

A STUDY IN SHERLOCK:
KNOWING TO BE KNOWN

by

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Abstract

This thesis explores the ways social communities are consciously, purposefully created and maintained so that they reinforce both individual identity and notions of personal value. Ethnographic research was conducted on a small Sherlockian community in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, The Crew of the Barque Lone Star: A Sherlock Holmes Literary Society. Through participant observation at the monthly meetings, attendance at a few of the extra 'outings' and lectures, and interviews with five members, participant interest in Sherlock Holmes, commitment to the fan community, and the identity politics of participating in the Holmes fandom were examined. Created communities, in which members self-select their level of commitment, revolve around shared interests, foci, and rules of belonging in order to remain functional and active. Members who choose high levels of commitment earn the respect of their peers, and the opportunity to elevate their societal engagement by demonstrating their knowledge of these interests, foci, and rules.

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Introduction

I peck at my food, nervous. I know what's coming, and I know that it will be a pivotal moment. Steve Mason, who put me up for the mini-speech I'm about to deliver, catches my eye. "All right, folks. Let's go and ahead and get started. Allana?"

Game time. I push my seat back. Unfold my page of notes. Blush a bit. Ignore the expectant faces turned my way. Dive in.

"As we all know, Sherlock Holmes is off enjoying his retirement at the moment. While undoubtedly a peaceful existence, this century-long isolation from the thrill and adventure of solving crimes no doubt grows wearisome—boring, even. This is why I have no doubt that every year on Halloween the great detective comes out of hiding, knowing this is the only time of the year he can pass among us, anonymous and unnoticed by his still active fans.

Drawn by the slightly sinister element inherent in Halloween and the promise of camouflage crowds bring, as well as his demonstrated knowledge and appreciation of the Americas, Holmes's favorite Halloween haunt must be the very streets of DFW—a place where Halloween celebrations are bigger, better, scarier, a little more immersive, and offer an opportunity to get away from his staid day-to-day life. As we well know, Holmes was a master at acting and disguise. A convincing enough dying man to fool Watson's physician in "The Adventure of the Dying Detective," an old man in an opium den in "The Man with the Twisted Lip," a plumber, of all things, so method in his acting style that he becomes engaged to a housemaid in "The Adventure of

Charles Augustus Milverton,” a book collector who shocks Watson after three years of supposed death in “The Adventure of the Empty House,” and a drunk stable hand in “A Scandal in Bohemia.” Clearly, Holmes’s repertoire of characters is extensive. Who can say which of these identities he used to walk among us this Halloween?

So, this toast is to Sherlock Holmes, for deceiving us and slipping under our noses unnoticed one more year. Next year, when a grown man knocks on your door and asks for something a little sweeter, a little stronger than a treat, and a little scarier, more complex than a simple trick, look twice—it may just be the master in disguise.”

The backroom of La Madeleine, French country diner and meeting place for the Crew of the Barque Lone Star (Crew), erupts with laughter and the clinking of glasses as their owners sip and set them back on the table. I flush, a little embarrassed by the attention, and sink into my seat. I’ve just delivered the toast for the Crew. It’s a minor task in the grand scheme of the day’s events, but it’s a ritual that has been around at least as long as Sherlock Holmes fan clubs. The tradition of the toast pays homage to the heavy drinking celebrated by many Sherlockians¹ and opens meetings in a congenial, albeit official manner.

It’s the first Sunday of November 2014, which means the 15 to 20 or so self-identifying Sherlockians in the Dallas-Fort Worth metropolis have gathered to pay their

¹ Identifier used by many fans of Sherlock Holmes.

respects to the great detective. Studying, via participant observation, the literary society since May, I have become one of the club's handful of regulars. We surround two long tables, cheesy, carb-y crumbs sprinkled onto plates pushed aside now that 'Mix and Mingle' is over. The meeting agenda is laid like a placemat before me, and, optimistically, before every chair in the room. It lays out the various stages of the gathering 'Mix and Mingle,' 'Toast,' 'Quiz,' followed by the lecture for the week as well as any other orders of business.

Every meeting of the Crew of the Barque Lone Star is essentially the same. A week before each first Sunday meeting Third Mate (e.g., President) Steve Mason will send out an email:

The next meeting (and future meetings) of the Crew of the Barque Lone Star will be:

Date: Sunday, February 2nd

LA MADELINE COUNTRY FRENCH CAFÉ

5290 Belt Line Rd #112, just east of the Tollway, Addison

Time: 1:00 pm

Following the Baring-Gould chronology, we will be discussing [the Adventure of Yellow Face](#)

We will also have a [discussion on interracial marriages in the 1890s](#), as well as [future events...](#)

**Please RSVP me ASAP if you will be attending so we have
an estimated count for the restaurant...**

**Also, let me know if you would like to do the opening
toast... first one wins...**

Steve and Walter

(Mason, email sent to Crew of the Barque Lone Star mailing list, January 26,
2015)

The Crew of the Barque Lone Star follows a reading schedule long-accepted by the broader Sherlockian community, moving from short story to short story to novel and back to short story in the chronological order the now legendary Bill (William) Baring-Gould postulated.² Crew members (Or deck hands, if the member has been elevated in status with an investiture.) complete the assigned reading on their own time, and come to the meetings to dine and socialize, take a quiz testing the depth of their knowledge on the story of the week, and then hear announcements and a lecture on a Sherlockian, Doylelesian, or Victorian topic related to the week's reading. Closing with a discussion of the Crew's upcoming activities as well as a classic reading from the Baker Street Journal,

² Because each story and novel was written independently of each other and the events they describe, publication dates reveal only when Dr. Watson decided to record a particular event (per Sherlockian lore). Sherlockian scholars closely read the texts for embedded clues that hint at season or weather events or societal happenings. Cross-checking these dates with, for example, actual weather conditions for London during the Victorian Era, event dates are approximated and a rough chronology is ordered, hotly debated, and reordered. Though the chronology is constantly put up for debate, Baring-Gould's chronology, published in 1955, remains the standard (Sherlockian.net).

the Crew breaks for the month, planning to see each other in the interim if Sherlock Holmes-themed plays, movies, or exhibits are anywhere within an easy day's travel.

Before any of this unfolds, meetings officially begin with the toast maker, a Crew member who either volunteers or is asked to stand and deliver a pre-written dedication on any Sherlockian topic of their choosing. Which brings us back to my toast.

Although the query to Crew members to volunteer for the toast came out monthly, I remained silent. To deliver a proper toast—and toasts are incredibly varied month to month—one has to demonstrate a command of Sherlock Holmes, the short story of the week, and the Sherlockian belief system. Even after six months, I didn't think I was ready—when I began attending meetings, the extent of my exposure were repeat viewings of the *Sherlock BBC* series, which, although much loved, takes considerable liberties with the source material.

My new Crew friends have been attending meetings for years and poring over the canon for more than half their life. They know Sherlock Holmes. Knowing Sherlock is crucial. To speak up in the meeting, you better know what you are talking about—if you are wrong about an element of the canon, you will be corrected and your next contribution to the discussion will be greeted with hesitancy and skepticism. I watched enough faces contort with dismissal in reaction to inaccurate statements that I was rightly wary about opening my own mouth. So I waited to volunteer for any public role, reluctant to risk even a minor mark on my as-yet-unproved reputation.

When the November reminder email landed in my inbox, however, I pounced on the Reply button. Third Mate Steve Mason had been a promising a one-on-one interview

for weeks, his schedule and mine constantly at odds. In the same place at the same time for the meeting, I wasn't going to let the interview opportunity slip away.

Hi Steve!

I will be coming to the meeting! Also, would you be willing to do the Sherlock interview this week? I could come early and conduct it before the meeting gets started or stay after for about an hour?

Just let me know!

Thank you!

Allana Wooley

(Wooley, email sent October 28, 2014)

Steve's reply:

Let's plan on doing it after the meeting...

Would you like to do the opening toast this week... any subject, any character, and story is fine...

Thanks

Steve

(Mason, email sent October 29, 2014)

How's that for direction?

Lost and nervous, I hammered out a toast the night before. I drove the 50 minutes to La Madeleine the next morning with knots in my stomach. This would be the first time I would address the entire group. Admittedly, the stakes were not that high—the group would drink and go on about their meeting no matter what I said. But I would never again get this first opportunity to demonstrate my competency. If I bungled this toast, it would be harder to secure future opportunities to give lectures and make contributions to the society. I needed to deliver something simultaneously entertaining, informative, and clearly aligned with the group’s particular brand of wit and ethos.

Clearly, my toast was well-received, leaving the Crew room to move onto more time-consuming matters like the lecture and quiz that had more significant impacts on member reputations than an introductory toast. My cheeks slowly return to their status quo pastiness as members of the Crew continue to giggle, thrilled to have recognized ‘The Grand Game’ and be ‘in’ on the inside joke.³ Third Mate Steve Mason asks if I wouldn’t mind sending him a copy of the toast to put on the newly renovated website. He only half-jokingly offers me a permanent role as monthly toast maker.

An hour and a half later, after discussing Part One of Doyle’s novel *The Valley of Fear*, Crew members make their way through scraping chairs and raise their voices above the growing chatter to congratulate me again on a great toast. It’s the first time I’ve spoken to a handful of them, but the Crew’s members reward contributors. The toast, it seems, has done the trick. A two-minute speech doing more than half a year of steady attendance.

³ “The Grand Game” refers to the Sherlockian tradition of conducting meetings and research under the presupposition that Sherlock Holmes was a historical figure. Occasionally, this Game extends to include the assertion that Sherlock Holmes is, in fact, still alive. See “Knowledge” chapter.

Such is the way of Sherlockia, though. To be identified and accepted by others as a Sherlockian, one has to demonstrate a depth of knowledge on the Sherlockian ways. My toast was successful because it hit upon exactly the elements that maintain Sherlockian societies: displays of knowledge and contribution as testaments to one's right to belong.

This is the crux of what it means to belong to community. At the same time that the group is welcoming to all visitors, a true affiliation with the group, true acceptance and true belonging, must be earned. To become a Sherlockian, the potential or new member must find ways to articulate their worth. Members have to continually engage in a process of proving their own intrinsic value—what do they know and what can they contribute that will further strengthen the community's legitimacy? One's perception of their own social value is the currency that drives their behaviors and the extent of their involvement within the community.

By making a toast, I had the opportunity to bolster my own perceptions of value with members of the Crew. By citing examples of Sherlock Holmes's forays into disguise from across the canon, I demonstrated a breadth of knowledge that only a true Sherlockian (or, in my case, a determined web searcher) could possess. To be able to pull together examples from the many cases and adventures of Sherlock Holmes, synthesize them, hone in on specific, yet revealing characteristics of the main character and his peers and his era is, in fact, one of the primary functions for nearly all recognized Sherlock Holmes literary societies today.

Including the digression on Holmes's current status and whereabouts proved that I am, unequivocally, one of the Sherlockians. 'The Grand Game'⁴ is played by Sherlockians everywhere—the continued breaths of Sherlock Holmes are community folklore, a fun story to entertain, especially after a few drinks. I belong to the group because I am adhering to the tenets of their belief system. While no one in the group actively believes in the continued life of Sherlock Holmes (at least no Sherlockian that I have yet met or heard of), proper adherence to the folklore in group settings is a core part of acceptance and membership. This folklore justifies Sherlockian scholarship and is one part of what distinguishes the true Sherlockian from those who don't qualify for the title—either because they don't understand the draw of the detective or because they care only about the high cheekbones of the actors who portray Holmes in the TV adaptation. Exclusion, then, becomes another way of reinforcing in-group membership. Members have put in the work to truly know the character and the stories and have dived into the heart of the canon and the society's activities. They are superior to out-of-group members, at least in the realm of literary (read: "historical" if playing The Game) devotion.

Finally, because I delivered an original toast (members have read from the Baker Street Journal or other secondary materials in the past), I created and contributed to the wide world of Sherlock Holmes. Sherlockians are invested in the spread of Sherlock Holmes. In that vein, they seek to volunteer within the community, collect Sherlockian items, produce work. The more you produce or gather, the more it boosts your status

⁴ 'The Grand Game' is a long-standing Sherlockian tradition, whereby members conduct mock-scholarship under the presupposition that Sherlock Holmes was not a literary figure, but a historical one.

within the community. To take pains to create and to collect shows knowledge, dedication, and attests to the personal importance of belonging to Sherlockia in the creator's world.

THE CREW OF THE BARQUE LONE STAR

The Crew of the Barque Lone Star was founded in 1972 by two women, surprisingly⁵. Since then, the Crew has gone through “several incarnations over the decades” under the direction of Joe Faye, Bill Beason, Jim Webb, and Steve Mason—all who served as Third Mates (About).

The Third Mate is “considered the leader of the Crew.” This individual has the most power, a “similar rank and stature of the Captain of a fine sailing ship” (Buoy-Laws). The Third Mate is in charge of communications, organizing group activities, and setting the agenda for and facilitating the Crew's monthly meetings. The Third Mate has enough power and influence to guide the Crew according to their interpretation of the society's mission: “The crew members of the Barque Lone Star are committed to spreading the words of Conan Doyle, John Watson and Sherlock Holmes to the Dallas/Fort Worth area and to the larger Sherlockian world both in the United States and around the world” (About). This position, like all others, is granted by election every two years during the March meeting. There is no term limit.

Below the Third Mate is the Helmsman, whose duties include providing unending loyalty to the Third Mate and carrying out all tasks handed his way. The Helmsman is also responsible for “forcing the Third mate to walk the plank” if a mutiny arises within

⁵ See “Belonging and Exclusion” chapter.

membership of the Crew (Buoy-Laws).⁶ The Helmsman also coordinates the Crew's social media and web presence.⁷

Scribes record notes and keep minutes. There are two appointed scribes within the Crew at any given moment. When "The First Scribe" is unable to attend a meeting, the attending scribe will take over their duties for the week.

Rounding out the officers are the Honorary Spiritual Advisor(s). While these individuals have no official responsibilities, they are chosen based on their demonstrated commitment to the Crew as well as their reputation as good Sherlockians. The Spiritual Advisors "provide guidance and direction as needed to keep the Crew on an even keel and always pointed to the North Star" (Buoy-Laws).

Beyond these officer positions, there are both the deck crew and regular members. Regular membership is open to any participant interested in Sherlock Holmes and the society's mission who has attended at least one monthly meeting. The "deck crew" designation comes as a special investiture when a member has 1) donated at least two Sherlockian-themed books to an institution where books will be shared with the general public, 2) conducted a Sherlockian presentation to an outside organization, and 3) delivered at least one presentation at a regularly scheduled monthly meeting.

Each member is expected to "go everywhere, see everything, overhear everyone" in support of the society's Missions:

⁶ A role and disclaimer no doubt added in response to the Crew's history. See "Belonging and Exclusion" chapter.

⁷ In theory; however, since the current Helmsman does not have coding experience, the website has fallen to another member of the Crew—Third Mate Steve Mason's son, Rusty.

- a. to find the Lost Members of the Crew and restore their Names to the Ship's Roster. (For this Mission, strong-armed tactics, while not recommended, shall be tolerated—in Moderation.)
- b. to Notify the Third Mate and Helmsman of all local and distant Sherlockian events, whether or not instigated by the Crew. So that Landing Parties may be organized and put ashore to Support and Enjoy them. (Buoy-Laws)

Clearly, the Crew is a fun-loving group that does not take themselves too seriously. The cheeky tone reflected in the above samples from the Buoy-Laws are representative of the Crew's attitude in meetings. The only thing that is serious about this group is their allegiance to each other and to the pursuit of knowledge regarding Sherlock Holmes and his world.

The Crew is an official scion society of the Baker Street Irregulars (BSI), the leading international Sherlock Holmes society. Scion-hood is a point of pride for the Crew, since it means they are officially recognized by the most powerful and prestigious group of Sherlockians in the world. The Crew once lost its scion status during a dry spell, regaining it in 1996. The official certificate certifying "The Crew of the Barque Lone Star" as an "Irregular Scion Society" is prominently displayed on the organization's website, sporting a signature from one-time BSI president Tom Wiggins (About).

The Crew of the Barque Lone Star got their name from the Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's short story "The Adventures of the Five Orange Pips," notable for its inclusion of Ku Klux Klan activities. In the story, Holmes spends time tracking down the mysterious origin of five orange pips, or seeds. He eventually comes to the conclusion

that the pips were sent by ship and the Barque Lone Star was the only ship to have made port in locations matching the postmarks on the letters containing the pips. Holmes sends the pips back to the captain of the Barque Lone Star and has the London police notify Savannah (the Lone Star's home port) that the Captain and first two mates are wanted for murder. However, the Barque Lone Star never arrived home, probably lost in the year's severe gales. "According to the secret archives of the Crew of the Barque Lone Star, Dallas's Sherlock Holmes Society, Holmes was actually on board the barque, disguised as a seaman. He was responsible for convincing [sic] the Third mate of the captain's crimes and they commandeered Barque Lone Star, sailed her to Texas where she ran aground" (Maniac Collector). This is also the inspiration behind the official title of the Crew's leader—the Third Mate.

RESEARCH METHODS

I have a great fascination for communities and subcultures, particularly those that fall a bit off the beaten path. To explore the ways communities are constructed and then maintained by their members, I knew I needed to find a small but local group where I could conduct ethnographic research. Having recently conducted research on the phenomenon of fandoms, I decided to pursue this research further. In January 2014, when I first began working on this project, *BBC Sherlock* had just premiered its third season, *Elementary* was in its second season, and Robert Downey Jr.'s second turn as the famed detective had come and gone from the silver screen. Sherlock fever was in high pitch.

It didn't take much internet searching to locate the Crew of the Barque Lone Star (although I was stymied in my hunt for a few months after I came across a site devoted to

the Diogenes Club—I believed the two to be entirely independent⁸). Initial attempts to contact the group went unanswered (a consequence of what I now know was a neglected web site for which current members of the Crew did not know the password). After stumbling upon the Facebook page (also rarely used), I sent a direct message asking if I could attend (just as a visitor). This was warmly received, so I made the 50 minute trek to La Madeleine on Sunday, May 2. The meeting went well, with members Don Hobbs (you’ll read more about him later) and Don Casey greeting me, asking about my research, and encouraging my continued attendance. I began to attend the meetings held on the first Sunday of every month at 1 pm in the backroom of La Madeleine country French diner. During meetings I took notes and made observations, but I also participated, chatting with members, taking the quizzes, suggesting ideas when an open forum presented itself and delivering a toast for the November meeting.

In addition to attending meetings, I also set up five interviews with members from the Crew. These interviews took anywhere from fifty minutes to nearly two hours and were conducted either at participants’ homes or in restaurants of the participants’ choosing. For the interviews, a loose interview format was set and followed, deviating as interview direction dictated, depending on the interviewee’s personality and forthrightness, and whether the question had already been asked or was pertinent to the specific member I was interviewing. Divided into three categories, the questions dealt with basic demographic and biographical information, Sherlock Holmes and fandom questions, and identity questions. The purpose of the demographic questions was to get a better feel for the sorts of people who belong to Sherlock Holmes fan societies as well as

⁸ More information on the Diogenes Club/Crew of the Barque Lone Star relationship can be found in the “Belonging and Exclusion” chapter.

to make the interviewee comfortable with the question-answer format of the interview. The Sherlock Holmes questions were designed to assess the subjects' perception of their devotion to the society's figurehead character as well as their involvement with the Crew and other Sherlockian societies. The identity questions gave participants the opportunity to share the importance of Sherlock Holmes and the Crew in their lives and social networks. All interviews were recorded and transcribed at a later date.

In conducting this ethnographic research and interviews, as well as reading academic scholarship and Sherlockian scholarship, issues relating to knowledge and group belonging were continually raised. It is evident that members of the Crew are passionate about their central subject as well as the community that has sprung up in his honor. Crew members act to demonstrate this passion and this loyalty, resulting in a tight-knit camaraderie that nonetheless gets political as well.

