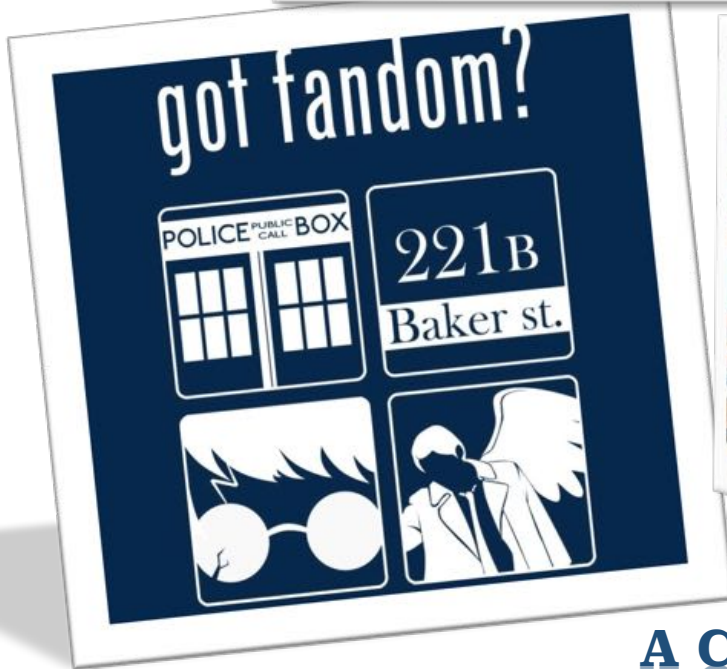


June 1st, 2016

Looking Through a Glass Onion



A Closer Look at
Fandoms and Fan
Culture

What is a 'Fan'?

The word 'fan' is an abbreviated form of the word 'fanatic' and is derived from the Latin term *fanum*, which is translated to 'temple.' Every year in ancient Rome, priests staged a festival in which they tore off their robes and hacked at their own bodies with axes. According to Michael Macronei, author of *It's Greek to Me!* writes "this crazed behavior could only be a sign of divine inspiration, and so the term *fanaticus* came to mean something like 'crazed by the gods.'" Later on when the term *fanatic* made it's way into the English language around the 16th century it meant 'crazed person'. [Winston Churchill](#) is quoted around 1952 saying, "A fanatic is someone who can't change his mind and won't change the subject". Henry Jenkinsⁱⁱ, the founding father of fandom studies, cites a [Saturday Night Live](#) skit that aired in 1986, featuring William Shatner (AKA Captain Kirk from *Star Trek*), which satirizes the overzealous Trekkie by depicting the fans as brainless consumers who devoted their lives to the cultivation of worthless knowledge and are unable to separate fantasy from reality.



Yet everyone is a fan of something, whether it's a sports team, a movie, a television show or a band. There are sports fans that use body paint and feathers to show their dedication just as there are Trekkies who will wear plastic Spock ears. This paper will explore some of the key aspects of modern fandoms as well as some of the fandoms themselves.



Love Me Do

The Beatles were a 60's rock band consisting of John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison and Ringo Starr. Lennon originally formed the band The Quarrymen in 1957, McCartney joined a few months later followed by Harrison and finally Starr. They became the Silver Beatles in May 1960 and finally settled on the Beatles in August 1960.

Please Please Me

The Beatles played regular gigs at The Cavern in Hamburg, Germany for several years before signing to a label. During their gigs they wore head to toe leather, which McCartney says got them laughed at 'more often than not.'

Thank You Girl

One of the Beatles' earliest gigs was playing background music for a stripper in Liverpool. The dancer would become frustrated with the Beatles since none of them could actually read her music.

SuperWhoLock

SuperWhoLock is helpfully defined by Urbandictionary as “a fandom made up of three other fandoms: Supernatural, Doctor Who, and Sherlock. It is also known as the Bermuda Triangle of Tumblr, because there are many ships, they just all sink. The three fandoms are widely known as the three main fandoms, as the fans are extremely powerful and scary.” In her paper “SuperWhoLock: The Face of the New Super-Fandomⁱⁱⁱ,” author Joyce-Nyack writes that “[the] impact of the SuperWhoLock fandom is so large that, even though the fandom is small, it reaches beyond its members to all of social media as a whole.” What Joyce-Nyack is describing is the growing phenomenon of fandoms on social media. *Supernatural*’s popularity is skyrocketing in a time when the ratings for most shows are steadily decreasing and this is being attributed to the fan base.

According to Gavia Baker-Whitelaw, a journalist from *The Daily Dot*, *Supernatural* owes this steady increase in popularity to *Doctor Who* and *Sherlock*, the other two parts to this Tumblr trifecta (the three shows come together to create the SuperWhoLock fandom that is known as the most active fandom on the social blogging site, Tumblr, which is discussed at length later in this paper). In her article Baker-Whitelaw comments, “People read some *Supernatural* fanfic or see enough Tumblr GIFs to get them interested, and then they start watching the show, either catching up on DVD or (more likely) via online piracy. In 2013, *Supernatural* was the most reblogged TV show on Tumblr^{iv} Perhaps the most interesting part of the *Supernatural* phenomenon is that unless you are a part of the fandom, *Supernatural*’s success is virtually unknown. The CW, the network that hosts *Supernatural*, does not advertise the show extensively like it does for other series such as *The Vampire Diaries* or *Arrow*.^v Despite the lack in advertising, ratings for *Supernatural* are continuing to grow.

What’s With the Lingo?

When delving into fandom culture knowing the lingo is incredibly important. Aside from common terms, such as ‘crossover’ and ‘ship,’ fandoms even have their own unique words to describe certain plot lines or character relationships. With the help of UrbanDictionary, let’s get some of the basics defined.

Ship: a noun “short for romantic relationship, popularized in fanfiction circles.” It can also be used as a verb for when a fan endorses a romantic relationship between two or more characters.

Crossover: when the characters from one story world meet with the characters of another.

Canon: Another word for official. Used quite often in fan fiction to differentiate between the official storyline in which the fan fiction is based on.

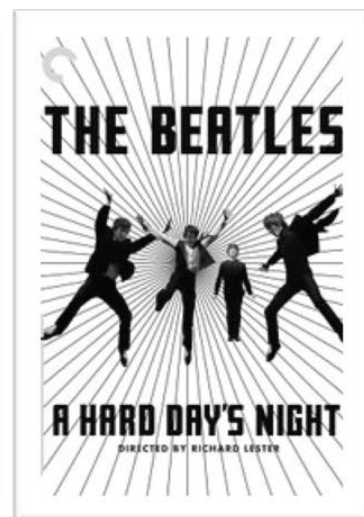
Another unique aspect of *Supernatural* is the show's tendency to throw in meta episodes. These episodes, starting in season 4, acknowledge the fandom and examine the fan culture surrounding the show. Aspects of the fandom, including LARPing (Live Action Role Play), fangirls, and fanfiction are all confronted. As noted by Anissa Graham in her essay "A New

Kind of Pandering: *Supernatural* and the World of Fanfiction," "such episodes exist in part because creators and fans are able to use the Internet not only to absorb new information... but also to examine the multiple readings the episodes invite^{vi}." These meta episodes are instant fan favorites and are unique to the *Supernatural* fandom. In an interview with Eric Kripke, the creator of *Supernatural*, he remarks, "ripping down the fourth wall, and exploring some of the uneasy issues and conflicts that arise between fictional subjects, their creators, and the fans who enjoy the work, has been great fun for us, and something most shows don't get the opportunity to do-- because they're generally not as insane or stupid as we are."^{viii} *Supernatural* has a unique relationship with its fans in that the show's creators not only acknowledge the fan base, but they write them into episodes. One such episode, titled "[Fanfiction](#)," shows an example of fanfiction put into musical form and which the main characters eventually encourage. *Supernatural*'s relationship with its fan base continues with the cast and crew. They travel to different conventions around the world to interact with the fans on a very personal level. This level of commitment is what has allowed this show to continue for so long (it was recently announced that it was renewed for seasons 12 and 13)^{viii}.



A Hard Day's Night: The First Meta Film

"A Hard Day's Night" was the Beatle's first film, titled after their hit song, which was a product of a malapropism by Starr. The film, like so many films starring rock bands of the era, was meant to be a quick way to profit off of the Beatle's popularity. The witty commentary, surprisingly good acting, and meta plot line made the film an instant classic.