In the chapters to come, I will look at what it means to be a member of a group, what is expected of a Sherlockian, and the mechanisms that work together to ensure the continued survival of special-interest societies. In my "Literature Review," I delineate a range of academic discussions and ethnographic studies of sub-cultural societies and other groups with which one may self-identify, focusing on what qualities lead individuals to feel allegiance to their social groups. In the "History of Sherlock Holmes" chapter, I delve into the detective himself, his many derivations over the past century, and the growth of Sherlockian-themed societies. The chapter on "Knowledge" combines ethnographic observations with academic thought to assess the most important method by which a Sherlockian proves their fealty and worth. Finally, "Belonging and Exclusion" investigates the mechanisms put in place by Sherlockian societies and members to

encourage member identification as well as the continued existence of the society as a whole.

Literature Review

The Sherlock Holmes fandom is believed to be the world's oldest, with associated groups dating back to the late 1800s, contemporary with when the stories were actually being sent to press (Brown 2009; Lee 2014). Over a century later, this fandom has remained active, a continued love for the canon-as-written bolstered by the many iterations of the famous character over the years. In 1994, Holmesian scholar Ronald Burt De Waal compiled a bibliography of more than 25,000 appearances of Sherlock Holmes or Dr. Watson in literary criticism, memorials, games, quizzes, audio and video tapes, ballets, plays, movies, parodies, cartoons, advertisements, and many more associated products. This bibliography has only grown in the intervening decade.

FANDOM AS SUBCULTURE

A fandom, as defined by Henry Jenkins, is a participatory culture “in which people are bound together by a wide range of desires and expressed through an equally wide range of practices” (Stenger 2006:26). Those who love similar cultural phenomena find each other, form connections with each other, and express and indulge in fantasies that go well beyond “official” narratives distributed by executive producers, editors, players, and other active agents in the production of the fans’ central foci.

Broadening the scope, fandom can also be seen as a specific type of ‘group.’ Cinoglu, Huseyin and Arakin (2012: 1114) define a group as a collection of members with “similar goals, same sources for references, same ideals, same leaders to look up to, and the same environment.” Add a central focus around which these elements orbit as glue and this definition also works for fandoms. References are the central cultural

product fans circle around—if members of a fandom watch the same show, read the same books, or otherwise interact with the same source material, and then come together to discuss meaning and implication, they are more likely to share interpretations. Ideals derive from these interpretations, producing the group’s particular canon and regulatory norms, aspects all members must know and heed for acceptance. Leaders emerge from the larger body of fans as those who seem to have the deepest breadth of knowledge, and are thus afforded more status when in the process of interpretation (Anderson and Kilduff 2009:295).

In an examination of football fandom, Ian Jones (2000) explains what makes an individual loyal to a group. Grounding his analysis in a social identity perspective, Jones looked into the habits of “serious leisure activities” like football. With fandom membership, allegiance and participation are voluntary and members can select which team they specifically want to support. Individuals choose to be fans of groups they identify as having positive attributes and likeable fans. Aligning themselves so closely with something they see as desirable and worthwhile enhances both individual self-esteem as well as group loyalty. Group loyalty is shared amongst members, unifying purposes until similar goals, sources of reference, central figures and shared knowledge turn the fandom into its own subculture.

Yinger (1960) notes the problems in defining the concept of “subculture,” with at least three clearly defined meanings found in scholarly literature. In introducing a new term, “contraculture,” Yinger teases out the ways normative systems and habits develop within subcultures. Where subcultures have normative systems that develop in the larger context of society, contraculture’s norms lie at odds with society. Fandoms, while

inapplicable to all of society, do not lay at odds with it, and so normative systems of fandoms mirror those seen on a broader scale. Normative systems are the unifying behaviors and beliefs shared by a group and are the basis for all the group's goals and actions. Norms can only be learned through interaction—one must participate to really be part of the subculture (Fine and Kleinman 1979, Jones 2000; Yinger 1960).

Fine and Kleinman (1979) distinguish between subsocieties and subcultures. The authors designate “subsociety” as a (usually) larger group that can be described structurally, where the individual is placed not by choice but by their address, age, class, race, values and beliefs, and so on. “Subculture” is a smaller group within the subsociety in which individuals get to choose allegiance—the act of choosing increases loyalty because they feel responsible for their own membership. A subculture can be defined by its referent, “a clearly defined population which shares cultural knowledge” (Fine and Kleinman 4).

There is the subsociety of all those with access to media productions, and within that is the subculture relating to fandom, and within that is the sub(sub)culture relating specifically to Sherlock Holmes. This group can be narrowed down further still to the specific incarnation of Sherlock Holmes and the specific domain of fandom interaction and enactment; each would have their own set of norms and objectives. Fine and Kleinman recognize the difficulty in attempting to narrowly define a subculture because of these varied levels. The best indicators of ‘subcultural vitality’ are where members interact and communicate freely and all members identify themselves with the group. Fine and Kleinman go on to argue that any study of subculture needs to be linked to these processes of interaction amongst group members.

For members of a subculture, identification with a group leads to interaction with said group, which leads to even deeper identification (Cinoglu and Arıkan 2012; Fine and Kleinman 1979; Neville and Reicher 2011; Van Vugt and Hart 2004). It is through identification that a potential member is motivated to adopt the “artifacts, behaviors, norms, and values characteristic of the subculture” (Fine and Kleinman 1979:1). This is subculture as it pertains to social identity theory—for a subculture to exist, the group must exist, and for a group to exist, members must first self-identify and interact to establish norms, value systems, and a threshold level of knowledge necessary for basic participation.

In an exploration of the nature of fandoms, Booth (2013) looks at the phenomena of fandom through the development of a devoted fan practice that has erupted around the fictional show *Inspector Spacetime*. Set within the television comedy *Community*, *Inspector Spacetime* plays a non-vital role, appearing in the background of a few scenes and being mentioned by a few characters. Despite its insignificance to *Community*, the loose parody of the fandom-heavy BBC show *Doctor Who*, has attracted a large enough online following that fans propose theories, create their own material, and try to build out the world of which they see relatively little. This habit speaks to the phenomenon of people who are fans of fandoms, Booth says, meaning they want the sense of belonging and purpose offered to them by the fandom more than they actually care about the source material. Individuals unfulfilled or disconnected from traditional communities in their physical lives often seek out fandoms where, by demonstrating knowledge and interest, they can enter a mission-driven (to build out the world and available knowledge of a subject) social community. But to engage with a fandom, knowledge of source material is

still essential, since this is what intragroup interactions center around (Bieber et al. 2002; Alavi et al. 2005/2006). Today, where fandom is a ‘norm of viewership’ the object of fandom is not the purported product or goal (which itself is often created collaboratively with other members of the community), but the “creation and formation of the fan community through social media” (Booth 2013:150). Because of the importance of self-identification, fandom members share a high-level of self-awareness—they are fully cognizant and proud of their allegiance to a fan community. They choose membership for themselves, after all.

Commitment to a group was looked at by Klimstra et al. (2010). Focusing on the day-to-day fluctuations in identity formation of early adolescents, the authors assert that at the root of all searches to establish identity is the desire to find a sense of sameness and continuity. People want stability—they want to know that they will continue to have a place in their group and that the group with which they affiliate is the best one for them and for their needs. With this goal in mind, group members must consistently weigh the perceived benefits of their chosen group identity versus available alternatives. ‘Identity’ here references the labels individuals impose upon themselves. Members of fandoms are constantly surrounded by alternatives—there are and will always be other books, shows, characters and fandoms to fall in line with. The more stable an individual is when it comes to their social identity, the stronger their personal identity becomes (Booth 2013; Klimstra et al. 2010). Of course, involvement with one fandom does not prevent people from being members in another, as Booth notes in his discussion of fans of fandoms. Sustained, steady commitment to a fandom means the individual will actively participate in and identify as a member of that group.

IN-GROUP AND OUT-OF-GROUP DYNAMICS

In their review of three major sociological theories of identity formation, Cinoglu and Arakin (2012) state that social identity theory is the idea that group membership can serve as a catalyst for the formation of identity. An individual aligns themselves with their group by emphasizing shared traits: “This group does things/sees things the way I do things/see things.” ‘In-group’ is the group in which an individual locates themselves and claims affiliation with. This ‘in-group’ affiliation is strengthened when the group is juxtaposed with the ‘out-group,’ those who do not affiliate and are seen as outsiders. The differences in membership/non-membership provides an “us-versus-them tension” necessary for creating a division and further uniting the group by forcing the individual to choose a side of an imagined in/out dichotomy (Cinoglu and Arakin 2012; Jones 2000; Lee and Gretzel 2014).

In a classic piece on the subject of intergroup relations, Sumner (1906) wrote about how strong beliefs of one group’s superiority or rightness over another can amplify social cohesion. The group sets itself apart from everybody that is not a member, creating a ‘we-group.’ Differences with outsiders actually help to protect the group by strengthening in-group bonds and tying people to their membership and identification. By continually setting the in-group apart from everybody else, the in-group is conflated such that membership to it begins to feel like an essential part of members’ lives.

Surrounded by a similarly-aligned crowd, an individual’s cognitive bent will shift from a personal to a social focus. The individual doesn’t lose who they are, but acts out their identity through a frame set by the group they are surrounded by. Neville and

Reicher (2011) put together a team of researchers who attended several venues that would feature collective experiences—a soccer match, a student demonstration, and a rock music festival. In each situation, ‘self-categorization’ was essential to determining whether or not somebody was a participant (as opposed to a bystander). Unless an individual self-identified—verbally telling the researchers that they labeled themselves as members and as belonging to the whole—they did not feel wholly comfortable in their environment or consider themselves to have a shared identity with those around them. Once connected to the group and ‘sharing’ an identity (the ‘we-group’ of Sumner’s classification), individuals were more likely to have intense and positive perceptions of the group and the relationships formed through the group. In Neville and Reicher’s study, identity and commitment were made stronger by connection (being surrounded by the group/crowd), recognition (identifying what the group is about/for), and validation (being labeled as a member of said group). An important part of social identity theory is the categorization of the world into in-groups and out-groups. Identifying oneself as a member of a group and seeing that membership as valuable is enough to grant a fan an identity to latch onto (Lee and Gretzel 2014).

Jones’s (2000) study of football fandoms also revealed four compensatory behaviors that encouraged continued membership and loyalty—in-group favoritism, out-group derogation, unrealistic optimism, and voice. Within a fandom (and within life, depending on the level of commitment and daily engagement one devotes to fan activities), personal and social identity become so heavily tied to the group that related costs diminish in importance. Belonging to a group affects the mental, emotional, and behavioral states of the member to the point that not belonging leaves them without a

portion of their identity. Even if the requirements for membership are fulfilled solitarily (such as watching a show or reading a book or, in Jones's study, watching a football game), the knowledge that others are doing the same is comforting. It doesn't matter if the 'others' are strangers—in-group favoritism is such a powerful force that two strangers and self-identifying participants will automatically develop a rapport based on the common ground established by their fandoms. Jones emphasizes that, especially with subcultures like fandoms, where participation is entirely voluntary, the act of choosing a group automatically gives other members of the group higher appeal and positive traits from an in-group perspective.

INTRAGROUP INTERACTION

To reiterate Jones's point, it is essential that individuals feel as though they genuinely chose to be a member to form loyalty. The idea of "I choose this. This is right for me," gives the choosing individual agency and a belief that the relationships within the chosen group are genuine because they are optional. Life in fandom is always chosen, whereas a life in the larger world and society is what an individual was born and set into (Fine and Kleinman 1979).

Varying levels of fan commitment and fan status can and do work together within a single, collective membership. Subcultural identification occurs along two spectrums: centrality (the degree of importance an individual allows their group) and salience (the frequency with which an individual interacts with and actively identifies with the group). There is a positive feedback system in play with groups and subcultures across the board—"high levels of exposure tend toward high levels of acceptance" (Fine and

Kleinman 1979:13). Finally, Fine and Kleinman noted that identification serves as a motivation for socialization—people, once set within a group label, want to get involved and make contributions because participation increases their sense of continuity and stability.

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

Within a fandom, knowledge often translates to power. Ali (2002) studied English schoolchildren and the ways musical tastes played out in gendered contexts as well as in friendships. Ali asserts that children read and interpret cultural products as capital they can use to gain favor among their peers. Cultural capital is knowing the right facts and the appropriate amount of facts about the cultural product currently occupying the group's attention. The students with the most cultural capital were the undisputed leaders of the friendship groups and had the most influence when they wanted to shift focus to themselves or a topic of their choosing. These power dynamics translate to adult group relationships as well, and are especially prevalent in the sphere of fandoms. There is the in-group, with all the self-identifying members of the fandom, and then there is the inner-in-group, where “Big Name Fans” seem to know and have access to more information than fellow fans, straddling the producer/consumer divide to serve as “gatekeepers” for the franchise in question (Booth 2013:155).

Reinforcing the importance of understanding the correct ways to behave within a fandom subculture, Hadas (2013) dives into *Doctor Who* fandom, describing the hierarchical positions fans can hold within a single fandom. The fandom is a strong community only as far as they have differentiated themselves from casual viewers of the

show, positioning themselves as true experts who know and understand the inner workings of plot and character. Whimsies of fans who try to ‘ship’ (romantically pair) the Doctor with other characters are ridiculed within the tightest-knit community of fans. This behavior violates the norms and fanon (a canon of characters, plot points, traits, and more as established by the fandom), marking the ‘shipper’ as something other than a ‘true’ fan. The fandom-dictated social position of ‘shippers’ illustrates the spectrum of social activity and normative systems both: these fans are still members of the *Doctor Who* fandom as a whole, better members than the casual viewers who merely watch and don’t engage with the show beyond its weekly timeslot, but somewhere below the elite fans who believe in and champion a (subjective) reading of the show and its characters. These are Booth’s (2013) gatekeepers, the “Big Name Fans.”

FANDOM APPEAL

Part of why fandoms are so attractive to potential members is that they are socially transcendent. Jindra (1994) describes the “sacralization” of *Star Trek*. The show, its spin-offs, and its cast became subjects of an intense devotion marked by its own canon, hierarchy, rules, and a central organizing body that controls disseminated knowledge. From the perspective of potential members, fandoms offer something unique and special, apart from the drudgery of everyday routine. This relates back to social identity theory and in-group conflation; the group is special, with extra positive, possibly unearned associations attributed to it. The fandom’s importance to its members’ identities encourages them to seek out more knowledge. Not only will the knowledgeable

individual be a better member of the group, but they will also be able to interact with other members with more status, authority, and credibility (Highfield et al. 2013).

Overall, the literature reviewed revealed the importance of in-group/out-group categorization, intragroup interaction, and acquirement of knowledge in the ways individuals self-categorized and committed to a group (or fandom, as the case may be). The research to be conducted will attempt to locate these ideas in the real-world group The Crew of the Barque Lone Star.

History and World of Sherlock Holmes

“These are the facts:

1. Effie went to America in her youth.
2. Her first husband was a lawyer in Atlanta.
3. He was also a light-skinned black man. (Effie is, presumably, white.)
4. Their daughter took after ‘his kind.’
5. Both husband and child died from a Yellow Fever outbreak in the area.

These tenets are central to Arthur Conan Doyle’s “The Adventure of Yellow Face,” one of the 56 short stories revolving around the exploits and great deductive mind of consulting detective Sherlock Holmes.” Steve Mason, Crew of the Barque Lone Star’s Third Mate, is giving his monthly story-inspired lecture.

After Mason has given the room of Sherlockians the basic facts, he sets up his lecture. “While the story seems simple on the surface, there are many questions that arise from closer inspection.” Mason pauses to look around the room. This is how most of his lectures begin. Start with the canon—what happened in the story, what did Arthur Conan Doyle’s written text lay out as the events that transpired? Then move into the many, many, often convoluted layers of Sherlockian analysis and conjecture.

“Now, Sherlockians studying the chronology of the stories have deduced that this is one of the earlier cases where Watson and Holmes partnered up. Since *A Study in Scarlet* was set in 1881, it is likely that these events unfolded between 1882 and 1883. Working backwards, that means that, if Effie and Grant Monro [a man who hired Sherlock to uncover why he felt distance between him and his beloved] were married for three years, they must have gotten engaged in 1879 or 1880. So she must have married

Hebron [her first husband] around 1876. Now, remember, the time period we are talking about—the mid-1870s, is just 10 years removed from the Civil War. Some things to note here.

There was NO Yellow Fever epidemic anywhere in the South at the end of the 19th century. There was NO great fire in Atlanta, except for the one set by the unwelcome intruder Grant. And the general consensus among anthropologists and geneticists is that, if one parent was white and the other a light-skinned black individual, the child will not be darker. Monro claims that he has seen Effie's first husband's death certificate. But Georgia didn't start issuing death certificates until 1914."

Mason has arrived at the crux of the problem. "Things just don't add up here. Which leaves us with a number of questions:

"Why did Effie invent Yellow Fever as the disease that killed her husband and child? And why didn't Holmes or Watson catch her on this? In the story, Effie claims that she is concerned about the health of her child. But she left her sick child in the states and left for England, just to get away from it all. Another unexplained aspect of the story is why Effie would voluntarily offer to sign over all of her money to Monroe."

Walter Pieper breaks into Mason's monologing. Raising a hand, he addresses one of the raised concerns. "Well, on the most recent season of *Downton Abbey*⁹, Cora Crawley signed away her money."

⁹ Many of the Crew's Sherlockians and, I suspect, the world's Sherlockians, are fans of Victorian England and indulge in shows, such as *Downtown Abbey*, highlighting a time period very nearly contemporaneous to Sherlock Holmes's active years as a detective.

Cindy Brown nods, chimes in. “Yeah, and wasn’t there a law that women weren’t allowed to hold property or money at that time? Wouldn’t it have automatically become the husband’s property? So why would she have needed to sign it over at all?”

Tilting his head back and forth, Mason considers, mentally stirring around the suggestions. “Well, but there are instances in other Doyle stories—“The Speckled Band,” “The Noble Bachelor”—other Sherlock Holmes stories where women set aside money for themselves or their children, so that their husbands couldn’t get at it unless they or their children died.”

True. Heads nod up and down the tables, as connections between disparate stories in the Sherlock Holmes universe are forged.

Mason gets back on track. “Besides, there are still more questions. Why would Effie wear a locket if she told Monroe it wouldn’t open? If Effie forged a death certificate for her husband, why wouldn’t she also forge one for her daughter to make that death more believable? And how did she forge a death certificate for her husband? Plus, wouldn’t a death certificate mention his race? Mention somewhere that he was black?”

Pausing to take a breath after piling the many disparities and logical incongruities from the story, Steve continues on, this time offering Sherlockian proposed hypotheses—solutions to explain Doyle’s ‘mistakes.’

“Now, having read a lot of the scholarship from Sherlockians who have studied this story intensely, I have come across a number of other ideas. For starters, nowhere in the story does Effie say that she lived in Atlanta, *Georgia.*”

The Crew of the Barque Lone Star Sherlockians pause, their eyes floating up to the ceiling as they mentally roll the theory around. Mason doesn't wait for their acceptance, plowing through the rest of his research.

“There is an Atlanta, *New York*. This would explain her husband's position as a lawyer as well as the marriage, because there were black lawyers in the North, as early as the 1840s in some places. And while interracial marriage was surely not allowed in the South, there were a few states where it was not illegal—Connecticut, New York, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts. There was also a small breakout of Yellow Fever in the Northeast at this time.

“A few scholars have suggested that it would be possible for the child to be darker than both Effie and her husband if Effie had some black ancestry. Then Effie would have a few recessive genes. There are even more arguments that the daughter was not her biological child. Perhaps her husband was married before her and had this child. After his wife died, he married Effie, who adopted the child.. When he died too, Effie was the only parent the girl had. She may have presented the child as her own to her husband thinking that it would be more likely for him to accept the child if he saw it as her own offspring.

“Then there are Sherlockians who have put forth the theory that Hebron didn't die of Yellow Fever at all. Maybe he moved to the South and was killed for his success as a lawyer and his interracial marriage to a white women. The fire Effie references was actually his house being torched.

“And maybe Effie left her daughter in the states because she believed the environmental conditions were better in America than the London smog where she was going.

“Using all that, you must ask yourself how Sherlock Holmes didn’t see through this—if he had challenged Effie she likely would have broken and confessed. Some Sherlockians believe that Watson or his editor later took out this part for whatever reason.”