DOCTOR WHO THROUGH THE AGES, DOCTORS 1-12: DUE TO THE SCIENCE FICTION ELEMENT OF THIS SHOW, 12 ACTORS TO DATE HAVE PLAYED THE ICONIC CHARACTER OF THE DOCTOR

Doctor Who, the “who” part of this Superwholock fandom, is perhaps one of the oldest but strongest fandoms in existence. *Doctor Who* is a science fiction television show that airs on the BBC. It premiered in 1963, making it 53 years old. Despite a hiatus from 1989 to 2001, the show has remained a prominent aspect of British culture with its fans affectionately calling themselves *whovians*. Due to the longevity of this show and its continuing popularity many researchers have used it to study the evolution of fan culture. In a study published in 2013 by researchers Peter Kelley and Paul Booth^x fans of different ages were interviewed at a convention in Chicago called “Chicago Tardis.” Over 1,100 fans attended the 3-day convention and 115 of these fans were interviewed. What makes this study so interesting is its focus not only on the age differences in the fandom, but on the relationship between the online aspects of the fandom and the offline. While it is true that much of fandom culture is now online, especially on social blogging

Did the Beatles Meet the Doctor?

The Beatles were originally set to appear in an episode of *Doctor Who* in 1965. They were to sing “Ticket to Ride” made up as old men. At the last moment their manager vetoed the idea and stock footage of the song was used instead.

sites such as Tumblr and WattPad, the offline culture continues to thrive. In this study it was concluded that digital practices certainly influence the growing fan culture, but they do not monopolize it. Similar to the *Supernatural* fandom, *Doctor Who* has a thriving convention culture where fans gather to discuss the show and to have in-person interactions with other fans.

The third part of the Superwholock fandom is BBC's *Sherlock*. Following a long tradition of adaptations of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's famed detective, *Sherlock* is a modern take on this classic character. Of the three TV shows, *Sherlock* is the newest addition, yet its fans are just as passionate as those of *Doctor Who*, which has been around much longer. What is even more surprising is the very limited amount of content this fandom has, only 3 seasons with 3 episodes each have been made (and one holiday special). Yet the fans of this show are still some of the most active on Tumblr. *Sherlock* also differs from the *Doctor Who* and *Supernatural* fandom in that its cast and crew are not involved in the fan culture. *Supernatural* hosts conventions all over the world and most of these conventions feature at least a few of the main actors. *Doctor Who* conventions have a long-standing tradition within the fandom and also occur all over the world with support from the show itself. *Sherlock* is very separated from its fandom and there are even instances where one of the main actors, Benedict Cumberbatch who plays the esteemed Mr. Holmes, has condemned works of fanfiction.^x

Despite the lack of official content, the *Sherlock* fandom is one of the most active on social media. A Tumblr blog titled "[Rules of](#)

You Can't Do That

When the Beatles arrived in the US in 1964, Beatlemania was reaching its peak. In an interview, Harrison mentioned how much he enjoyed Jelly Babies and during a performance fans loaded their pockets and threw the candy at the band. This incident scarred Starr and prompted changes to the original lyrics in 'With a Little Help from my Friends.'

Ticket to Ride

Lennon has called this the first 'heavy' pop song. Lennon was also a successful poet and released two books of poetry. His work has been called postmodern, surrealist, and 'linguistic gibberish for the sake of diversion.'

Act Naturally

In late 1964, before their first American tour, the Beatles preformed in Shakespeare's [Midsummer Night's Dream](#). In true Shakespearean fashion, Lennon dressed up to play the female role of Thisbe (The Beatles were performing *Pyramus and Thisbe*, which is within the larger play). When asked why he volunteered for the role he said, "Because if anyone likes dressing up more stupid than the rest, I enjoy it, you know."