With each new theory, the Crew of the Barque Lone Star has nodded or shrugged, tacitly accepting or challenging the occasionally logical and often far-fetched hypotheses that Sherlockians have proposed over the past 122 years as they tried to fit the story into a real-world historical context.

The time has come, finally, for Steve Mason to add his own theory to the milieu. “I submit,” he begins, raising his voice. “I submit that Sherlock Holmes didn’t delve further because he recognized Effie was merely telling the tales she told for the sake of her child and so he decided he would just let it lie.”

It is a lovely portrait of the detective. A portrait of a caring, empathetic soul. A portrait that doesn’t quite gel with Doyle’s detective as written. For this, too, there is a reconciling theory.

“Some people believe that perhaps Sherlock Holmes and Mycroft were the products of a mixed relationship. At the time, a lot of English men were marrying Jewish women immigrants. So Sherlock Holmes may have been naturally more inclined to go along with Effie’s tale.”

Cindy Brown giggles. “Or it could have been an English parent and an extraterrestrial one, because both brothers are so odd.”

The Crew chortles.

“Bottom line?” Steve Mason wraps up the month’s lecture. “There is much more to this conversation than just what is written on the surface.”

“Or, maybe,” Walter Pieper slyly slips in his final thought. “Maybe Arthur Conan Doyle just didn’t do his homework.”

This. Pieper has hit the nail on the head, finding the most logical, albeit the least fun, answer to the story’s many inconsistencies. The group laughs.

“Maybe,” Mason hesitates. “Although, I did read an old article from the *Baker Street Journal* where the author—and he really took it to extremes—hypothesized that Effie was originally born in the South to mixed parentage, then moved to England for her childhood, then went back to the South as a young woman and...”

Although Sherlockians dedicate substantial portions of their free time to puzzling out the little inconsistencies of Doyle’s stories, fitting each clue and story into a holistic, single chronological line detailing Holmes’s world and many cases is impossible. The truth, as Pieper revealed, is that Arthur Conan Doyle simply didn’t care enough to make sure he had all of his facts straight before he plunged into writing the Sherlockian stories. As a matter of fact, Conan Doyle didn’t even particularly like Sherlock Holmes. He recognized the lucrative potential that the new crop of regularly-published magazines and increasingly literate English population offered. Conan Doyle postulated that non-serialized short stories featuring the same characters would be the easiest to sell—with distinctive characters, it would not matter if readers had missed the previous issue or two (Miller 2009). Conan Doyle had already written Sherlock Holmes and Watson into his novels *A Study in Scarlet* (1887) and *The Sign of Four* (1890) and the distinctive

detective seemed to be a great fit for the author's purposes (Discovering Arthur Conan Doyle).

"A Scandal in Bohemia" was the first short story Conan Doyle submitted to *The Strand Magazine*, just a year after its founding. Although Conan Doyle had low expectations for the story based on the success of previous two Sherlock Holmes-featuring novels, "A Scandal in Bohemia," published on June 25, 1891, was a hit. Subsequently, *The Strand* contracted six more stories (Sherlock Holmes Canon Timeline).

Sherlock Holmes quickly became Arthur Conan Doyle's ticket to fame and fortune, much to the author's dismay—Doyle believed the mystery stories took the thunder away from his 'real' literary achievements in historical fiction ("Conan Doyle"). The stories and characters were set contemporary to the times and were seen by many readers as a response to societal trends. Holmes, for example, was a man of science, using his wits to solve "moral and practical dilemmas." Set in London, his character and his firm adherence to a personal ethical code sharply contrasted with the criminal gangs taking over areas of the city. Aimed at the middle-class, *The Strand Magazine* and the detective who made the magazine a success addressed societal ills and gave people a sense of order and optimism with their tidy endings. ("Discovering Arthur Conan")

Although Sherlock Holmes quickly became a widely-celebrated literary star, Arthur Conan Doyle was never the biggest fan. He killed off Holmes in 1893's *The Final Problem*, hoping to spend more time concentrating on the high-brow literature he preferred writing. Eight years later Conan Doyle, needing money, resurrected the great

detective with his third Holmes novel, *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1901-1902).
 (“Conan Doyle”)

It is theorized that “canonical cruxes” (inconsistencies in details between separately published tales) exist because Conan Doyle wrote quickly—penning *A Study in Scarlet*, a novel, in just three weeks and publishing as many as ten short stories a year. If he forgot a detail or date from a previously published story, he made something up and moved along. This has led to major canonical inconsistencies in Watson’s given name, his injury, the timeline and specifics of his many (perhaps?) marriages, as well as a myriad of minor discrepancies within each story. “The Adventure of the Yellow Face,” from the February 2015 Crew of the Barque Lone Star meeting, exemplifies the way logical issues pile up as well as the way Sherlockians ferret out the cruxes (“William S. Baring-Gould”).

Christopher Morley, founder of the Baker Street Irregulars, commented on the number of inconsistencies, finding them endearing. “What other body of modern literature is esteemed as much for its errors as its felicities?” (“Discovering Arthur Conan”)

Arthur Conan Doyle once wondered why anyone “should spend such pains on such material.” Despite his dismissal of his own material, Sherlockians around the world have spent more than a century engaging in a bit of detective work to discover, examine, and try to explain away any and all logical gaps (“Discovering Arthur Conan”).

The basic chronology of the canon is one of the central areas of focus for wannabe detective Sherlockians. The Crew of the Barque Lone Star, for example, reads stories and novels according to how they fall along the Baring-Gould established

timeline. Because Arthur Conan Doyle wrote the majority of the stories from Watson's perspective, as retellings of cases past, their publishing order does not correspond to their chronological order. In an attempt to clean up the mess, William S. Baring-Gould, an executive of *Time, Inc.* and invested member of the Baker Street Irregulars ("The Gloria Scott") dug through the canon and wrote *The Chronological Holmes: A Complete Dating of the Adventures of Mr. Sherlock Holmes of Baker Street, as Recorded by His Friend John H. Watson, M.D., Late of the Army Medical Department*, published in 1955. This volume claimed, among other findings, that Holmes was born on January 6, 1854 and that Watson was married three times. While other chronologists (and there are many of them) have disputed many of Baring-Gould's hypothesis (such as Holmes's death on January 6, 1957), the Baring-Gould chronology remains one of the most famous works of Sherlockian scholarship ("William S. Baring-Gould"). In addition to his chronology, Baring-Gould published *The Annotated Sherlock Holmes: The four novels and the fifty-six short stories complete* (1967), a collection of notes and further explanations about every minor detail of every story, including the background on the professions of Holmes' clients, the locations mentioned, the weather conditions during certain scenes, and much more ("William S. Baring-Gould"; Klinger 2000:47).

Following in Baring-Gould's footsteps is Leslie Klinger, a lawyer and invested Baker Street Irregular ("The Abbey Grange") who published a three-volume *The New Annotated Sherlock Holmes* in 2004 and 2005. Once again, Klinger provided readers with in-depth analysis of the novels and short stories, biographies of the major characters, insights into Victorian society, and illustrations from across the years and globe, as well as several Sherlockian theories to patch up holes.

Beyond his annotated bibliography of the great detective, Les Klinger has written and edited *The Sherlock Holmes Reference Library* (2006), *A Study in Sherlock* (2011) (a collection of new stories on the Holmes character from well-known authors like Neil Gaiman, Laura Lippman, and Lee Child), and *In the Company of Sherlock Holmes* (2014) (yet another collection of canon-inspired short stories written by contemporary authors).

It was this last book that led Leslie Klinger to make perhaps his biggest contribution to the Sherlockian world—and made him one of the most noted Sherlockians in the world. Laurie R. King, a friend and author of the Mary Russell series (featuring Sherlock Holmes), and Leslie Klinger were invited to participate in a panel presentation at a mystery convention. There they hatched the plan to follow the pattern of his first collection and ask their writer friends to pen Holmes-inspired tales. All was well until Random House received a letter from the Sherlock Holmes estate demanding that the copyright be paid in full or the book be stopped from going to press. Ultimately, Random House paid the rights and the book proceeded to press.

When it was time to publish Volume Two, this time with Penguin as a publisher, the same letter arrived, stating “your authors need a license to use Sherlock Holmes’ characters” (Klinger, talk presented September 20 at Afghanistan Perceivers 40th Anniversary). Klinger and co. refused to pay, this time on principle. With a large publisher backing them, they could pay, but self-publishing and recreational writers would have been completely shut out from a favorite Sherlockian pastime—pastiche writing and product development.

The estate’s argument against releasing Sherlock Holmes and his attendant characters into the creative commons centered around the fact that a few of Arthur Conan

Doyle's short stories (10 out of 56) were published after 1923 and are not yet in the public domain (in the United States). Klinger and co. countered this argument, citing the 50 stories (including the four novels) that were published in 1922 and earlier, featuring all of the same characters. The summary judgment of the court was that "only the elements of the characters exclusive to the casebook are off-limits." The estate was unhappy, of course, believing the characters to be incomplete until all of the stories were freely available—in 2022. The estate appealed. The case went up to the 7th Court of Appeals and eventually landed before the Supreme Court. In November 2014, the Supreme Court settled the matter by declining to hear the case, upholding the Appeals Court's decision. Sherlock Holmes characters and stories were finally open to the public domain in the United States (they had been open to the public domain in the United Kingdom since 1980) (Schaub 2014; "Curious Case" 2014).

This historic case is widely celebrated in the Sherlock community and even spawned a website (free-sherlock.com) tracing every legal motion. The ruling means that Sherlockians everywhere have the right to pen and publish any adaptation they want without fear of exorbitant licensing fees. Clearly, they do want. For the Sherlockian community, using Conan Doyle's characters in their own stories and other creative projects provides a necessary outlet for Sherlockians to channel their intense interest. As creative work itself is a major component in enhancing one's status and right-to-belong; the freedom to write is, and has always been, crucial to the fan experience. The first Sherlock Holmes pastiche was written in the early 1890s and there have been thousands written since. Writing Sherlock Holmes pastiches ("the traditional Sherlockian term for stories by new authors that hew closely to the style of the original stories, and include a

mystery as a major part of the plot”) and fanfiction (stories written in any way, any style, to play out writer desires or play the ‘What If’ game) attracts more than just amateurs—Laurie R. King’s Mary Russell series is a pastiche that has made it to the *New York Times*’ bestsellers list and Nicholas Meyer’s 1974 *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution: Being a Reprint from the Reminiscences of John H. Watson, M.D.*, another *New York Times* bestseller, reignited interest in Sherlock Holmes in the mid-70s and led to the founding of a slew of new societies, including the Crew of the Barque Lone Star.

Media portrayals of Sherlock Holmes raise the character’s profile and help fan-written books, short stories, and scholarship find audiences. In 2012, Guinness World Records even declared Sherlock Holmes to be the “most portrayed literary human character in film and TV” (Guinness). More than 75 actors have played Sherlock Holmes more than 254 times. The earliest on-screen depiction of the consulting detective was in *Sherlock Holmes Baffled* (1900). Each generation has had its own signature Sherlock Holmes, reigniting waves of interest in the century-old figure—William Gillette, Arthur Wontener, Basil Rathbone, Jeremy Brett, Robert Downey Jr., and Benedict Cumberbatch, to name a few (interview with Leslie Klinger, September 20, 2014).

Although Arthur Conan Doyle attempted to write a play based off his most lucrative character, it wasn’t until he met and handed William Gillette the reigns that portrayals of the literary pseudo-hero leapt off the page. William Gillette’s performance was so commanding that, even with his only on-screen depiction of Holmes lost (until November 2014), his stage representations have influenced every other portrayal of Holmes. Gillette made popular the now iconic phrase “Elementary, my dear Watson” and the iconic curved pipe—neither are mentioned in the canon. Sydney Paget, the most

famous of Holmes's many illustrators, even based his drawings of the detective on Gillette—forever affecting Holmes portrayals.

Today, there are more than 250 Sherlockian societies (i.e., The Crew of the Barque Lone Star and the Baker Street Irregulars) around the globe (Swiss info). There are also video games (selections include *221B: Baker Street*, *The Lost Files of Sherlock Holmes*, and *Sherlock Holmes Versus Jack the Ripper*), board games (selections include *221B Baker Street: The Master Detective Game* and *Sherlock Holmes, Consulting Detective*), countless websites, from the authoritative and well-maintained to social media pages (see [Sherlockian.net](#), [Sherlocktron](#), [I Hear of Sherlock Everywhere](#), an entire corner of tumblr), podcasts ([I Hear of Sherlock Everywhere](#) and the [Baker Street Babes](#) are two extremely popular and well-regarded), artwork, cartoons, and even a touring *Sherlock on Ice* production.

Sherlockians are a voracious bunch, attending conferences small (The Tulsa Perceivers' 40th Anniversary Celebration, September 2014) and large (the annual Baker Street Irregulars or Society of Sherlock Holmes meetings on alternating weekends in January in New York and London). Sherlockians read and write and create and watch anything associated with the world's greatest detective, analyzing the value of the piece as it supports the canon or matches with widely-accepted hypothesis in filling in holes.

Despite Sherlock Holmes's age, he endures. With a global presence, Sherlock Holmes continues to win over fervent followers and fans, no matter how he is currently being reiterated for public consumption. For many Sherlockians, though, the consumption of Sherlock-themed materials fails to provide them with enough engagement with the beloved, fascinating detective; the world he inhabits; and the cases

he solves. In these instances (thousands of them, given the number of Sherlockian societies across the globe), Sherlockians unite to transform their fascination into purpose and community.

The Crew of the Barque Lone Star's Buoy-Laws (so named for the Crew's boat theme—i.e., Third Mate for the Crew's leader and the "Barge Plimp" for the monthly newsletter) exemplify the purpose of many a Sherlockian society:

"ARTICLE 3: PURPOSE

The objectives of the CREW are:

- a) To promote the study and enjoyment of the revered writings of the Canon involving Sherlock Holmes, written by Holmes' Boswell, Dr. John H. Watson, and provided to the world by the esteemed literary agent, the late Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.
- b) To study Sherlock Holmes through the 60 stories of the Canon, the life of Doyle, the society of Victorian times, and other related items of interest, such as pastiches, TV and radio shows, games, comics, and movies.
- c) To further these objectives, the CREW will conduct lively discussions at the monthly meetings, as well as special "cruises" of the CREW throughout the year, as well as promoting the teachings of the Canon to the outside world through speaking engagements, support to other organizations, and attendance at other Sherlockian events.
- d) To perpetuate the legend that Sherlock Holmes is not a Legend."

As a community, Sherlockian societies aim to preserve Holmes's significant history and heighten the world's awareness of the detective. As single members within

the broader community, however, Sherlockian individuals are also intensely focused on heightening their group's awareness of their own value and ability to make contributions. The higher status one has within the community, the more likely they will have a real impact in carrying out the stated community objectives (Alavi et al. 2005/2006).

Knowledge

“Elementary,” said he. “It is one of those instances where the reasoner can produce an effect which seems remarkable to his neighbor, because the latter has missed the one little point which is the basis of the deduction. The same may be said, my dear fellow, for the effect of some of these little sketches of yours, which is entirely meretricious, depending as it does upon your retaining in your hands some factors in the problem which are never imparted to the reader.” –“The Crooked Man”

Jack Frey has the right idea. He cackles as he pulls out a yellow legal pad. Tiny cursive script covers the page in lace. This page, and the one after it, are filled with what seems to be this month’s entire story. Jack has taken out a few transition and conjunction words, added in a few bullets, but he has every detail down. He must have put in hours to read the story and rewrite the story and study on top of it. He catches me staring. "I studied," he whispers. It's almost conspiratorial, this confession, like I'm not supposed to know, but it is certainly no secret. He has the damn legal pad out on the table for all to see.

I sigh. It doesn't look like I'll be winning this month, either.

I have never won a quiz. Which is a very hard thing to stomach, me being the type of person I am. Worse yet, it's not just that I have never won a quiz, it's that I consistently score a 60, or 50, or even (God forbid) a 40 percent on the quiz! Failing. That's did-you-even-read abysmality.

I try to help myself as much as I can. I put off reading the monthly assigned story as late as possible for maximum information retention. Late Saturday night, early Sunday

morning, I'm reading—and reading thoroughly. I try to pay attention to the minutiae that I think might crop up. With which hand did Sherlock pick up his magnifying glass? What pithy statement of unusual and often arbitrary insight did he share with Watson? What was the name of the street where the crime took place? The less mentioned the piece of information, the more likely it is that it will appear on the quiz. This tests our ability to read closely, to notice the small details Sherlock himself would have noticed.

Steve Mason passes out the quiz he wrote for the week. These are his quizzes. His questions. His evil at play. While we twiddle our pens over the page, trying to think back to that one sentence on that one page in this one whole story, he leans back, hands folded over his belly, surveying the damage he has wrought. This month, December, the quiz is over Part Two of “The Valley of Fear.” It's a relatively convoluted story, and one of my favorites since becoming a regular member at the Crew of the Barque Lone Star's monthly gatherings. Holmes and Watson are summoned to a castle, where a man has been stabbed. Average enough occurrence. But! The castle has a moat and a surrounding wall and all the servants were asleep and the wife was upstairs asleep. The question of who committed the dastardly crime, then, is unknown. Until Holmes pieces it together. Of course.

I can recall and write all that more than three months after reading the story for the first time. Less than twelve hours after my first read, however, I was unable to answer what color robe Holmes wore or what the occupation of the victim was or what the name of the maid who opened the door for the consulting detective was. Jack, to my left, giggles as he writes in every carefully studied answer, his right hand scribbling as his wrinkled left forefinger traces its way down his note-filled legal pad.

Stu Nelan, to my right, is reading over the questions, mentally answering in his head. He does not participate in the quizzes—on principal, he tells me. "I hate the quizzes. I figure if I'm going to do the quiz then I need to study the story and I don't want to have to study the story. I want to study the story because I enjoy it not because I want to memorize the details of it or the minutiae of the story. I want to enjoy reading it and with a quiz facing me, I don't enjoy reading it, so I don't do the quizzes" (interview with researcher, September 14, 2014). Nelan, from what I can tell, is the only one who does not participate.

The rest of us cringe each time Mason hands out his quiz sheets. Ten highly specific queries from the text, followed by three tie-breakers that deal with even more minutiae and sometimes even diverge from the world of Sherlock Holmes to ask about an element of Victorian society or culture or the London landscape mentioned in passing in the story. It is fun. But it is also difficult.

Mason watches, waiting until the Crew goes jittery and fidgety—a sign that our knowledge has been tapped out, for better or for worse. "Are we all done? Anybody still working?"

He begins to work his way through the quiz. "What time do the servants usually retire for the evening?" Pauses. A smattering of answers bounce back to him. "Well, if you can remember, it was actually between 10:30 and 11 at night because..." I mark a harsh, unforgiving 'X' over my answer. I take solace in the scratching sounds of Crew members doing the same. This little detail, though applicable to Sherlock's study of the case, was mentioned just once in the story. I don't have time to dwell on where it was

mentioned or why I didn't remember because Mason has moved on. "Who did Holmes purchase the historical tract about the manor from?" "A local tobacconist." *What?!*

Mason continues down the line. Occasionally, there is a question no one knows. "What name did Douglas give while delirious during a hunting accident?" The pause doesn't rebound with an answer. "Nobody knows?" He seems surprised, though he clearly takes pleasure in the difficulty of his quizzes. "Body Master McGinney."

After all is said and done, Mason tallies up. "Anybody get a perfect score?" No hands shoot up. That's normal. In eight months, I've only ever seen four people take a perfect quiz. Keep in mind these are generally individuals who have been reading and talking about the Sherlock stories for a decade or more. "90 percent?" Jack Frey and Walter Pieper raise their hands.

"Okay," Steve Mason chuckles—he loves when his tie breaker questions are actually put to use. "What unusual circumstance probably kept Douglas from defending himself?" Jack wins, offering that the man's revolver was not in his pocket. He cackles again and accepts a honey jar embossed with Sherlock Holmes's profile and name, made by Steve Mason's wife, Linda.

Jack's win, albeit honest, is a little less impressive than the average month-to-month win. Where notes are needed, you aren't seen to be displaying true familiarity and intrinsic knowledge of the source text. The better the Sherlockian, it seems, the more they ought to be able to quote and reference at a moment's notice. The quiz is merely a check to prove you are a genuine Sherlockian and to offer a venue for local Sherlockians to win attention and recognition. The quiz—and the proof of knowledge in general—are vital parts of the Sherlockian gathering.

Where Sherlock is concerned, knowledge confers status, recognition, and respect. Knowledge is valuable; knowledge is power.

Knowing, and the ability to demonstrate how much one knows, are crucial talents for the Sherlockian society member. These serious Sherlockians seek each other out, looking for fellowship, a share of knowledge, and a validation of their interest in the great detective (see section on Belonging and Exclusion). The community of Sherlockia is created and perpetuated by its members—there is open access to all who demonstrate a viable interest, with next-level membership reserved for those who demonstrate an invested, researched knowledge-base on the great detective, his canon, and even the rules and norms of the community.

DEFINING SHERLOCKIAN KNOWLEDGE

The Sherlockian society is interesting in that it exists both as a social group and as an organization—there is a purpose to gatherings and undertakings (bylaws). Each time Sherlockians gather socially, the planned activity will relate to Sherlock Holmes, Arthur Conan Doyle, or the Victorian Era in some way, and so will lead to a greater amount of knowledge about these central facets to the group's existence. These social gatherings (e.g., movie nights, outings to plays, dinner and drinks at conferences) are a crucial part of the organizational knowledge creation among Sherlockians. When the individuals gather for a society-sanctioned event, the information they learn is the same, and this “is the process of making available and amplifying knowledge created by individuals as well as crystallizing and connecting it to an organization's knowledge system” (Nonaka and von Krogh 2009:635).

Knowledge—facts, trivia, hypotheses about Sherlock Holmes and about the Sherlockian movement—is “embedded in a social context that determines both how the information will be shared and how it will be interpreted” (Alavi et al. 2005/2006:193). The context, of course, are the Sherlockian societies that dot cities around the world. On a micro scale, there are the organizations like The Crew of the Barque Lone Star, serving the Sherlockian population in the DFW area. On a macro scale, there are the Sherlock Holmes Society of London and the exclusive Baker Street Irregulars (BSI).¹⁰ The Crew has club-exclusive knowledge deriving from the lectures, toasts, quizzes, discussions, plays, and more that only local members are exposed to. This creates an important shared basis of knowledge, though this knowledge does not extend beyond the local society.

For larger, overarching Sherlockian societies, however, information does flow down to the smaller, scion societies. The BSI, for example, publishes a quarterly journal that is subscribed to and read by thousands and thousands of Sherlock enthusiasts, as opposed to the free newsletter sent out monthly to a mailing list of about 80 on the Crew of the Barque Lone Star’s side. Essentially, this means there is a hierarchy of knowledge at play. Sherlockian societies revolve around what members study and uncover about the detective or his associated topics. Knowledge affects conversation topics, created products, and accepted folklore of the community, and serves as a test of allegiance and dedication—it is valued because it affects everything a community does. Alavi,

¹⁰ The Baker Street Irregulars is the longest continuously-running, largest and most exclusive Sherlock Holmes society in the world. Membership is by invitation only, restricted to 300. Members of this group are well-known in the Sherlockian world for their knowledge and contributions to the world of Sherlock Holmes. It would be nearly impossible to become a member without also being a public figure. (See “Belonging and Exclusion” chapter for more detail.) The Sherlock Holmes Society of London is a large, well-respected group based out of London. There are no restrictions on membership here, which has likely contributed to its lesser status next to the BSI.

Kayworth and Leiner (2005/2006:194) write that “values represent a more visible manifestation of culture that signify espoused beliefs identifying what is important to a particular cultural group.” The discovery of and production of knowledge is crucial to being a valued member of the Sherlockian community. The BSI and Sherlock Holmes Society of London have more resources and produce more content, and therefore have a higher status in the Sherlockian world.

The same principle can be applied to individual members—the more one contributes to knowledge creation, the higher their status and perceived value to other members of the group will be. Writing about a corporation, Alavi, Kayworth, and Leidner (2005/2006:209) hit upon the organizational impetus of ‘knowing’: while there was an established corporate structure at the studied location, what mattered was expertise, as members “placed a high value upon subject-matter expertise. Being recognized as an expert was considered an ‘intrinsic motivator.’” The more one tastes the recognition that comes from being an expert, the more they strive to replicate it. For Sherlockians, once you begin publishing or writing pastiches it is very difficult to stop or slow down, as that would only serve to halt or reverse one’s rising importance to the group.

In the Sherlockian community, there are two types of knowledge: knowledge about the world of Sherlock Holmes—the character, the canon, the chronology, the Victorian Era in which he lived—and knowledge about the community itself—the political maneuvers, the way membership works, the culture, the traditions.

One could ostensibly be a Sherlock Holmes scholar without also being a Sherlockian. Reading the canon and vetted academic literature could lead one to a possession of deep knowledge of the stories as written by Arthur Conan Doyle. But this is

unlikely, since so much of the Sherlockian research has been published by noted Sherlockians. There is so much scholarship, in fact—a century’s worth of sustained interest and scholarship quickly accumulates—that Leslie Klinger, BSI, writes “the shelves of the student of the Canon are often filled with far more material than the student can ever hope to assimilate or even review” (Klinger 2000:47). The expectation is that a Sherlockian scholar will seek out knowledge, learn, and keep learning as much as they can for as long as they can. As Third Mate Steve Mason said, “A true Sherlockian is one that wants to take the canon and study it from a literary side.” Even the most voracious readers could dedicate the rest of their life to exclusively reading Sherlock Holmes scholarship, or Sherlock Holmes pastiche, or Sherlock Holmes annotations, and still not run out of material.

Knowledge enters a community and disseminates through its members by “ a process of learning, [which] may be roughly divided into four elements: exposure, selection, interpretation, and retention” (Sykes 1951:380). Exposure, of course, is the moment when an interested party learns of and begins attending events for the Sherlockian world. For many Crew members, this moment came reading newspaper articles written about the club (Brenda Hutchinson and Stu Nelan), learning about it from a fellow Sherlockian familiar with the Holmes scene in the city (Cindy Brown and Don Hobbs), or stumbling upon the club while actively seeking out more information on Sherlockian (myself) or Victorian (a young(er) fencing couple named John and Maria) related enterprises. Although the character and original canon are world-renowned, the culture of Sherlockian world is best understood through direct, personal exposure. Attending the meetings encourages stronger associations and a continued desire to attend

meetings. Sykes (1951:382) describes this in-person power as the “social location of community knowledge.” When individuals attend meetings, they form bonds and “it is this cohesion which provides both the means of obtaining knowledge and the motivation to do so” (Sykes 1951:382).

To identify as a Sherlockian is to identify as a learner, constantly reading and studying. The mass of material surrounding the world of Sherlock Holmes has led many Sherlockians to establish a complementary Sherlockian canon to accompany Conan Doyle’s canon of stories and novels. This is selection—to acquire the culturally-appropriate foundation of knowledge, what are the requisite requirements? Sykes (1951:380) notes the expectation of the individual to adhere to the group’s standards as “a determining factor in deciding what knowledge an individual will expose himself to.”

A few noted (by virtue of their own published scholarship) Sherlockians have compiled lists to aid burgeoning and veteran Sherlockian scholars alike in their studies. The putting together and publishing of such lists, of course, is an exercise in knowledge demonstration. *We have the authority to say what is good and bad*, the lists imply. *We have read all of these books and more*. Leslie Klinger’s 2000 article “Sifting the Writings Upon the Writings,” published in *The Baker Street Journal*, includes 50 tomes separated into the section headings “Annotated Editions of the Canon” (for truly understanding *every* aspect of the stories; Leslie Klinger’s own ten-volume Annotated Editions, for example, are notorious for having footnotes take over the entire page); “Contemporary Victorian Source Material” (for contextualizing the stories); “General Commentaries on the Canon”; “Collections of Essays on the Canon (Single Author)”; “Single-Author Works on Specific Subjects”; and “Indispensable Sherlockian Reference Tools.” Klinger

notes that his list of important “Writings” omits foreign language writings, chronologies, electronic sources, and a bevy of other wonderfully smart Sherlockian writings. Still, Klinger vouches for these pieces—a Sherlockian can specialize in the area in which they direct their attention (the section on specific subjects discusses Sherlock Holmes in association with music, sex, books, and medicine, among other things), but only with the proper foundational knowledge.

John Bennet Shaw, BSI, wanted to help current and prospective Sherlockians get “an in-depth view of the entire Holmesian culture,” so he created a helpful “Basic Holmesian Library,” consisting of no less than 100 pieces to give Sherlockians a solid overview. First published in 1979, this list of One Hundred has been revised multiple times, by Shaw during his lifetime and by others after his death, molded to fit new releases and to reflect new tendencies in Holmesian scholarship. The list is still used by many as they begin their own book collections or delve into the world of Sherlock Holmes. Though the list, through its many revisions, has included 130 different Sherlock Holmes-related products, from annotated bibliographies to pastiches to plays, it is still intended to serve as merely a document guiding “the participants through the welter of words that have been printed about Mr. Holmes, his life and times and career, his friends and enemies, and his standing today as a world figure who lives and is revered and respected by all” (Johnson 2001:5). Like Klinger, Shaw had to leave out many “fine contributions” to The Writings on the Writings from the likes of renowned Sherlockian scholars Jay Finley Christ, Lord Donegall, Charles Honce, Nathan Bengis, Peter E. Blau, Jon Lellenberg, Christopher Morley, Julian Wolff, and Edgar W. Smith. “Please

remember,” Shaw notes in his introduction to the 1979 list, “that while I have listed One Hundred items I have not listed more than two thousand others.”

Interpretation and retention, the final two steps in Sykes’ (1951) four-step model for knowledge acquisition, explain how closely and fervently an individual applies their cultural learnings to membership in the Sherlockian community. The conception of what it takes, precisely, to be a knowledgeable Sherlockian is indefinable and fluid. New scholarship is constantly being published, societies are constantly meeting and working on different projects, and the field in general is so large it demands either broad generalizations or hyper-focused specialization. Interestingly, the sheer amount of things that there are to know and the competitiveness of always having to know more and learn more than fellow members to maintain status leads to divergent pathways by which individuals identify as Sherlockian. Identity, as defined by Holland et al. (1998), involves people telling others who they are, telling themselves who they are, and then acting as though they truly are who they say they are. This results in a practice of modeling—the society member defines themselves in comparison to other individuals they identify to be Sherlockian. The less one interacts with high-knowledge Sherlockians, the less the perceived requirements are to identify as one. Once a member is in a position where they frequently encounter high-knowledge, high-status, well-regarded Sherlockian scholars, they have higher expectations for themselves—up until they are definitively marked as one of the high-knowledge individuals by receiving, for example, an investiture in the Baker Street Irregulars.

Brenda Hutchinson (who is considered, despite two years of steady attendance, to be a recent recruit), told me that she feels “comfortable” identifying herself as a

Sherlockian (interview with researcher, December 16, 2014). For her, the title can be applied where one has “a passion and excitement for it. I think you have to be interested in the intricacies and the stories and all the detail, studies of it.” Although Hutchinson does her own scholarship, her exposure to Sherlockian-themed groups outside of the Crew has been restricted to small, relatively local gatherings such as the 40th Anniversary celebration hosted by Tulsa’s Afghanistan Perceivers.

Cindy Brown has been a member of the Crew for more than seven years and has even traveled to Michigan for a large conference and to see the International Exhibit of Sherlock Holmes in St. Louis. Brown considers it a “big compliment” when someone refers to her as a Sherlockian (interview with researcher, September 28, 2014). Those deserving of the title are those who have “read most of the canon, [and] who like to talk about it, in all forms, whether it’s reading, movies, plays, exhibits.”

Surprisingly, Stu Nelan was the only Crew member interviewed hesitant to identify as a Sherlockian. In conversation, Stu throws the term around easily, casually. When explicitly asked to self-identify, however, Stu hedges. “I guess I don’t really consider myself a Sherlockian, though. I wouldn’t be able to talk with some of the more learned people on the details of the Sherlock Holmes stories, you know, and which story did he wear this kind of a hat and what shoes was he wearing when he did thus and thus and was it raining or was it cloudy on such and such a night. There are people who can quote the stories, that can probably quote the entire series for you, that have memorized them and have their knowledge in detail and I’m not that kind of guy, I don’t have that kind of minutiae knowledge of the stories.” Stu has this perspective perhaps because he attends the BSI weekends in New York City each January, and has for several years. He

knows and is friends with many world-renowned, intimidating Sherlockians. His standard for comparison is considerably different than that of Hutchinson or Brown.

Don Hobbs, on the other hand, doesn't have to self-identify. The BSI, by giving him an investiture, has claimed him as one of their own. This is who a Sherlockian is, his membership said. He knows enough, is well-versed enough.

Defining a Sherlockian and the amount of knowledge a Sherlock-lover must have to claim such an identity will require different things for different individuals, depending on their length of exposure to the world and community and the size of their network of Sherlockians. Individuals coming into the world of Sherlockia for the first time may have read and loved the canon, but know nothing about the intrigue, the inconsistencies, the Grand Game, or the politics. These come with time. The longer a member is in the world and the more they read (Sykes 1951:379), however, the wider their awareness of Holmes's spread and reach and the scholarship and what the most dedicated individuals are bringing to the community. The assumptions placed on them are higher, as are their expectations of what the 'best' Sherlockians know.

The 'knowledge' that is most valuable to Sherlockians is not knowledge in a factual sense. While a thorough understanding of the literary agent's life (Arthur Conan Doyle), the canon, and Victorian society and culture are mainstays for matching knowledge expectations, understanding folklore, culture, and popular theories are just as important. Iser (1974:271) writes that "one text is potentially capable of several different realizations, and no reading can ever exhaust the full potential, for each individual reader will fill the gaps in his own way, thereby excluding the various other possibilities; as he reads, he will make his own decisions as to how the gap is to be filled." Sherlockians

cannot just check out any of the numerous Holmesian encyclopedias or annotated bibliographies, memorize the facts, and expect to be caught up to speed. Knowledge, in the Sherlockian community, must be at least partially be sought out for one's self. Reading the canon and puzzling through the logical inconsistencies and forming personal conclusions are good Sherlockian practices. This allows Sherlockians to arrive at meetings and other gatherings both knowledgeable in the basics of characters and story, but also in a position to engage in friendly debate and further the study of Sherlock Holmes and his contemporaries.

Sherlockian scholarship is often at odds with itself. Klinger's (2000) "Writings on The Writings" reveals an acceptance for discordant and unbacked hypotheses. For instance, while *Holmes and Watson*, by June Thomson, is a "fine fresh view of the Canon, it's greatest flaws are the lack of reference to other scholarship" (Klinger 2000: 50). Sherlockians are granted remarkable freedom to postulate wildly on the grounds of very little—writing on *Sidelights on Holmes*, by John Hall, Klinger (2000:50) notes that "Mr. Hall makes much out of very little data in this useful work." Take the works *Ms. Holmes of Baker Street: The Truth about Sherlock* (which holds as its "thesis that Sherlock Holmes was a woman") and *Sherlock Holmes: Rare Book Collector* (with a thesis "that Holmes had a fine library of books, and Stern explores its likely contents") (Klinger 2000: 51,53). These books are part of a genre of speculative Sherlock Holmes scholarship—they are valuable not in the knowledge or truths they reveal, but in that they analyze the canon and add to the discussion and ongoing research of the great detective within pre-accepted cultural idiosyncrasies (Nonaka and von Krogh 2009).

As long as speculative works play along with the foundational truths of Sherlockia¹¹ they are considered passable within the community. What matters is not that the findings or hypotheses are congruent with previous scholarship, but that they employ a kind of deductive lens, a magnifying glass set to the canon in much the same way as Holmes himself might approach any one of his own cases. Members are valuable so far as they can emulate the detective and open room for discussion. This keeps the finite number of stories from growing stale and creates room for the community to continue to grow and be dynamic. Taking on that task in a Holmesian way is just another celebration of the detective found at the center of all community activity.

CONTRIBUTIONS

As already noted, part of my ethnographic research on the Crew of the Barque Lone Star involved interviewing five members. To elicit these interviews, I queried the group during a monthly meeting. “As most of you know, I am studying Sherlock Holmes and his continued impact more than a century after the canonical writings. I was wondering if I could interview a few of you—five, perhaps?”

The Crew members immediately began to throw out their suggestions for who my interview subjects ought to be—among the proposed names were Don Hobbs, resident BSI and world-renowned collector of foreign language translations of Sherlock Holmes’s

¹¹ Christopher Morley, founder of the BSI and the father of most Sherlock Holmes fandom activity, had three principles (according to present day Sherlockians) that he espoused to guide Sherlockian activity. First: “Have fun, above all else, have fun; and take neither yourself, nor anyone, seriously.” Second: “The characters in the stories are not fictitious creatures of some author’s imagination. They are real people.” Third: Arthur Conan Doyle should not be eliminated from discussions or study (as many Sherlockians have done in efforts to better respect the “lived lives” of Holmes and his contemporaries) (sherlocktron.com/grand.htm).

adventures; Stuart Nelan, a quiet man who had been with the Crew for decades, longer than almost anybody but Hobbs; and Steve Mason, Third Mate and frequent topic presenter. Honestly, these suggestions were unneeded—had I tried, I very likely could have guessed who the suggested individuals would be. The names that were suggested were the people who comment during meetings the most frequently; who have been members through the club’s various ups and downs; whose names are listed, month after month, in the bulletin as leaders and “spiritual advisors” (Sykes 195:382; Anderson and Kilduff 2009:296). These men have earned respect and have long since proved their dedication, passion, and knowledge for all things Sherlockian.

My interviews back this up. Stuart Nelan spends 30 minutes showing me his extensive library. “You know, it’s not like Don Hobbs—his is insured for something like \$250,000, but mine might only be worth \$100,000—optimistically.” Nelan, unlike Hobbs, tries to read each new book that comes into his house. His shelves, crammed with books, magazines, and encyclopedic annotations, testify to the knowledge contained within his brain. Even more telling are his digressions—for as much as Nelan dislikes the quizzes for their focus on the minutiae and his reluctance to identify himself as a Sherlockian for his inability to recite canon word-for-word, he is very familiar with the history and people who have contributed to Sherlock Holmes’s legacy. Nelan knows the stories behind the Baker Street Irregulars launch and the writing of their bylaws, he knows the biographies of the earliest BSI members, he knows where the largest collections of Sherlock Holmes-related literature can be found, and he knows who all the early illustrators were and what their style consisted of.

Part of this knowledge comes from Nelan’s regular attendance at the annual BSI gatherings in New York City, an opportunity for him to attend lectures by distinguished Sherlockians and engage in conversation with fellow Sherlockians with varied backgrounds and specialties. But a large part of this knowledge comes from Nelan’s own carefully curated library and his fondness for reading at the end of his long, technical workdays as a software developer. In a spacious, tall room surrounded on three sides by gargantuan bookshelves, there is a wall of collector’s items—Christopher Morley’s letters to Jon Lillenger, William Fuller’s limited-run Christmas publications, copies of *The Strand Magazine*. Another wall is filled with pastiches and scholarship, and another with annotated bibliographies and collected volumes. Outside the library, however, is where Nelan keeps his treasures—he is, like a good Sherlockian collector, working on obtaining a set of John Bennet Shaw’s *One Hundred*.