A Closer Look at Fandoms

Annie Halseth

[the Sherlock Fandom](#)" has 127 rules as of May 2016. Many of the rules are inside jokes in the fandom that reference particular moments in the show while others act as a sort of support group for the fandom (since they must go so long without new content). Yet the fans are not passively waiting for new content. Fanfiction is a large part of the online community. During a Q & A session with a few of the main actors a moderator brought in a sample of fanfiction and had the characters read their parts.^{xi} Despite promises that the content was not racy, the work of fanfiction turned R rated quite quickly and put the actors in an awkward situation. The author of the work was mortified and Cumberbatch was paraphrased in ensuing articles as calling works of fanfiction "absurd" and essentially dismissing the fandom in general.^{xii} Undeterred by the negativity, fans of *Sherlock* continued to create their works of fanfiction and perpetuate the ship of Johnlock, which had been the source of Benedict's ire.

The SuperWhoLock fandom is certainly something of a powerhouse on the Internet. There are numerous articles on Buzzfeed alone that follow the fandom's creative and immensely entertaining presence on Tumblr. SuperWhoLock is also the source for many researchers who are looking into studying fandoms and fan culture on the Internet. Yet no matter the context and controversies that may arise, the fans of SuperWhoLock remain devoted supporters of their show.

Playing Detective

John Lennon was a fan of Sherlock. While on holiday in Tahiti with his wife, Cynthia, Harrison and Patti Boyd he read some of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's original Sherlock stories. He said that reading Sherlock helped inspire his second collection of stories, *A Spaniard in the Works*. [Lennon says](#) of his inspiration, "There just happened to be a big volume of Sherlock Holmes, a sort of madman's Sherlock Holmes where you get all the stories in one; and I realized that every story was the same. They're all pretty similar; and that's what I was doing, writing all of them into one. So I wrote one Shamrock Womlbs after three weeks of Sherlock Holmes in Tahiti."



Lisztomania... Beatlemania... One Direction Mania

From Franz Liszt to the Beatles to One Direction, the fandoms in music are some of the most outspoken. Perhaps the earliest example of the mania surrounding music would be the fandom of Franz Liszt. Liszt was a concert pianist during the mid 19th century and he revolutionized the way people saw the piano. Before Liszt people did not go to piano concerts, as the pianist would not be entertaining to watch. However, Liszt decided to place his piano at an angle so the audience would be able to view his profile as he played. While playing, Liszt would become so animated, flinging his long hair everywhere and slamming on the keys, that he would often break the instrument. In an interview, Stephen Hough, a world-renowned concert pianist, remarks, “We hear about women throwing their clothes onto the stage and taking his cigar butts and placing them in their

cleavages.”^{xiii} Two hundred years later Liszt is still inspiring musicians including Lang Lang and the band Phoenix. [Lang Lang](#) is an incredible pianist who composes and tours to give live recitals; his new album is titled *Liszt: My Piano Hero*. Lang Lang comments on Liszt, “he is a real piano god, so he make piano sound like entire orchestra. And he has this amazing technique like nobody else. At the same time, he brings passion and love and heart.”^{xiv}



Caricature of women at a
Liszt concert 1842

Phoenix, an alternative band from France, also references Liszt in their song *Lisztomania*, a term used by Heinrich Heine to describe the intense fan frenzy directed towards Liszt during his live performances.^{xv} The [music video](#) for *Lisztomania* shows scenes shot in front of Liszt's house and Thomas Mars, lead singer of Phoenix, remarks, “I love classical piano, so I have to love Liszt... He was exotic, he was different, he was pure in a way. It seemed that everyone wanted to get something out of him. So I think that's when people go ecstatic and hysterical reactions in the crowd because he's playing with this, and he had a sense, he was totally embracing that.”^{xvi}

A Closer Look at Fandoms

Annie Halseth

Lisztomania was a huge culture shock for the 19th century, but it did little to prepare the world for [Beatlemania](#). Hunter Davies, the only authorized biographer for the Beatles, describes Beatlemania:



The Beatles mocking Beatlemania

SGT. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band

SGT. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band was the alter ego of the Beatles. This was hailed as the first concept album ever and the cover remains one of the most iconic symbols of rock music. The cover features cut outs of people the Beatles admire, including Hindu gurus, Fred Astaire, Bob Dylan, Dylan Thomas and Aldous Huxley. Hitler was considered, the cut out made, but was tossed at the last moment. Jesus was chucked much earlier.