Nelan’s search for these tomes has involved a good bit of detective work—hunting down catalogs, searching through bookstores, contacting potential sellers (although he does admit the search has grown much easier since the internet took off). It isn’t only in his hunt for books that Nelan sees himself emulating the best qualities of Sherlock Holmes. “I would like to think that my work in software development is somehow related to Sherlock Holmes too, you know, following the clues for why the program didn’t work or how to make it better or what’s going on with it,” Nelan says.¹²

¹² As a matter of interest, most of the members of the Crew hold jobs that require them to be either detail-oriented or problem solvers. Hobbs installs cancer detection machines in hospitals around the world, Brown is an accountant, and Mason is a response coordinator. Besides these interview subjects, the Crew has doctoral candidates, lawyers, detectives, librarians and coders, among other things. Rather than Sherlock Holmes leading these individuals to their careers, it seems as though the traits that suit one in detail-oriented

Don Hobbs is quite a bit different than Nelan, though he too has a (larger, more cramped) section of his house partitioned off for Sherlock Holmes books and artifacts and he, too, identifies with the detective. Even Hobbs's grandchildren refer to him as "Holmes," rather than any traditional grandfather-like title. The more a Sherlockian is able to behave like Sherlock Holmes (who happened to know a whole lot about a whole lot), the better their reputation will be within the society. Hobbs embraces his role as an expert, has plaques of awards and framed newspaper interviews hanging alongside movie posters and comics. Hobbs's books are almost exclusively foreign translations of Sherlock Holmes canonical books and landmark scholarship. With over 12,000 books in his collection, Hobbs is no longer interested in getting his hands on any translation he can find—instead, his efforts are focused on the obscure things, the things he has heard rumor of but never actually found. For example, a 1968 Kazakhstan version is giving him particular grief (interview with researcher, September 28, 2014).

Though Hobbs doesn't read the actual stories he collects (he jokes that he can barely speak English), he demonstrates his knowledge in other ways. For one thing, collecting books from all over the globe, Hobbs has had to ferret out translations, finding them and locating them with a bit of detective work on his own—indirectly, perhaps, leading to his BSI name (Inspector Lestrade). While lacking the renown of Peter Blau or Leslie Klinger, Hobbs is also a Holmesian scholar. Holmes maintains a bibliography of Sherlock Holmes, updated monthly to accommodate the new finds he makes or reported to him on a regular basis. He calls this *The Galactic Sherlock Holmes*, so named because famed Sherlockian Ron DeWall took the World, International, and Universal Sherlock

careers are the same personality features that make the detective an appealing extracurricular.

Holmes titles for his bibliographies. Hobbs had to do one bigger, one better. With the largest collection of foreign translations in the world, Hobbs fits a unique spot in Sherlockia and is often invited on to podcasts and conferences to give presentations on his collection and the international spread of Sherlock Holmes. The collection has even led to opportunities to translate and edit The BSI International Series, a celebration of Sherlockian scholarship from across the globe that so far includes *Italy and Sherlock Holmes*, *Australia and Sherlock Holmes*, *Scandinavia and Sherlock Holmes*, *Japan and Sherlock Holmes*, and, with Hobbs's help, *Spain and Sherlock Holmes*.

Third Mate Steve Mason's knowledge is on display every month. He delivers presentations during each meeting that highlight or delve deeper into an issue from the assigned reading. Victorian era toys, the Pinkerton Detective Agency, moats and drawbridges, the historically verified inconsistencies of a particular story—the subject matter varies wildly, but all demonstrates a considerable amount of research to locate and bring to us the topics at hand. This, of course, is just his work for public presentations of knowledge. To bolster his personal knowledge of the canon, Mason reads far and wide—lately it is the biographies of Conan Doyle, picking them from a compiled list of about 90 entries he included in an issue of the newsletter.

“To me, the idea, when you say you want to study Sherlock Holmes—it's not just reading the stories, but also reading all the essays and criticisms that people have written about the stories themselves. And so, obviously, reading *The Baker Street Journal*¹³

¹³ *The Baker Street Journal* (BSJ) is published by the BSI and has been the leading Sherlockian publication since it was founded by Edgar W. Smith in 1946. “With both serious scholarship and articles that ‘play the game,’ the *Journal* is essential reading for anyone interested in Sherlock Holmes, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and a world where it is always 1895 (<http://www.bakerstreetjournal.com/home.html>).

every quarter, and reading—that’s a great one because people have written a lot of great articles and essays about the stories themselves,” Mason explains (interview with researcher, November 1, 2014).

Through all of Mason’s activities—his Sherlock Holmes cross-stitching; the radio plays, comics, and in-progress Sherlock-themed novels he pens; the newsletters and puzzles he puts together; the research for his presentations; and personal reading—he estimates he spends two to three hours every day on Sherlock Holmes. It is almost as though Mason has been taking an intensive course in the detective and his era for nearly a decade.

All this and Mason, like Nelan, shies from the title of ‘expert.’ “I think I’m pretty knowledgeable. I’m not going to say I’m an expert. [Compared to the average Sherlockian] I’m in the middle to a little higher. Because I didn’t study it, I just read them for years. I just started studying them seriously in the last eight or nine years, so I still have a lot of years to go to catch up to people that have been studying it all their lives.”

Studying, and not just reading, is crucial to gaining the knowledge base required to actively participate in Sherlockian conversations. These men, who have been in the Crew for years, and especially Mason and Hobbs, who have published and produced and proven their Sherlock IQ many times over the years have the respect of the group because they most fully represent who a Sherlockian is. Hobbs, as an example, has written Sherlockian blogs, articles that have appeared in the BSJ, and maintains and distributes his “Galactic Sherlock Holmes” bibliography, among other things. Mason researches, writes, and presents a topical lecture each month, as well as the Barge Plimp newsletter, a comic strip, and a radio play performed at the 40th anniversary of the Afghanistan

Perceivers. A Sherlockian studies, reads, is knowledgeable and never satisfied with knowing just enough—they want to know everything. For newcomers, the requirements of study and scholarship quickly become apparent and there is a tendency to (if one plans on sticking around seriously) ramp up the study, which ramps up the participation in the Sherlockian community—a feedback loop. Those who don't have the time or inclination to put in the work tend to drift away, evidenced by The Crew of the Barque Lone Star slow membership growth, though plenty of new faces will show for three or four meetings.

Cindy Brown and Brenda Hutchinson rounded out the Crew member interviews and are prime examples of the intensified Sherlockian activity inspired by membership in a community. Brown, a 62-year-old accountant (yet another detail-oriented profession), has been attending meetings for seven or eight years. When she first began attending, Brown had read perhaps a third of the Holmes stories. Assessing her command of the subject, Brown self-rates herself as a 7 on a scale 1-10. “There’s people who know a lot more about it than me.” Like Nelan and Mason, Brown is aware of all she doesn’t know and the number of Sherlockians who do know it. She studies though, reading the stories, the Annotated Baring-Gould, listening to Sherlock-themed podcasts, and has attended Sherlock conventions big (Minneapolis) and small (Tulsa). Brown, who does identify as a Sherlockian, defines the designation as “someone who has read most of the canon, who likes to talk about it, in all forms, whether it’s reading, movies, plays, exhibits. It’s all about enjoying the Sherlockian mystery.” Though not explicitly stated, Brown still makes it clear that one must be familiar with the world of Sherlock Holmes. To “talk about it” as a “serious fan” (as opposed to a casual fan) there is a base level of knowledge and

understanding one must possess. Brown expressed interest in presenting a talk of her own—a fifteen minute biography on the life of Arthur Conan Doyle—a demonstration of her knowledge.

At 57, Brenda Hutchinson is one of the newest permanent additions to the Crew (see *Belonging and Exclusion*). She started attending meetings nearly two years ago. She came to the meetings having already read the complete canon several times, but has since sought out original Sherlock films, biographies, and has compiled her own chronology with inserted history. Hutchinson is even working on producing a murder mystery for an upcoming Crew event. Hutchinson, too, identifies as a Sherlockian, noting the importance of studying and gaining knowledge. “[To identify] I think you have to have a passion and excitement for it. I think you have to be interested in the intricacies and the stories and all the detail, studies of it.”

Knowledge, once earned, must be demonstrated. By displaying knowledge, Sherlockians are proving they belong and have a right to speak and participate in meetings and discussions. Sherlockians view subject-related knowledge as one of the most valuable traits an individual can bring to the society and so use this value to pursue status (Anderson and Kilduff 2009:295). “The pursuit of status is thought to be pervasive in social groups,” Hogan writes (Anderson and Kilduff 2009:295). The most consistent predictors of status within a group are competence and a strong commitment to the group (Anderson and Kilduff 2009:297). Competency is displayed when a member is able to speak thoroughly about a wide variety of Sherlockian topics, no matter when they come up (lectures and quizzes are common places, for example). Commitment to the group is evident where a member has dedicated “substantial number of hours” to the domain to

become an expert that can best contribute, participate, and make presentations that further group knowledge (Ericsson et al. 1993).

There are a variety of ways to demonstrate acquired knowledge. A popular method employed often in Crew of the Barque Lone Star meetings is to simply insert one's own thoughts and trivia into the lectures and presentations. If Steve Mason has just presented on the Ku Klux Klan or turn of the century detective agency the Pinkerton Agency or the use of moats in nineteenth-century England, speaking up publicly supports the idea that you are a member who is in the know, who can contribute something worthwhile (Anderson and Kilduff 2009:295). This is the crux—Sherlockians strive to advance the study and appreciation of Sherlock Holmes externally and their place in the implied hierarchy internally. Without the proper background and amount of knowledge, one cannot fully contribute to the Sherlockian agenda. This is why the quizzes are important—though dealing in ultimately less-than-crucial details, they give members the opportunity to test their knowledge in a public forum. Members compare themselves and their level of knowledge to Sherlockian community around them—this is how one proves competence and commitment. The quiz is a medium of value-building available to all members and somewhat attainable, with the right amount of study.

Wider recognition, and harder to achieve without the proper connections and resources, is the act of collecting. Collections, too, demonstrate and create knowledge. “Meaning-making occurs through, and is irretrievably intermeshed with cultural artifacts” Holland et al. (2008:118) writes. Sherlockian-related items that are curated and preserved are collected so because they either reflect important contributions to the movement or because they highlight the spread of Sherlock Holmes's reputation. Either way, collected

items reflect what is important to Sherlockians. Furthermore, it is assumed that one knows about the things they own a lot of. To find the object in its obscurity and bring it into a cohesive collection simultaneously elevates the importance of the object and the collector. The Sherlockian community is fascinated by the collections curated by fellow Sherlockians—the more particular, the better.¹⁴ Perhaps this is because of how the items are perceived to reveal things about the Sherlockian pursuit. Alavi et al. (2005/2006:194) write that “culture is manifested through artifacts that are the most visible manifestations of culture.” The more specific the collection, the more renown the collector will get as Sherlockians, in their never-ceasing pursuit of knowledge, seek out information about the items.

John Bennet Shaw’s collection led to the publication of his famous List of One Hundred; his ability to gather a great collection of Sherlockian books testified to his good taste and his understanding of Sherlockian scholarship and culture. Having a great collection leads to features in Sherlockian publications, the opportunity to author pieces, and invitations to speak publicly about the collection as well as the world of Sherlock Holmes. Crew member Tim Kline, for example, is a collector of detective and Sherlock Holmes-themed board games going as far back as the nineteenth century. During the January Crew meeting, he passed around a magazine published by a Sherlockian society in Germany. Although nobody in the Crew could read the German text, his name and photographs of his games splashed across multiple pages. This isn’t the first time Kline has been interviewed and written up. Don Hobbs, with his foreign translations, has been

¹⁴ Collections range from traditional book collecting, with annotated bibliographies or issues of *The Strand*, to unique reflections of Holmes’s invasion of pop-culture. These items often end up in the Crew grab-bag as quiz prizes; one week, Mason offered as prize a bathroom spray—“No Shit Sherlock.”

able to make connections with Sherlockians across the globe (see *Belonging and Exclusion*), spreading his influence and name. When Sherlockians hear “Hobbs” they easily associate it with the expert in foreign translations. Whether or not Hobbs or Kline know the most about what they collect is a moot question—simply possessing the items implies knowledge. These are the internationally known collections, but within the group everybody knows about Nelan’s extensive library and Walter’s collection of hundreds of media portrayals of the characters. This confers them in-group status to speak about debates as they arise. When a question about a Sherlock actor or a movie adaptation comes up, for example, Pieper is always given the floor and the attentive ears of the attending Crew members.

Beyond collecting and speaking out, Sherlockians can actively create, contributing to the legend and impact of Sherlock Holmes, to demonstrate their knowledge. It is a point of pride amongst Sherlockians that the world of associated materials and scholarship is so vast. Contributing to the store of Sherlockians materials is necessary both for maintenance of the community at large and its levels of engagement, but also for the Sherlockian creator to mimic the immortality that Holmes himself possesses.

Contributions come in a variety of knowledge-exposing forms. Examples include research-filled presentations during meetings (requires an understanding of the unique style of Sherlockian scholarship), pastiche writing (demanding a comfortable familiarity with the characters and the culture of the Sherlockian community), and outside-of-genre tie-ins (spreading Holmes’s good name as well as imitating his wide ranging fields of expertise). These pursuits demand time and are yet another proof that one’s participation

in the community is serious. Crew member Marland Henderson, for example, writes a new, seven to eight page pastiche each month. Crew member Dean Clark writes and publishes widely, recently publishing a textbook using Sherlock Holmes to guide readers through major historic scientific milestones. Hutchinson has her chronology and her scrapbooks; Hobbs draws Sherlockian sketches and pairs them with quotes from the canon; Mason is working on a novel, recently started a comic strip series, and has written plays in the past; and Brown is expanding her repertoire of Sherlockian presentations.

Rusty Mason is Steve Mason's son, coerced into the Crew for his computer coding skills. The younger Mason is combining both the importance of collecting and contributing onto a newly designed Crew of the Barque Lone Star website and digital library ("About"). As (Bieber 2002:20) et al. require, the "digital library repository" gives "access to all of its community's documents: books, journal articles, conference papers, audio tapes, videos, still pictures, course syllabi, and so on." In addition to traditional materials, including all canonical stories (less the ten still waiting to enter the free domain) and freely available media portrayals, the website is filled with "artifacts of smartness" (Hatt and Otto 2007:509) produced by the Crew members themselves. Crew-written pastiches, plays, toasts, lectures and more are loaded onto the site for any web-savvy Sherlockian to stumble upon. If "smartness is culturally produced" through a community's requisite texts, as Hatt and Otto argue, then the website is an exhibit proudly displaying the "smartness" of its members. Just as the members interact with each other within in-club status hierarchies, the Crew interacts with other clubs (and

presents itself and its members) as part of the hierarchy of local Sherlockian communities.¹⁵

In the Sherlockian community, the role of ‘knowing’ takes on the dual roles of enhancing collaboration and competitiveness. Proving knowledge enhances reputation within the Crew and is a testament to the value of a member. The Crew is proud of its significant members—they raise the stock of the Crew and elevate everybody by association. The quizzes and the peacocking during discussions are less about petty competing with each other and more about positioning oneself propitiously. Once one reaches the pinnacle of the hierarchy, the payoffs are profound. Anderson and Kilduff (2009: 295) describe a study conducted by Ellis in 1994 on the political knowledge and status of men in a small American town, and found that “those higher in the social order tend to have more access to scarce resources, receive more social support.” Although referencing society at large, it is also emblematic of what Sherlockians are striving for. A high perception of status opens the doors for one to reach out to other high-status Sherlockians for support, networking, access to scholarship materials; to be fully accepted as a member, no matter the Sherlockian circle one runs upon; to last in the Sherlockian world for decades, becoming a mainstay of wisdom and a representative of Sherlock Holmes; and to spread the Sherlock Holmes name and legend far and wide, generating more followers and more scholarship.

While many Sherlockians (Hutchinson and Nelan, for example) participate in society activities for the fun and social aspects that come with talking about a much-loved topic and belonging to a community, many others strive to make their ‘belonging’ more

¹⁵See “Belonging and Exclusion” chapter.

secure by increasing perceptions of their value. The purported goal of a Sherlockian—stated in Christopher Morley’s by-laws for the Baker Street Irregulars and stated in the by-laws of the Crew, whether followed to the letter or not—is to spread and enhance knowledge of the great detective. The higher the esteem one holds in other’s eyes, the better equipped one will be to fulfill their role as a Sherlockian and further elevate their status.

THE GRAND GAME

Simply knowing about Sherlock Holmes’s character, life, and history would leave the would-be Sherlockian lacking in the final, crucial piece of knowledge—culture. Just as culture is manifested through objects, it is also manifested as “myths, heroes, language, rituals, and ceremony” (Alavi et al. 2005/2006:194). Sherlock Holmes is a hero to the Sherlockian community, his clever reasoning and fascinating cases raising his story into that of legend.

Christopher Morley, founder of the gold standard of Sherlockian groups, the BSI, subscribed to three principles¹⁶ that all Sherlockians would adhere to, the second being that “the characters in the stories are not fictitious creatures of some author’s imagination. They are real people” (Baker). The humoring of this belief is affectionately termed “The Grand Game” in Sherlockian circles. Referenced in the *Baker Street Journal*, Annotated Bibliographies by Leslie Klinger and William Baring-Gould, and countless Sherlockian articles and lectures, The Grand Game is pervasive throughout the Sherlockian community. Not every Sherlockian claims adherence, but every Sherlockian at least

¹⁶ See “History of Sherlock Holmes” chapter

knows the supposed history. Although the facts change slightly according to the whims of the Sherlockian retelling the story, they generally follow a common pattern. Leslie Klinger, in a talk presented at the 40th Anniversary Celebration of Tulsa's Sherlockian society (The Afghanistan Perceivers), delved into his version of the 'factual' history of the great detective:

“As the story goes, John Watson (not yet a doctor) was a senior at the University of Edinburgh when Arthur Conan Doyle arrived to begin his own medical studies.

Though never good friends, the two became acquaintances before Watson graduated and entered the military. Years later, returned from active duty, Watson agreed to room with a bizarre man named Sherlock Holmes, and quickly found himself pulled into the grand mysteries and over-the-top deduction techniques employed by the great consulting detective. Feeling pulled to share his eccentric friend's exploits with the world, Watson set pen to paper in 1886, writing *A Study in Scarlet*. Unfortunately, Watson had trouble finding a publisher. Nobody was willing to take a risk on an unpublished author writing about actual events—who would want to read such drivel?

“It was then that Watson remembered his old classmate, another doctor-turned-writer, Arthur Conan Doyle. Conan Doyle had had modest publishing successes, so Watson approached him to ask a favor. Arthur Conan Doyle consented and shopped *A Study in Scarlet* around, finding it a home in the Beatin's Christmas Magazine, which purchased it for 25 pounds. There was one caveat. The story had to be published under Doyle's name, because he was a known quantity. In 1888, Conan Doyle, riding off other

(fictional) literary successes, was invited to dine with Joshua Ballinger Lippincott's¹⁷ daughter, where Doyle proposed that Watson's newest novel, *The Sign of Four*, ought to be published.

“Soon, in 1891, short stories featuring Holmes's most beguiling cases began to appear in *The Strand Magazine*. Neither author Watson nor literary agent Conan Doyle could, of course, predict the attention that Holmes's cases would garner. Of course, then Sherlock Holmes died, and Watson was left with nothing to do but eulogize the consulting detective with his stories. In 1894, Holmes returned, revealing he had been in hiding for several years in a covert effort to put Moriarty's gang behind bars. To Watson's delight, the two slipped comfortably back into their old friendship as well as the detection game.

“With over 1000 important cases under his belt, Holmes decided it was time to retire in 1904, moving to a farm in the South Downs in Sussex where he kept bees. He gave Watson permission to continue writing his stories, and *The Hound of the Baskervilles* was published soon after.”

Klinger pauses in his narration. “Many have hailed this as the greatest story of modern times, but we know it to be a historic document.”

“Although Watson was back to solving puzzles and recording cases, the general public did not learn of Holmes's return until 1903. Though more stories were published after this point, only three stories were set during the time period following Holmes's retirement. Otherwise, the world had naught but silence on Sherlock Holmes's activities.

¹⁷ Lippincott was the editor and owner of *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*, where *The Sign of Four* was published in February 1890.

“Some claim the two must be dead by now, their age a limiting factor. But there is one thing they forget, the one thing Sherlockians everywhere hold onto, one telling proof—*The London Times* have yet to publish an obituary for either Sherlock or Watson. As the *The London Times* print an obituary for every real famous, deceased Brit, and as Sherlock and Watson are undeniably real Brits, there is only one logical conclusion.

“Sherlock Holmes (and Dr. John Watson) must still be alive.”

The story functions as a sort of centralizing folklore for Sherlockians, a self-aware bunch who still gleefully pounce on the fun that is indulging this myth. BSI Jody Baker (“Inspector Baynes”) traces the tradition back to Ronald Knox’s lecture on “Studies in the Literature of Sherlock Holmes.” The lecture satirized the overly pompous world of literary analysis and criticism by matching the “ponderous, exegetical style of scholastic writing” (Baker 2011). Morley loved it and he loved Sherlock Holmes. Thus, the Grand Game was born.

In *The Grand Game*, Sherlockians treat the stories as if they are historical documents. This treatment, of course, gives the lectures an added import because the consequences of any discoveries have real and historical implications. Baker (2011) writes, “As part of our mission in playing the Grand Game we search out the errors and the inconsistencies and seek to assign reasons for them.” Steve Mason’s Crew lectures on Victorian toys, the price point of those toys, whether they were widely available in the year the story is set in, whether a typical child would have played with them—all points raised during the May 2014 lecture (inspired by “The Man With The Twisted Lip”)—matter, because they help the attentively listening Crew members parse together where

the story holds up and where something has gone awry. Either Watson screwed up in his note-taking, or there must be some explanation.

Sherlockians find great joy in mocking up hypotheses to explain away these contradictions. The most famous contradictions include debates over the location of Watson's war wound and his first name (given as both John and James in the canon). This practice of "pretending to analyze matters of amusement with full severity is the best way to reproach those who approach the highest subjects with too literal a mind" (Rothman). The BSI is an outgrowth of extremely long, often boozy lunches held by Morley and his friends. Most come to Sherlockian societies searching for community and a social atmosphere in which to engage in smart, witty conversation. Staunch academics and other too-serious types were precisely the types of people who tried nerves and necessitated a need for long, boozy lunches to be held. Sherlock Holmes is of course a fictional character, but it is this 'of course' that gives the serious analysis of the short stories the air of an inside joke.

Sherlockians know their Game is just a joke, but this is, again, collective knowledge. This is what separates Sherlockians from academics. Members of the group are completely serious about not being serious in the mock scholarship they produce. That production of such scholarship and research into the canon and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's life occur, however, is less flippantly regarded.

Knowing is still very important. One can't fully join into the conversation unless they know Sherlock Holmes backwards and forwards and can follow a conversation that dips into chronology, social hierarchy, deductive practices, and Victorian society all in one go. The Grand Game is what makes Sherlockian scholarship such a peculiar body of

work. Grounded in fiction but presented as history, the scholarship can only be read and properly understood within the context of a Sherlockian community. Scholarship can reference other scholarship, building up arguments and theories, or it can completely ignore everything published before it and head down a completely different path. The resulting revelation would exist in the same space as the theory it negated. In the Sherlockian world, creating contradictions to dispel contradictions is part of the fun. Even as new theories are formed, the standard set of accepted facts must be recognized and adhered to—where Sherlock Holmes lives, for instance.

So pervasive is *The Grand Game* in Holmesian literature that works that do not indulge are often seen as incomplete in their unwillingness to adhere to the ritual of playing along that grounds and connects most Sherlockian societies.. Take Klinger's notes on the Oxford Sherlock Holmes, contingently included in his list of fifty important "Writings on The Writings": "The work contains much useful information about Arthur Conan Doyle and the literary and contemporary sources for the tales. There is also a wealth of definitional material regarding confusing or obscure terms. However, the editors decidedly do not 'play the Game,' and the work seems to ignore (with limited exception) most Sherlockian scholarship" (Klinger 2000:48). *Playing the Game* unites disparate Sherlockian communities, fans, and scholars. The Game, facetious as it is, is a commonality most Sherlockians share—it provides an automatic talking point for two stranger Sherlockians, who can commune over this shared subcultural knowledge.

At the same time that *The Grand Game* serves as a long-running commentary on academic seriousness, the lure of the detective himself cannot be left out. Sherlockians wouldn't indulge the Game for just any literary character. They truly love Sherlock

Holmes and Watson's stories—flawed as they are. As a matter of fact, it is perhaps the flaws that have enabled the growth and continued passion of the community over decades, centuries now. Published as disparate stories to appeal to both one-off and faithful readers of *The Strand Magazine*, Sherlock Holmes's canon contains 60 unique stories, each with its own contradictions and controversies, each with unexplained backstories and side characters, each with the detective as fascinating and impressive as ever, each with an “infinite diversity of storylines [fulfilling] viewers' need[s] to consume more of the text outside the limiting boundaries of the original source” (McClellan 2013:143-144). There is a reason pastiche is so popular among the Sherlockian set. Hunting down contradictions and then trying to make logical sense of them within the construct of the story and history gives the reader an opportunity to pretend to be like the detective himself, to think about the story, to immerse themselves in the story far beyond what Conan Doyle could have ever imagined.

Krasner connects the reader with the author (Watson), musing on reasons why Sherlockians circle around Sherlock Holmes and the things, people, and places associated with him:

Watson uses the stories as a way into Holmes's life, and as a way of staking his claim as Holmes's friend. His intense desire to hold and read the note packets, to increase his knowledge of Holmes's career, represents a desire to intensify that friendship. When knowledge determines friendship, gaining knowledge through reading, especially reading serial fiction, both generates and satisfies the desire to become emotionally linked to fictional friends. This perhaps helps explain the rather unique patterns of readership historically associated with these stories,

including the emergence of social organizations around them, the intense readerly affection for the characters, and the insistence on their reality. Holmes mania has always involved the desire to lay hands or feet on something—to find the Baker Street flat, to count the stairs and feel the curtains—to reify a fictional into a real Holmes just as Watson attempts to reify invisible labor into material forms (Krasner 1997:435).

Possessing knowledge, of the right kind and in the right quantities, in the Sherlockian community is a boon to one's perceived value to the group. Value is measured as the extent to which an individual can further the Sherlockian legend, spreading the appreciation for the Victorian literature as well as an irreverent culture of amused, yet dedicated, deduction. One can only contribute if they understand the text and the characters extensively, and one can only do so through intensive study. For serious Sherlockians, what you know and collect becomes your identity, who you are.

This is perhaps the point, though. Mark Gattiss, co-creator, along with Steven Moffat, of the hit BBC series *Sherlock*, sums up the fascination with Sherlock Holmes and knowledge: “He has an achievable superpower. You read it or watch it, and you think, ‘Maybe I could be as clever as Sherlock Holmes.’”

In the world Sherlock Holmes fans occupy, to know is to be known. Displaying one's knowledge serves two purposes in increasing one's status within the group as well as informing one's way of being in the group. For individuals who value the community Sherlockian societies make available to them, increasing and performing knowledge are crucial facets of membership and belonging.

Belonging and Exclusion

It started with a random Half-Price books table in the late 1980s. In an effort to push an overabundance of Sherlock Holmes-related tomes out the door, a stand had been filled with the works and writings on the works and placed near the front door. It was this stand that captured Don Hobbs's attention.

"How much is that?" Hobbs addressed an old friend of his, the owner and founder of Half-Price books. After selling his Stephen King book collection, Hobbs had \$10,000 to spend and was looking for a new literary obsession.

"That?" The 'that' in question was a table set up with selections from the world of Sherlock Holmes. A copy of *The Misadventures of Sherlock Holmes*, a world bibliography of Sherlock Holmes, and a couple of *Baker Street Journals*, among other items, ended up coming home with Hobbs for the low, low price of \$250. The bibliography in particular fascinated Hobbs, an amateur book collector. "I had no idea there was that much on Sherlock Holmes," Hobbs says.

Today, Hobbs has perhaps the world's largest collection of foreign language editions of Sherlock Holmes. He has an insurance policy on his collection and had to build extra supports into his house to hold up the second floor library. A Sherlockian celebrity in his own right, Hobbs knows fanatics across the globe and enlists them in his hunt for ever more obscure translations. He also participates on Sherlockian podcasts, Sherlockian panels, and is regularly interviewed by Sherlockian publications. And, for the last three years, Hobbs has been an invested member of the Baker Street Irregulars. However, getting to this point took him more than 20 years of hard work, determination, and frequent rejection.

Hobbs knew nothing about the Sherlockian world when he dropped the money on the Sherlock display. One of the things on the display of books was a copy of a publication called *Wheel Writings*, edited by Bob Burr. Impressed by the fascinating yet “scholarly” papers, Hobbs wrote Bob Burr. He was immediately made a member of the Sherlockian society in Peoria, the Hanson’s of John Clayton, and met Sherlockian Peter Blau, a well-connected man with his finger on the pulse of the Sherlockian world, who told Hobbs about his local, DFW Sherlockian club, The Crew of the Barque Lone Star.

Within a year, influential Sherlockian John Bennet Shaw, alerted to the new guy on the collecting scene by the Crew’s then-president, Bill Beason, invited Hobbs to come to the annual Unhappy Birthday, You Bastard, Professor Moriarty party in Moriarty, New Mexico. “It was held at the frontier saloon in downtown Moriarty, they had the potluck dinner and they had the Sherlock Holmes get-together. The first one I went to, a guy named John Farrell had written all fifty governors, all 100 senators, the President and the Vice President, asking for contributions [for his presentation],” Hobbs remembers.

At the end of the Unhappy Birthday, You Bastard, Professor Moriarty celebration, the gathered Sherlockians trekked out to the parking lot for a manure-fueled bonfire and a rousing rendition of the “Unhappy Birthday” song. “So [Farrell] had written all these letters and asked for contributions to the manure pile and [received some] really funny responses. So he was reading these at the meeting.” Hobbs laughs. “I thought, these are my type of people—they’re sick puppies! I want to be part of these people.”

Luckily for Hobbs, several Sherlockians took him under their wing and connected him with the individuals who would later be crucial to his networking efforts. John Bennet Shaw, Ron Dewall—these men guided him around the room, introducing him to

individuals from librarians to physicists and engineers who worked on the Manhattan Project. The one defining factor uniting the room of interesting individuals was an interest in Sherlock Holmes. Everybody was a dedicated Sherlockian. “That was the day,” Hobbs says about his first total immersion Sherlockian experience, “That’s the day [November 7, 1999, he remembers] I became a weird Sherlockian.”

The highest accolade any Sherlockian can earn, as a mark of their devotion to the great detective and their valued contributions to the worldwide community, is to be investitured as (invited to become) a member of the Baker Street Irregulars. Founded by Christopher Morley in 1934, the American-based club is the most famous, most prestigious, and longest-running Sherlockian society on the planet. The society follows a very strict membership limit of 300 investitured Sherlockians. Once investitured, one becomes a member for life, meaning the only open spots each year are a direct result of the six or seven member deaths.

This selection process is autocratically determined by the leader of the BSI, a position that confers power. The leader, the “Wiggins,” serves a life term and chooses his own successor. Every summer, invitations to the BSI’s annual January conference and dinner go out to the 300 investitured members. With an average of 150 members RSVPing each year, roughly 25 seats remain open to individuals invited by the president. The newly inducted are picked from this crop and surprised at the dinner with an investiture and their canonical name.

Getting an invitation to the BSI is intensely political. It requires intensive networking with all the influential Sherlockians, letters written on one’s behalf, and

measurable and very public contributions to and participation with the wider Sherlockian community.

A mentee of influential Sherlockian John Bennet Shaw, Hobbs had the man writing letters on his behalf in the early 1990s, but his death in 1992 ended Hobbs's relationship with his best-connected supporter. Fortunately for Hobbs, his early 1990s invitation to the January invite-only BSI dinner led to repeat invitations (as is common, given you don't embarrass yourself or prove unworthy in some way) through the mid-1990s. Hobbs's social and Sherlockian trajectory was on the ascent until Michael Whelan took over as president. "Then it was like 14 years that I didn't get invited back to a single BSI dinner," Hobbs says. "No one knows why. I mean, there's all this speculation as to what you did to piss him off, or you did this, or you didn't do this. But absolutely no one knows."

Confused and disappointed, but still a loyal, dedicated Sherlockian, Hobbs dutifully attended the annual meeting in New York every January anyway, showing up at the non-BSI exclusive events like the Baskerville Bash, the Gaslight Gala, and the scholarly Sherlockian lectures. Every October, when the invitations to non-BSI were sent out, Hobbs "got on pins and needles. Am I going to be invited back this year?" he'd wonder. "And it never happened. Well, as I kept working [Hobbs's job routinely sends him traveling to national and international locations] and I got to know Sherlockians in all the states and for my job when I'm working, I always end up with free time and I'd go see them. The problem is—people, Michael Whelan or Julian Wolff, or Tom Stix before him, in June they send out recommendations for who should be invited to the dinner and then we need recommendations as to who should receive their shilling (certificate of

investiture). Well, I know for a fact that I had at least 40 people writing on my behalf. Every year.”

Hobbs felt the exclusion was extremely personal. He had been collecting for decades and had amassed a collection recognized by Sherlockians around the world, went to the New York weekend religiously, was close friends with many invested BSI members, had published articles in the *Baker Street Journal*, and was even the first non-BSI member asked to participate in an oral history project, collecting stories from Texas BSI members.

Finally, in 2011, a breakthrough—Hobbs was in Pebble Beach and met a Sherlockian by the name of Michael Kean, “who probably has more power than anyone knows.” By the end of their visit, Kean offered to write to BSI President Whelan on Hobbs’s behalf. A few months later, Hobbs finally got the invitation he had been waiting on for more than a decade.

The next year, 2012, Hobbs received a second invitation and felt he was finally starting to work his way back into the prestigious end of the Sherlockian community. Having published in the *Baker Street Journal* the year before, he was attending a contributors’ cocktail party the night before the BSI invite-only dinner. Across the room from Hobbs stood BSI president Michael Whelan, the man who had, presumably, received and read all of the letters written on Hobbs’s behalf during the fourteen years he was implicitly denied membership. Though Whelan and Hobbs were not close, Whelan still waved and made a beeline across the room to strike up a conversation. Hobbs was dumbfounded by this uncharacteristically friendly move. What could it mean?

The following night at the BSI dinner, the warmer-than-normal greeting made sense. “When they called my name [for my shilling] and I got a standing ovation and people that had been going for years and years and years said it was the only time they ever remembered anybody getting a standing ovation for being invested.” And so Don Hobbs finally became a full Sherlockian—with status, rank, and power, predicated in his membership to the community.

There’s more to status than just receiving a shilling and winning the investiture into the BSI. Every BSI is given a canonical name (either a character, story title, or important element), carefully chosen to reflect the individual and their relative status, even within the elite BSI 300. Once again, the head of the BSI has full control over the investiture title, which they often use to make political statements.

As fun as they are, investitures matter, as they render visible the group flows of social and cultural capital. In a community well-versed with even the smallest intricacies of the Sherlock universe, one’s title conveys a lot about what is thought of them and where they stand within the 300. Hobbs, fortunately, is proud of his. “When Whelan started the speech, he’s going, ‘This next investiture, there has never been one. There was a G. Lestrade in the 50s, but there has never been an Inspector Lestrade... May I introduce you to the new Inspector Lestrade, Don Hobbs!’ And I’m sitting there going, I know that name. And then the crowd just burst, cheering. It was once in my life I was totally, 100 percent speechless, I just didn’t know what to say.

“I remember thinking, ‘Oh my god, it’s an unbelievable, indescribable—starting in the early 80s, I started collecting and you hear these bits and pieces of a Baker Street Irregular: ‘Oh, what’s a Baker Street Irregular?’ ‘Oh, I don’t know.’ You don’t know

anything about it. You don't know how it happens, you have to be perseverant. You know, I've been going year after year after year. You do it because you love Sherlock Holmes, you like the stories, you like the people that you're with, but if you go in and say 'I'm going to become a member of the Baker Street Irregulars' it's never going to happen. It's invitation only and only Michael Whelan knows the whole process of who gets in and who doesn't."

To keep communities alive, it is essential that the members feel as if they belong. Fulfilling this need cuts two ways—members must present themselves as worthy of acceptance while communities have to cast themselves as valuable places for people to devote their time and energy.

COMMUNITIES

Sherlockians dedicate incredible amounts of time to reading, learning, and studying about the world of Sherlock Holmes. Much of this study is self-motivated, coming from a place of genuine fascination with the source texts and Victorian era. One cannot, however, overlook the importance of status and performance in encouraging these activities, along with production. Before status can be built upon and before there is a place to showcase knowledge, one must first have a place and group to share with. Alavi et al. (2005/2006:207) see the purpose of a community to be "a knowledge sharing forum and to encourage a sense of belonging."

The ritual of expressing co-created knowledge, which is an essential component to the Sherlockian experience, is also imperative to the creation of a community because "it creates a sense of sharing experiences and perspectives, and emotional support

between people working toward similar goals or solving problems together” (Bieber et al. 2002:14). It is through communally-exchanged knowledge and the development of social connections that a Sherlock Holmes scholar or enthusiast becomes an actual Sherlockian (Schröder 2009:80). Belonging, and feeling like one belongs to the group, are generally seen as benefits to being a member of the Sherlockian world. At the same time, notions of belonging are largely constructed on ideas of who doesn’t belong. According to Kitchin (1999:47), communities “try to maintain social hierarchies and maintain their position within such hierarchies by excluding Others.” Sherlockians will make room for anybody interested in the great detective, but the height within the organization that a member can reach—the degree to which they belong—is capped by how able they are to fit the “good Sherlockian” mold.

Sherlockian societies can be supportive, uplifting social groups—if one does the work deemed necessary to prove one’s knowledge and dedication are sufficient. They can also be sources of stress, as unsatisfied members strive to improve their status by volunteering for special projects or taking on a special project. Who is in and who is out are constantly negotiated questions. Members must show their value to the group, just as the group must show its value to members.

CHARACTERS

Although the Dallas-Fort Worth metropolis is the fourth largest in the country, only fifteen to twenty individuals filter into the back room of La Madeleine on the first Sunday of each month. Perhaps fifteen are regulars, attending every single week, with a handful of rotating, albeit familiar, faces filling out the rest of the attendance sheet each

month. Third Mate Steve Mason doesn't seem to mind too much, though, repeatedly expressing through the weeks and in his January "State of the Society" presentation that his focus is not on growing the chapter, but growing the Crew's community involvement—which, of course, grows the Crew's visibility. Although Mason expresses an acceptance of the small number of members, he still routinely encourages Crew members to spread the word to their coworkers and friends, pass out the business cards advertising the Crew, and speak up at Sherlockian-themed plays and movies members attend.

As it is, the Crew is comprised of its fifteen or so steadily attending members. The mailing list has roughly 80 individuals. The majority of the Crew are older men, generally older than 50 and either retired or nearing retirement. Women (including myself) typically make up about a third of the meeting members, and are also generally older than their mid-40s. Young people (35 and under) constitute perhaps three attendees each month (including myself).

The Crew's demographics mirror the makeup of the Sherlockian community found at the national level, as evidenced by BSI member demographics. Collectively, the Sherlockian community is diffuse, found all over the world, and passionate, with most Sherlockians indulging their habit until death or illness intervenes. Mason's own experiences with the Crew over the better part of a decade reinforce this sentiment: "This, to me it's kind of like a lifetime thing, you know. I mean, obviously as people get too old to come to the meetings, they'll drop off and I know one of these days I'll probably get that same way. But, pretty much the same group of people. We've added a few people obviously, like yourself and Brenda. But the core group have been together anywhere

from ten to twenty years now. That's kind of neat, to form a friendship around a fictional character and know that you may have these friends for life, basically. Only in extraordinarily large cities, such as New York City or London, or at special conventions and gatherings will a significant number of Sherlockians ever gather together. The ability to attend one of these gatherings enhances feelings of belonging within the community, because they focus on spreading knowledge and plugging Sherlockians into a network of avid fans. For those unable to attend the gatherings or conventions, the meetings become "inaccessible environments" that are another way to differentiate member rankings (Kitchin 1999:49).