There was perpetual screaming and yeh-yehing for three years, one long continuous succession of hysterical teenagers of every class and color, shouting uncontrollably, not one of whom could hear what was going on for the noise of each other. Each of them emotionally, mentally, or sexually excited, foaming at the mouth, bursting into tears, hurling themselves like lemmings in the direction of the Beatles or just simply fainting.^{xvii}

What Davies is describing shocked people around the world. An article from 1964, relatively early in Beatlemania, remarks, “psychologists are as puzzled as parents over the explosive effect the Beatles are having on American teenagers. There has not been enough



A Closer Look at Fandoms

Annie Halseth

serious study on mass adolescent reactions to explain the impact of these four mop-headed British youths on the hearts... of the younger generation.”^{xviii}

The Beatles had successfully invaded America and thus began the era known as the “British Invasion.” British bands were now more popular in America than American bands and the behavior of the fans was without precedent. Beatles merchandise, including Beatles’ wigs, was selling by the thousands and record sales were through the roof. The Beatles’ fandom was the greatest fandom in existence and it was a massive culture shock.

In 2014 *Psychology Today* posted an article trying to explain Beatlemania in a more scientific manner.^{xix} The article explains that the autonomic nervous system is divided into two branches, sympathetic and parasympathetic. The sympathetic system is designed to mobilize the body in times of stress; it quickens the heart and can stimulate the release of adrenaline. On the other hand the parasympathetic nervous system calms the body down. However, it is connected to the tear ducts and activation of parasympathetic receptors by the neurotransmitter acetylcholine results in tear production, hence the tears when fans were relieved to see their idols in person. Yet some fans had a much more dramatic parasympathetic response. The parasympathetic system widens blood vessels and decreases the heart rate, thus producing a quick drop in blood pressure, which is why many fans would faint.

Help! The Cost of Beatlemania

The Beatles stopped touring at the end of 1964 for several reasons. One of which was the extreme emotional toll of Beatlemania. While touring the Beatles were not able to hear themselves play over the screaming of the fans. George Harrison, known as the ‘quiet Beatle’ said of Beatlemania, “They gave their money and they gave their screams, but the Beatles kind of gave their nervous systems.”



A Closer Look at Fandoms

Annie Halseth

In recent years a new British band has come into prominence, One Direction, commonly abbreviated as 1D. Since One Direction is a British boy band, the comparison to the Beatles is inevitable. An article published in *The Telegraph* by Olivia Goldhill^{xx} in 2014 points out the similarities (the female fans crying and fainting, the fact they are British), but also the biggest difference, social media. Social media has promoted One Direction

in an unprecedented way. The band has 21.3 million followers on Twitter while Harry Styles, a member of the band, has 22.6 million. The fans are so devoted to the band that when Styles tweeted tennis player Laura Robson she gained over 20,000 new followers, though most of them had no idea who she was.^{xxi} The band is also much more accessible to fans through social media. Members of the band will often interact directly with the fans, though this has caused its own slew of problems (including death threats to girlfriends of the band).



Security at a One Direction concert



Vogue magazine directly references the original Fab Four in their article featuring One Direction

A blog on Tumblr titled [“So You Want to be a Directioner: A Tumblr Starter Guide”](#) not only gives a detailed background on each member of the band, but states an important fact of modern fandom, “If One Direction is your religion, then Tumblr is where you go to worship.” While the band is now broken up, with one of the members leaving in early 2015, the comparison with the Beatles is an important one when looking at the evolution of fandom. Many scholars and writers who look at this comparison agree with Goldhill, that the fans are exhibiting much of the same behavior, but it is due to social media that this behavior has become more visible and, in many ways, expected.

A Closer Look at Fandoms

Annie Halseth

An article published in 2001 shows the research on the physical response to music. These scientists used “positron emission tomography to study neural mechanisms underlying intensely pleasant emotional responses to music. Cerebral blood flow changes were measured in response to subject-selected music that elicited the highly pleasurable experience of ‘shivers-down-the-spine’ or “chills.” Subjective reports of chills were accompanied by changes in heart rate, electromyogram, and respiration.”^{xxii} Essentially, what these scientists found was that when listening to pleasurable music, the subjects had increased blood flow to regions of the brain believed to be involved in rewards/motivation, emotion, and arousal. These brain structures are also found to be active in response to other euphoria-inducing stimuli, such as food, sex and drugs.