People find the Sherlockian community through a variety of means—many read the books as children and never lose their sense of awe over the skillful reasoning employed by the great detective. As adults, others discovered a love for the Victorian era or a penchant for mystery novels and followed them back to one of the genre originators. With the internet, it is only a matter of time before idle Googlers and serious researchers alike come across a scion society's website, read about them in a newspaper, hear about them at a local Sherlock-themed play, or meet a recruiting-minded member. Typically, though, membership spikes when a popular adaptation hits the public market. Klinger (interview with author, September 20, 2014) described these spikes as "waves of interest in Sherlock Holmes," grounded in a few iconic Holmes portrayals—William Gillette contemporary to Doyle's writing of the stories, Arthur Wontener in the 1930s, Basil Rathbone in the 1950s and 1960s, and, most recently, Benedict Cumberbatch.

Before the current wave, ignited by Guy Richie's Sherlock films and peaking with the release of the critically acclaimed BBC show *Sherlock*, the last significant popular

contributions to the Sherlock world came with Nicholas Meyer's *The Seven Per-Cent Solution*, in the late 1970s. This helps explain the older-skewing demographics. The last huge surge in Holmes' popularity was more than 40 years ago. With the new iterations and opportunities for constant engagement offered through Tumblr and Twitter, a younger generation is beginning to show more interest in the great detective. Many viewers who began watching the show with little real knowledge of Sherlock Holmes have taken reading the canon and looking for non-digital ways to immerse themselves deeper in the subject.

Stu Nelan, Crew member for about two decades, has been attending the BSI weekend in New York City for several years and has noticed a definite uptick in the number of young people showing up. "The BSI weekend—back eight or five years ago when I started going it was mainly older guys, older women involved with Sherlock Holmes. Now there is a very large community of young women, primarily, involved with Sherlock Holmes. I think due to the Sherlock Holmes series, the Benedict Cumberbatch [from BBC's *Sherlock*], exactly, exactly...they're a very much more involved with Sherlock Holmes, they go to the meetings and dress up." That the majority of the newly interested are women is another shift for the Sherlockian community.

The most famous Sherlockians have all been white men (e.g., Peter Blau, Leslie Klinger, Jon Lellenberg, Christopher Morley, and Vincent Starrett) have all been adult white men. For a while, this was seen as a given by group members, being that Sherlock Holmes was a white man (Nelan interview). Frustrated, Sherlockian women began to throw a Gaslight Gala on the same night as the annual BSI dinner, opening the event to anybody (unlike the exclusionary practices of the BSI). In 1989, the BSI finally began to

allow women into their ranks. The Gala remains one of the most popular events at the annual weekend. A few scion societies today still maintain male-only membership (Copper Beeches, Speckled Band), but are often matched by female-only societies (The Copper Bitches; The Friends of Irene Adler) (Vande Water). In addition to membership in the BSI, women are gaining prominence and visibility in the Sherlock Holmes community with podcasts like the Baker Street Babes. These demographic shifts are not without complications, as even the most well-meaning, understanding Sherlockians struggle with the changes. Stu Nelan pondered what the appeal of Sherlock Holmes was for women—how did they identify with a male main character? Don Hobbs glibly commented on the misfortune of Sherlock Holmes being boiled down to a sex object for screaming teenage girls (Hobbs’s sentiments have been expressed by several other members of the Crew over the months of observation, men and women alike). Neither Brown nor Hutchinson, the two women I interviewed, indicated frustration at this gender disparity. Both did, however, comment on their ability to identify with and appreciate the Sherlock Holmes character—clearly, their gender did not get in the way.

Another salient feature of the Sherlockian community is the socioeconomic status and education level held by most members. While neither factor necessarily causes the other, there is a positive relationship between the two. “Educated.” Steve Mason immediately hits on this point as he answers my query about who Sherlockians are. “Because, whether you like it—you actually have to think about [the stories]... You don’t find a lot of people who haven’t finished high school studying Sherlock Holmes.” All of the Crew members (to my knowledge) are college graduates. Many have gone on to pursue graduate and even doctorate degrees. With so much of ‘being’ a Sherlockian

bound up in studying and learning, it makes logical sense that members would have first learned those skills in an educational environment. More than just that, members tend to be successful professionals. With the exception of Hutchinson (she has a college diploma but worked as a stay-at-home mother for three decades), all members are either retired from prominent fields, have careers, or are pursuing higher education (myself and a few members—like Jim Webb—who are working on doctorate and master’s degrees).

Although nobody in the club is hurting financially, they do inhabit different tiers of the socioeconomic scale. Class status was crudely deduced after hearing members discuss their careers, their vacations, and visiting their homes. For members who are middle-class (if there are impoverished or lower middle-class Sherlockians in the DFW area, they do not attend the monthly meetings), purchasing a café lunch once a month and attending the occasional local play do not put undue strain on their finances, allowing them to fully participate along with the rest of the members. For larger events—the annual BSI weekend in New York each January, for example—the expense limits who is able to attend. Attending the annual meeting means paying for airfare, hotel accommodations, transportation, meals at pre-selected locations, books, and entry into events like the Ash Dinner or the Gaslight Gala (Mason). Members with an excess of disposable income have a greater ability to attend and fully participate in a greater number and wider range of events in a variety of locations. By virtue of simple proximity, they are then better able to integrate and position themselves as truly ‘belonging.’ Kitchin (1999:48) writes that “one way to ensure people know their place is through the creation of cultural norms and identifiable social spaces.” It is the conventions and meetings where Sherlockians gather that become the important social

spaces where community norms are established and practiced. Being able to attend, then, by virtue of economic well-being, impacts one's ability to behave as though they belong. It is also not insignificant to note that having money enables the type of collecting that confers status.¹⁸

MEMBERSHIP

“And now I have a special announcement,” Steve Mason says. We're in the middle of the January meeting, running through need-to-know information during the post-lecture wrap-up period. We've just finished a feel-good reminiscence about the movie night held at Walter's house in December—designed to make every non-attendee feel as though they were missing some inside joke. Now Mason stands up and delivers a speech about what it takes to be a deck hand¹⁹—the requirements and responsibilities of the title.

“So I am proud to present this investiture to Marland Henderson.” The older gentleman beside me cracks a grin and waves away the claps echoing throughout the room on his behalf. I just met Marland this month. During the designated Meet and Greet before the toast kicked us off, he had shared his love of pastiche writing with me. He writes a new one every month and is often working on multi-part series. When he found out I was a writing major, he grew earnest. “Please take a look at my stories, please give me honest feedback, I'm always looking for more feedback. Cindy Brown reads my stories and she gives me great feedback, great comments.” Cindy, seated at the long table parallel to us, turns her head and nods, verifying her involvement with Marland's writing.

¹⁸ See “Knowledge” chapter.

¹⁹ See “Introduction.”

The same exuberance on Marland's face when talking about his writing comes over his face as he stands to accept the certificate from Mason. "Thank you, thank you! This really means a lot." Perhaps Marland will file the certificate away for safekeeping, perhaps he will toss it on a dining room table and forget about it, or perhaps he will frame it and hang it (as Brenda Hutchinson did) where he stores the rest of his Sherlock Holmes memorabilia. Whatever he does, this is a significant moment for him, his participation with the Crew, and his final and full stamp of belonging within the local scion society.

Being investitured (made a deck mate) signals a recognition and respect of one's contributions to the society and an acceptance of the individual into the inner circle (Romano 2000:106-107). These are the Crew members who have been attending the longest, who know Sherlock the best, who are seen as authorities and crucial elements to the functioning of the Crew. While being a deck hand doesn't confer any official status, the endorsement to membership (regular members are simply 'in,' without any formal process), means "you have been taken in, accepted into the group" (Romano 2000:108). If membership fosters a "sense of belonging," then proof of membership, in front of fellow members, is a reminder to the newly initiated as well as the old of their commitment to the group and each other.

For Brenda Hutchinson, who treasures her investiture, becoming a deck hand marked a significant shift in how she perceived her treatment from others in the Crew. According to Hutchinson, her first months were hard. "I will say, they were cautious at first. For anybody new coming in—they don't pass around phone numbers or addresses...so it was a while before people warmed up. But, once that little bump is over,

you're accepted, no matter what level of knowledge you have about it. It just seems like you're well accepted, which is a really nice feeling.”

Hutchison rejoined the Crew following major life changes, looking to rebuild a social network and find purpose to get her out of bed each morning. Revisiting the Sherlock materials she had kept from her high school and college years, she stumbled upon an early attempt at a chronology and saw an opportunity to pour her energy into something constructive for the Crew community.

“My first year, when I came back, I had worked on [An Archive of Cases and Events Pertinent to the Perpetual Lifetimes of Mr. Sherlock Holmes and Dr. John H. Watson: Including a Plethora of Historical and Sherlockian Notations For Pleasure and Edification] for a while.” Hutchison says. “It was part chronology, and also inserting history into it. I gave that out to everybody. I think that’s interesting, when you look at Sherlock Holmes and compare it to real things that were going on. So that’s a little bit of a side passion of mine.”

Brenda was so excited about her Sherlockian-era historical findings that she decided to share her work with other Crew members—“they need to know about the balloons and the submarines and all that stuff.” At the time, Brenda was still considered a newcomer, with just one year of attendance under her belt, compared to many of the members’ ten or more years of monthly lunches.

“I probably ruffled a few feathers because I wasn’t actually a Crew deck hand at that time,” Brenda says. She may not have been a Crew deck hand at the time, but the chronology, distributed September 2013 after a year of work, as well as a few

presentations and outside-the-meeting participation, contributed to proving her dedication to the Crew and to the world of Sherlock.

Hutchison became a deck hand (a step up from a regular member) of the Crew of the Barque Lone Star on February 4, 2014, after nearly two years of meetings and involvement with the Crew. She has since continued to participate in the Crew by attending meetings and volunteering for administrative tasks and society projects—things she did even before she received her investiture.

An investiture does not necessarily grant the deck mate with specialized access or privileges—regular Crew members can volunteer for the same activities as deck mates and all members of the Crew are invited to all official group events. Still, the implied status and abilities of an investiture does confer significance in terms of how status, hierarchy, and perceptions of expertise play into belonging and the desire to join communities in the first place (Alavi et al. 2005/2006).

Anybody can become a Crew member and all are welcome to. Based on ethnographic observations of Crew activities and behaviors, however, speaking up, giving presentations, distributing self-made historical chronologies, are activities generally performed by deck hands. While anybody can make a presentation, it is rare for a non-deck hand to volunteer unless they are gunning for an improvement in status or have highly specialized knowledge. This could be chalked down to an intimidation factor (*Do I know enough? Older members probably know better than I.*) as well as a subconscious internalization of the enacted society hierarchy. In my time attending Crew meetings, non-deck hands have been involved in toasts (informal and brief speaking opportunities), a young(er) couple gave a Victorian fencing presentation (highly

specialized knowledge that does not directly imply Sherlockian mastery), and Marland Henderson has distributed his pastiches (and subsequently enjoyed an increase in status to the designation of deck hand).

This is not to say that presentations are not given simply for the joy of sharing knowledge, pastiches aren't written for the joy of writing, and toasts aren't made in celebration of fellowship. There does seem to be a status distinction enacted between members of the Crew and designated deck hand members of the Crew. It could be, of course, that deck hands are simply those members who have attended the longest and shown their dedication and knowledge and so are logically the most vocal and involved members within the society. They hold the rank they hold because they have earned it and participate in more discussions because they have invested more time in Sherlock Holmes. Sykes (1951) describes this chicken and egg relationship—community knowledge comes both as a by-product of striving for belonging and position but also provides the means by which such goals can be achieved.

Above the rank of deck hands are the officers. Officer names are printed in the monthly agenda alongside their titles—Steve Mason, Third Mate; Walter Pieper, Helmsman; Cindy Brown and Pat Mason, Secretary; Jim Webb and Don Hobbs, Spiritual Advisors. If, as Simmel (1950) proposed, “society is an event, something that individuals do,” then these are the individuals who do the most and do it best. Printing these names confers a special recognition to the positioned members. New attendees automatically associate these names with people who know Sherlock Holmes and are clued in to the ways of the Crew. Furthermore, these positions come with duties and expectations—their holders must contribute concrete, established behaviors to the maintenance of the Crew.

The added responsibility increases identification with the Crew and differentially distributes purpose and power.

Save for the permanent designations for Spiritual Advisors Don Hobbs and Jim Webb, the positions are voted on every two years, with no term limits. To keep officer position beyond a single term and to maintain the closer relationships and greater responsibilities typically enjoyed with the deck hand position, then, members cannot slack off after their initiation and expect to enjoy the same level of belonging. Rather belonging is something members have “to keep achieving through an active process” (May 2011:372). Members must continue attending the monthly meetings, continue reading and studying the canon, continue volunteering to help the Crew and showing up to Crew social functions.

If navigating the status differentials and implicit hierarchies of the Crew requires work and a thorough understanding of what it takes to perform as a ‘good Sherlockian,’ then the BSI is a minefield. Whereas the Crew is open to anybody interested in Sherlock Holmes, no matter what their level of knowledge is, and only self-selects for higher ranks, the BSI is intentionally exclusive.

With a hard limit of 300 members, the BSI president has full control and final say over who receives an investiture and even who is invited to simply dine with the members. To receive an investiture is to play a very political game, spending years demonstrating knowledge, networking with the ‘right’ Sherlockians, and cultivating a resume testifying to the value one would bring as a member of the BSI. Don Hobbs’s twenty-year saga is testament enough to this.

The BSI allows limited participation to non-investitured members. *The Baker Street Journal* is published once a quarter (along with a bonus Christmas Annual), accessible to anybody with 40 dollars to spare. Published since 1946, the journal features both “serious scholarship and articles that ‘play the game’” and routinely publishes work produced by BSI investitured members (expected, as BSI are supposed to be the most prolific, most dedicated Sherlockians in the world). Non-investitured members can also attend the annual BSI weekend in New York City. Only the BSI dinner on Thursday nights is reserved for BSI members only, leaving plenty of opportunities for Sherlockians of any knowledge and status-level to attend, as both Stu Nelan and Steve Mason have done. Of course, these events are not the same as being an actual BSI—the tip of the top of the ladder of most consequence in the Sherlockian world. “[I]t is a very closed society—and by that I mean, like the dinner, you can’t get to that unless you were specifically invited, you cannot become a member unless you’re specifically invited—that there are literally thousands and thousands of people that will never get to experience that,” Mason says. “Just me personally, I feel bad for those people.” There is a lot of pressure built into the BSI designation. Sherlockians excluded from the inner fold often feel frustration and are forced to question the value they bring to the community. Sherlockian members of the BSI, on the other hand, have their value and rank reinforced through their VIP access.

The exclusiveness of the BSI likely adds to the prestige of the society. Within the world surrounding Sherlockians, there is a perceived gradation of influence—the BSI

occupies the top position; select societies like the Sherlock Holmes Society of London²⁰ and The Speckled Band of Boston round out the next tier stuffed with BSI members, respected publications, and Sherlockian scholars; and smaller, scion societies where much of the activity occurs in the local sphere and stays in the local sphere. The BSI serves as the central organizing body for Sherlockia. Local and professional-affiliate societies operate autonomously as “scion” chapters of the BSI. These “perceived differences between groups are not essentialist but are socially constructed in order to maintain power relations between social hierarchies” (Kitchin 1999:50). People often want what they can’t have, and this maxim holds here—namely, Sherlockians want validation for their years of research and demonstrated dedication to the great detective with an investiture from the BSI. An investiture grants automatic belonging and status and entry to the ultimate Sherlockian VIP club (Jaramillo et al. 2001:335).

While scion societies such as the Crew function as micro-democracies, the leader of the BSI distributes power in accordance from an autocratic position—the leader gets it all and even chooses his successor. Without free elections, the direction of the society is tightly controlled and oft-speculated about. Membership—designations of who deserves to belong—are down to the whims of a man (thus far, all presidents have been men) whom you need to do everything in your power to impress, in spite of his personal attitude toward grudges and earned recognitions. Hobbs shared an anecdote about Edgar Smith, one-time head of the BSI. “If you’re invested as Thor Bridge and somehow you piss [Smith] off and so you’re at the dinner and you’re sitting as far away from the

²⁰ The Sherlock Society of London is respected around the world. However, their membership is open to all interested Sherlockians and they lack the distinction of being the first Sherlockian society, formed in 1951 compared to the Baker Street Irregulars’ start in 1934 (BSI archival history.)

podium as you can [yet another indication of rank] and the new investiture is Thor Bridge, that's how you can tell that you did something to piss Smith off or make him mad.”

Even though the president holds all the power, there are still ways for BSI members to differentiate themselves. Much like with the Crew, demonstrating knowledge and value directly correlate to perceptions of rank within the society.²¹ The president's knowledge of the 300's talents and research interests and his like or dislike for any of them can make or break their membership in the group. Take Don Hobbs's story—he was ignored for many years, until a letter from a member the president respected once again garnered him a spot on the invite list. Now a member of the BSI, Hobbs makes sure to keep actively involved, actively maintaining his right to belong (May 2011:372). His work editing the Spanish edition of the International series published by the BSI came as a direct request from the president. This was not predicated on Hobbs's ability to speak Spanish (he can't) or his editing and publishing experience (other than Sherlockian pieces, he has none). Rather, the request came as a recognition of Hobbs's interest in international Sherlockian affairs and a nod to the contributions he can make to the collective group. Securing a reputation as an expert, over acquiring actual hard skills, had the “pragmatic aim [to serve] as an avenue to desirable projects” (Alavi et al. 2005/2006:209). Once the collection of essays was translated (work outsourced to BSI-paid translators), Hobbs brought his work back the Crew. Several volunteers jumped at the chance to help him with the nitty-gritty of editing and the chance to affiliate with the BSI—volunteer names would go in the acknowledgements section of the BSI-sponsored

²¹ See “Knowledge” chapter.

publication. Not only were the volunteers setting themselves up for a little boost in public knowledge perceptions, but they were also connecting themselves with the BSI and the larger Sherlockian mission (Alavi et al. 2005/2006).

The subtleties and reality of the Sherlockian world cannot be accurately expressed until individual members and societies are described in context of one another. A Society requires individuals to grant it meaning and existence, while individuals who seek out society membership are looking for purpose and communion (May 2011:366,368). To understand the symbiotic relationship between members and societies “it is necessary to give up thinking in terms of single, isolated substances and to start thinking in terms of relationships and functions” (Elias 2001:19). Simmel proposes that relationships and “interactions between individuals” make social formations possible and dictate the way members navigate their community involvement (May 2011:366). In other words, belonging is intensely political.

POLITICS

Like most organizations of substantial size and age, the Crew has a somewhat storied history. The website (www.dfw-sherlock.org/) tells the history thus: “The Crew of the Barque Lone Star is a proud scion society of the Baker Street Irregulars. It was originally founded in 1972, and has had several incarnations over the decades, even losing its scion status for a time before regaining it in 1996, thanks to Tom Stix. Keeping with the tradition of being irregular, the Barque has gone into radio silence a couple of times, only to resurface again to focus on the study of Sherlock Holmes, his world, and the world of those who also love him, his faithful chronicler, and Victorian England.”

These periods of “radio silence” were not incidental. In the mid-to-late 1990s, a few members began to grow unhappy with the monthly society meetings under the direction of Third Mate Bill Beason. “He was borderline genius, but he had a way of pissing people off,” Hobbs (one of the only current Crew members who was there) says. “The Crew would be active for years and then it would kind of peter out and it wouldn’t do anything and then it would get active again.” In 1997, Don Hobbs, Jim Webb, and one other member decided they wanted something “that was fun and [they] could get together and talk Sherlock Holmes and not have to put up with Bill Beason’s BS.” Retired or consultants, the three men could afford to take luxurious, boozy Friday lunches to indulge their hobby. “So that’s why we became known as the Diogenes club. We didn’t tell anyone or speak about our secret society and we met for a couple or three years there.” When Beason “pissed everyone off” enough that the Crew fell into a dry spell, the Diogenes quietly let it be known that they existed, opening ranks for displaced Crew members to join them. For nearly a decade, the Diogenes club served as a Sherlockian haven for the DFW community. Jim Webb, original founder of the group, was president.

Until the group grew unhappy once again. Webb was “working on his masters and working on his doctorate, so didn’t want to put a whole lot of work into the things [done] as the Diogenes Club.” Reaching out to the community, moving the society’s social events beyond the once monthly meetings to include Sherlockian plays, movies, and regular dinner nights, encouraging scholarship through presentations and lectures—important elements of membership to Crew members today—were not Webb’s docket.

When Webb was approached about his outside commitments and the Crew’s desire for new leadership, he balked. “It got to the point where we just didn’t want to be

kind of rebelling again. We said we want more out of this, there's got to be more to this, but Jim didn't want to relinquish his hold on the Diogenes Club," Hobbs says. "We'd asked him to let Steve [Mason] become the leader of the Diogenes and that's when we took sort of drastic steps to change and the rest is history." Webb didn't want to let go of the power he had as the helmsman of the Diogenes, he didn't want to allow anybody but himself to use the name and website he had created (in fact, the website is still up, existing as one of the many static dust bunny sites littering the World Wide Web), nor did he want to be a part of a Sherlockian club where he wasn't a leader. So Steve Mason and Don Hobbs reignited the Crew of the Barque Lone Star. The same members (save for one) and the same purpose, but with new leadership and a new mission. Mason made it clear from the outset that his goal was to shift the club from passivity to active engagement with the canon and with the wider world of Sherlock Holmes—feats my informants tell me he has succeeded in over the past two years.

"When we rewrote the bylaws," Mason says, "I put in there at the end that the mission of this society or the meetings was, to me, if people come to the meetings and they have fun and they enjoy themselves and, secondly, if they walk out of the meeting knowing something they didn't know when they walked in, then I'm accomplishing my goal."

Everybody in the Crew agrees that the society is better off now than it was a few years ago as the Diogenes Club or even decades ago as the original Crew. Not everybody agrees (or is equally forthcoming) with the methods used to get to the State of the Society today. For Hobbs, the turnovers are fine so long as they serve the society. "Beason moved away and then when we opened up the Diogenes Club for everyone, he never showed up

for the meetings,” Hobbs chuckles. “He doesn’t drive so he’s just a curmudgeon. We’re mean. It was a bloodless coup we had.”

Nelan, another long-time member, sees the reinventions of the club as the expected outcomes ascribed to power struggles. “You know, there’s a lot of personal, I think, a lot of personal ego involved in the Sherlockian societies. The leader feels a special aura, you know, and Jim Webb was certainly that way and Bill Beason was certainly that way. You know, the leader of the pack, sort of. He didn’t want anybody else leading it. That’s sort of one of the shortcomings of [Sherlockian societies], maybe, is that a lot of it is based on one individual.”

The dual coups are not part of the history the crew advertises. They like to present a united front of fun and acceptance, where everybody belongs and is welcome to the Sherlockian brood. Had I not known to ask (from stumbling upon the still-alive webpage for the Diogenes Club) I very likely would never have known about the existence of the Diogenes Crew (except, perhaps, from Don Hobbs himself). When queried, Nelan grimaced and chose his words carefully. Hutchinson and Brown were either oblivious or reticent. Mason sighed, not thrilled with the line of questioning. When he did speak about the exchange of power, it was polite and cautious.

Only Hobbs was happy to oblige to freely talk to me about the various schisms and mergers and restarts and mutinies. Don’s willingness to chat comes from, one, his naturally chatty personality, but two, his identity not being tied to the Crew. Hobbs is the only crew member I spoke with who carries membership in the BSI—a point of pride for both him and the society. This membership is larger, more prestigious, and trumps his membership with the Crew, even though he attends Crew meetings more regularly (once

a month, as opposed to once a year). Because Hobbs's identity is less associated with the Crew, there is less at stake when the Crew is painted in a bad light. At the same time, Hobbs has played a key role in both schisms—talking to me about them was yet another way to prove the depth of his knowledge and the length of time he has put into this hobby as well as the power he wields within the group.

Hobbs's experience with the BSI story is evidence enough of the politics embedded in every level of Sherlockia. One never escapes scrutiny or the pressure to prove oneself as a worthy and valuable member of the group to which one most closely identifies. Access to "hierarchical positions might be the critical factor in the process of status attainment" (Lin 1999:470). The more a Sherlockian associates with higher status members, the more their own status will improve, as they are led to the best resources and plugged in to the best networks. Reputation improves as social contacts improve. With greater reputation, members have greater sway in influencing decisions and the direction of the society (Gamson 1966:123; Gould 1989:532).

For all the political games of trying to position oneself as most prominent, respected, and influential within the community (Smith 1965:39), the society, at its core, is interested in inclusion. Jim Webb, as an example, attended the February meeting of the Crew, his first meeting since the Diogenes Club dissolved. Webb had earned his PhD in December, had more free time on his hands, and had enough time between the dissolution and the present to put pride aside and attend. The world of Sherlockians, though deep and wide, is not yet large enough for Sherlockians to easily plug into communities (Victoria Gill). The Crew is the only Sherlockian community in the DFW area, with its closest peer groups found in Tulsa, Oklahoma and Austin, Texas. While there was a group that met in

Fort Worth for a period of time over a decade ago, the difficulty in gathering a large enough group of dedicated enough members to fill the ranks eventually led to its demise. Maintaining a sub-cultural society over the course of a few decades requires political scaffolding, as with any group.

Politics divides people into ‘we’ and ‘they.’ A crucial component of political action is strengthening the ‘we’ and defining the ‘us’ so members have a clearer sense of who they are and who they aren’t (Tuan 2002:310; Warriner 2007:345). The Sherlockian world, layered and diffuse as it is, is not a large one. While there are differences amongst members and groups, these are unimportant relative to the larger question of whether or not someone identifies as a Sherlockian. When it comes down to it, the “disparate groups [are united] by a love of the stories of John H. Watson and a fascination with the figure and methods of Mr. Sherlock Holmes, formally of Baker Street; an emotion they share with the BSI itself” (Vande Water). Individuals all over the world could love Sherlock Holmes, but without the existence of societies through which to connect and engage with fellow scholars and readers, there would be no community, no belonging, and greatly diminished value in the hobby. Belonging connects individual Sherlockians to the social societies that empower them. “Our sense of self is constructed in a relational process in our interactions with other people as well as in relation to more abstract notions of collectively held social norms, values, and customs” (May 2011:368). Belonging, then, can be boiled down to aligning oneself with fellow Sherlockians; “the most important social good achieved is a sense of belonging itself, which is created and revived through genuine dialogue out of respect and recognition” (Romano 2000:113).

When Jim Webb walked into the back room of La Madeleine in early February, the group acted no different than they would with any other member. His name was shouted and a few jokes were made at his expense (“Glad you could *finally* make it”), but then he sat down at the table and was just another Crew member excited to learn a little more about Sherlock Holmes amongst friends.

RELATIONSHIPS

Famed Sherlockian John Bennett Shaw once said that all one needs for a scion society are two Sherlockians, a copy of the Canon, and a bottle. In a pinch, he says, you do away with one of the Sherlockians (IHOSE; Vande Water).

This quote remains popular in the Sherlockian community because it is funny, memorable, and references alcohol (The overarching culture of Sherlockia loves to drink.) The reality is that the Sherlockian universe “begs to be lived in and shared, and it is, the world over, in the form of Sherlockian societies” (IHOSE). While the political dynamics and always simmering concern with relative rank and status heavily influence on the way group members interact, the Sherlockian world is still welcoming. “Community is considered good because its members cooperate; they help one another” (Tuan 2002:307). In Sherlockian communities in general and the Crew specifically, fulfilling the Sherlockian mission and furthering the great detective’s good name requires a willingness to volunteer, collaborate, and generally help one’s fellow Sherlockian. These helpful relationships, made possible by nearness, but predicated on “common values and interests,” eventually grow into genuine friendships (Back et al. 2008:439; Blieszner and Adams 1992; Thomas 1987:218).

In the State of the Society speech Mason gave at the January 2015 meeting, he made it clear that the goal of the Crew was not to grow in size. It had maintained 15 to 25 steady members, with dozens more on the mailing list. Mason was pleased with this. What he did want, however, was for the group to continue their outreach efforts to find other Sherlockians, or potential Sherlockians, in the area who might not yet know of the group.

Mason wanted the younger members of the group (myself [21] and two others around 30 years old) to brainstorm methods of outreach. He encouraged the group to speak up at plays and movies with a Sherlockian bent. He detailed his vision for the group going to nursing homes with Sherlock-themed radio plays to act out. Essentially, Mason wanted to make sure the society was accessible to anybody who wanted to attend. It may take a lifetime of work to enter the upper echelons of the national and international Sherlockian community, but the local scion societies are accessible to virtually anybody with an interest (IHOSE).

While it may take some time to grow a friendship, scion societies allow for person-to-person relationships in codependent groups that members have chosen to belong to (Thomas 1987:218; Tuan 2002). By choosing to become a member of a group, the friendships that develop over time can be viewed as intentional choices as well (Bleiszner and Adams 1992). Only where members have equally intimate and frequent access to high-status Sherlockians outside of the Crew do they not readily identify fellow members as friends.

“Do I consider these people my friends? Hmm.” Don Hobbs wrestles with the question. He knows his answer, but he’s trying to arrange his words. We’re about

halfway through a nearly two-hour interview, and this is the first question that has slowed him down. Hobbs hesitates, repeats my question, chews on his thoughts.

“Yeah. Some of them, I mean some of them are friends. I mean, like Don Casey, I’ve known Don forever, we go way back, we go pub crawling. And Steve Mason. I mean, my, I mean, I don’t, that’s a good question. Friends as in—friends, that’s a broad stroke of the brush calling someone your friend. As a member of the Baker Street Irregulars, it is my responsibility, part of my responsibility of being a BSI is to mentor and promote Sherlock Holmes in any way I can. So I have this library and anybody in the club or anyone who wants to use it for research purposes or to do anything, I’m glad to help. I travel so much, it’s hard for me to make close new friends.”

It’s a political answer, a calculated roundabout.

Hobbs knows it. “How’s that for an evasive answer?” He laughs at the logical inconsistencies. A collector of foreign editions of Sherlock Holmes books, Hobbs has been peppering our conversation with references to Sherlockians he knows in Japan, Germany, Scotland, Denmark, Mexico, and more. He never hesitates to call these Sherlockians friends, despite getting to see them only once or twice or thrice, ever. To be a friend of the great Don Hobbs, it seems, you have to be the right kind of Sherlockian—a Sherlockian of equal temperament, equal status, or possess the ability to do him favors.

The other Crew members on my interview slate, whose involvement with Sherlock Holmes is largely contained to the Dallas meeting, are less discriminating about whom they call ‘friend.’ Since both of his kids graduated high school, the Crew is Steve Mason’s primary social sphere outside of work and his family. “To me, a friend is somebody that you get together with because you have common interests So these are

my Sherlockian friends that I like to get together and talk about Sherlockian stuff and do Sherlockian things together.” Mason’s enthusiasm for Sherlock Holmes has even led him to merge social circles, recruiting work colleague Cindy Brown seven years ago. For Brown, the Crew gives her an opportunity to stay sharp and stay active. With a husband living and working in another state and retirement on the horizon, the friendships she makes with the Crew are growing increasingly important. “Marland and I email a lot. . . . He sends me his pastiches to edit, so that’s kind of fun. Pam and I email some. I’m becoming pretty good friends with some of these people.” Brenda Hutchinson’s involvement is also a lifeline of social engagement—divorced and with adult children, the Crew gives Hutchinson friends and purpose. “Being a single woman, I don’t feel comfortable running off to a play or activity by myself. This is my chance to meet with other people and to have adult conversation, rather than talking baby talk to my dog. It gives me purpose because of the activities I’m involved with.” For Stu Nelan, the Crew is a comfortable, steady aspect of his life. None of his family members share the same enthusiasm he has for Sherlock Holmes, so the relationships he has developed over the years with other Sherlockians are his opportunity to indulge a passion without risk of being mocked or derided. “It’s a way to meet people interested in Sherlock Holmes that you wouldn’t normally meet. I’ve met a lot of people there that are just very interesting people.”

In addition to the monthly meetings, there are regular movie nights hosted by a member of the Crew, outings to plays and movies, museum visits and arrangements to attend local and far-away conventions, such as the one in Tulsa. When a member of the Crew falls ill, an exhortation is made to the group to send Sherlockian-themed cards. It is

a gesture of well-wishes but also a reminder to the receiver of the community he belongs to. As political as the inner-rankings are, once accepted to the group and in, there is also a tremendous amount of support and encouragement, especially amongst those members whose involvement will likely never extend beyond the local realm.

Friendships are important for more than just social purposes. Relationships also contribute to what makes a Crew member a valuable Crew member, since they facilitate collaboration between members. Collaboration leads to contribution which increases the social stock of the collaborators. In the Crew, collaboration occurs on actual writing projects—Don Hobbs asking for editing help from the group for the Spanish essays and Marland Henderson asking for peer reviewers for his pastiches. For the coming of the International Exhibit of Sherlock Holmes, the Perot Museum in Dallas asked the Crew to, essentially, host the evening. The Crew needed to come up with interactive ways to engage a few thousand people with a murder mystery. Although their involvement with the event did not come to pass, the Crew dedicated large chunks of each month's meeting to brainstorming story ideas, logistics, and interactive activities. Collaboration was made possible because of genuine affection for each other, but benefited each involved member by giving them the opportunity to take on added responsibility by volunteering to research the practicality of an idea. By collaborating, involved members were more effectively and actively living out the missive of the Crew—to spread enthusiasm and scholarship on Sherlock Holmes—than they would have been able to do on their own.

Sherlock Holmes is certainly important to Sherlockian societies. The societies would not exist without their literary hero/mascot (Gill 2014). However, it is the

friendships and relationships initiated by the existence of the societies that maintain the Crew and other Sherlockian societies. The relationships are what lead people to return, meeting after meeting, and what encourage them to collaborate, volunteer for tasks, and dedicate often substantial amounts of their free time to building deep wells of topical knowledge on the great detective. The desire to belong and be included are incentivized by the promise of camaraderie with other people who share the same enthusiasms, likes, interests. This is also why the “Grand Game” is so important. The whole thing plays like an inside joke shared amongst friends, a continually evolving and growing entity to laugh about, contribute to, and experience collectively. Sherlockian societies “should not be viewed as something separate from the relationships that constitute [them]” (Elias 2001). The Crew is only as strong as the interpersonal relationships that hold it together and the feelings of belonging imbued by membership.

Conclusion

Finishing up this research, I was struck with the realization of just how unlikely it would be for Sherlock Holmes to actually be a member of a Sherlockian society.

Preferring to work alone or with a select few partners (such as Dr. Watson), Sherlock would have eschewed the socially-oriented meetings, seen quizzes as immaterial, and The Game as a folly with no logical function. This has not stopped Sherlockians from their devoted study and idolization of the detective.

There are Sherlockians for whom Sherlock Holmes societies are merely a side venture, a casual hobby. For many devotees, however, participation is far more meaningful, granting a unique identity, a purpose, and a community of like-minded individuals. Sherlockian communities, such as the Crew of the Barque Lone Star, provide a location for individuals to define who they are, gain status and respect, and make lasting and meaningful contributions to a community. Maintaining an active membership and good standing in these communities is seen by Sherlockians as a valuable commodity because the community itself is a valuable part of the participant's social life and perceptions of self-worth.

The most salient characteristic of the Crew of the Barque Lone Star (which also fits what I researched of larger Sherlockia) is the desire to accrue knowledge and garner respect in the effort to become an invaluable member of the society. The more a Sherlockian entrenched themselves in studying the canon, collecting Sherlockian-themed products, and writing and producing their own Sherlockian-themed artifacts, the more important the 'Sherlockian' designation became to their personal identity. As one's identity with the group grew, so did their commitment to sticking with the group and

supporting the Sherlockian agenda. One begat the other begat the other in a feedback loop of increasing feelings of affinity.

This project, for all its implications, was based off an ethnographic study of one local club, meeting once a month, and comprised of just fifteen to twenty regular members. Naturally, there are limitations in my findings. Other Sherlockian groups could behave in entirely discordant ways (although this is unlikely) to the Crew of the Barque Lone Star. Were I given a year or more and funding to continue this project, I would make an effort to travel and visit groups across the country in their regular meetings, as well as attend major conventions such as the BSI weekend that occurs every January.

With more time and resources, I would also investigate the way community dynamics play out in a more diffuse environment—online. Thanks to Tumblr, Twitter, Facebook, and other, Sherlockian-made, websites, there is a robust Sherlockian fandom online. Especially bolstered by (and sometimes overlapping) the rising star of Benedict Cumberbatch and BBC's *Sherlock*, members of these communities are typically younger, typically female, and typically non-exclusive in the fandoms they follow.²² Although drastically different in demographic make-up and area of interest (canon versus media representation), these users similarly identify as Sherlockians and can earn status by displaying knowledge of the canon as well as behind-the-scenes details of the media productions. Fans still produce content, in the form of speculation on upcoming seasons, “shipping,” fan art, and fan fiction. The more reblogs or likes a post gets and the more followers a user accrues, the higher their status and visibility within the community as well as their likelihood to partner with other high-profile users on projects.

²² A large number of online Tumblr users identify as members of SuperWhoLock—fans of *Supernatural*, *Dr. Who*, and *Sherlock*.

The human desire to find a purpose in life and truly matter is achievable through participation in clubs and social groups. Many of the principles discussed here could apply to book clubs, gardening clubs, fraternities and sororities, elementary school parent-teacher associations—any social organization with a society-specific knowledge, a member-created and enforced hierarchy system, and opportunities for members to volunteer and otherwise engage on projects. The Crew of the Barque Lone Star is a very particular type of group that fits these specifications. A set of (mostly older) individuals with a highly-focused literary fascination and an almost silly treatment for their central subject, the Crew of the Barque Lone Star and other Sherlockian societies occupy a cultural space all their own. But their structures, ways of organizing, and ways of being, are significant and illustrative of similar microcommunities. As I've already discussed, online communities mirror many of the practices of these microcommunities. While they deserve their own studies, research on self-selected communities in general can serve as a good launching pad.

On my first interview for this thesis, I found myself sitting on a couch in the middle of Stu Nelan's library. We had just completed the set of interview questions I had brought and were now chatting about the BSI weekend in January that Nelan attended each year, what it takes to be a book collector, and where Nelan hopes his collection ends up after he is gone. As I piled my papers together and shoved them back into my bag, stopping the phone recording, the gray, affable Nelan stood up and walked to one of us intimidatingly tall bookcases.

“I’ve got a gift for you too, since I know you’re a Sherlockian,” he told me. “In the past I’ve tried to get people to read a book—this is something I’ve enjoyed and this is something I know you would enjoy too—but in general that hasn’t worked out since the books I like, nobody else has liked.”

Nelan slides a thin book off the shelf and hands it to me. It has a navy hardcover, with wear on the corners from past readings and yellowed pages from age. “Thank you,” I am genuinely touched by the gesture.

“Since you’re a Sherlockian, I know you’ll like a Sherlock Holmes book. “The Blue Carbuncle” is my favorite book. So start your collection with that book and grow it big and big and big.”

This, from my experiences over the past year, is the epitome of a Sherlockian. Friendly, always willing to help a fellow Sherlockian further the study of Sherlockia, and generous with knowledge and belongings if it will go toward spreading the discipleship of Sherlock Holmes. The Blue Carbuncle was the first book I received from a Sherlockian, but it was not the last. I also personally received chronologies, puzzles, and bibliographies, which does not include any of the materials that were distributed to the group at large.

When I began this research, I was merely interested in the dynamics of niche communities and was not, in fact, a Sherlockian at all. A year later, and I have been converted, affected by the same feedback loop I describe earlier in this conclusion. There is a certain satisfaction that comes with having your words applauded (as mine were, with the toast that I opened this thesis with) and receiving recognition from fellow members for good ideas and opinions on the canon. The more I am exposed to the Crew of the

Lone Star, the more I find myself liking and truly enjoying their company and wanting to be recognized as a Sherlockian as well.

As I've already covered, a crucial step to building recognition and respect is putting together and presenting research on a Sherlockian character, story, or feature of the time period. Which is where this project comes full-circle: in a meta turn of events, I will soon present this research about Sherlockians to the Crew of the Barque Lone Star Sherlockians in my effort to be taken seriously as a Sherlockian. In doing so, I will demonstrate the knowledge, the contribution, and the understanding of belonging that are essential to deep identification.

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