Sports: America’s Up and Coming Religion

Going to a sports game, professional or otherwise, as an outsider to the sport can be a daunting experience. Sports fans are some of the most devoted of any fan in any fandom. They dress up, scream themselves hoarse and experience physiological symptoms of increased testosterone and motor neuron activity.^{xxiii} In his article “Just How Much is Sports Fandom like Religion,”^{xxiv} published in 2013, Michael Serazio takes the research of Emile Durkeim, who is a sociologist that studies early religion, and applies concepts of religious activity to sports fandoms. Durkeim, in his book *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, asserts that a religion hinges on a ‘totem,’ which is the external and tangible form of that religion. This can be translated to a flag or logo in a sports fandom. This totem is what distinguishes that religion, or fandom or sports team. It is the visible mark of its personality. Serazio then

Being for the Benefit of Mr. Kite

The Beatles were an incredibly prolific band. Between 1960 and 1969 they recorded and released 309 songs, 237 being original compositions. Lennon and McCartney, the main composers, sometimes struggled for inspiration. Sometimes they turned to papers or magazines left in the studio by George Martin, their producer, ([Happiness is a Warm Gun](#), [She’s Leaving Home](#)) or would find a poster pasted on a shop window.

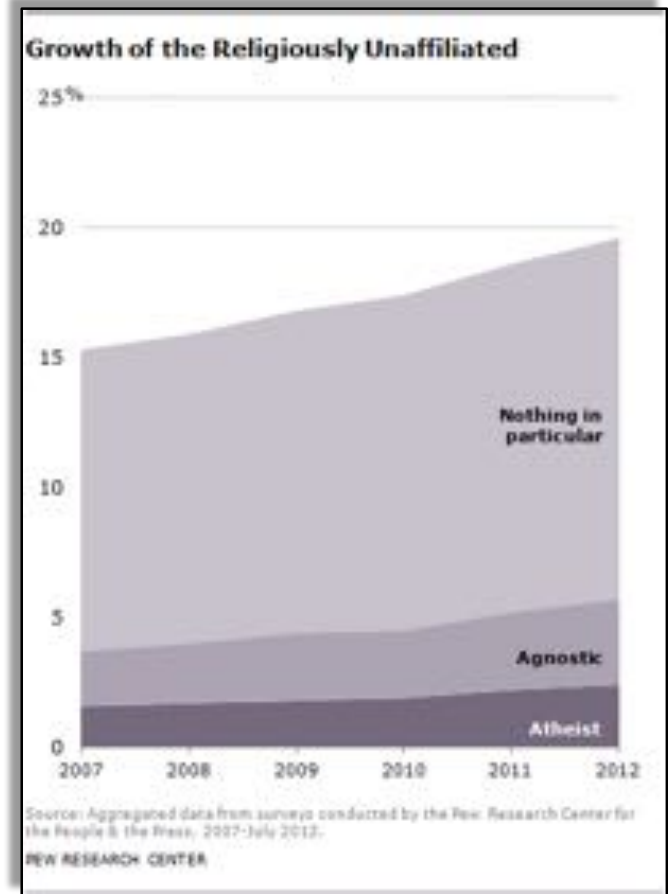


A Closer Look at Fandoms

Annie Halseth

connects this with the steady decline of religion in the United States. According to the PEW Research Center 20% of the US public claim to be religiously unaffiliated, and 1/3 of those are adults under 30.^{xxv} These are the highest percentages in recent history and in the last 5 years alone this has increased from 15-20%. Serazio remarks, “The notion that sports remain our civic religion is truer than we often let on. In fandom, as in religious worship, our social connections are brought to life, in the stands as in the pews.” In fact, just the timing of major sports events coincides with traditional religious congregations. The NFL schedules games on Sundays, which are the traditional days of rest in Christianity. Americans are becoming religiously independent just as they are becoming culturally dependent on sports.

In a groundbreaking study done in the early 1990s in Italy researchers found that the motor neurons in the observing brain replicate the motor neurons in the acting brain. This conclusion came from watching the brain activity of a monkey eating. The same neurons that fired in the monkey’s brain when he was eating fired in the monkey’s brain when he was watching another monkey eating.^{xxvi} This study has been replicated and expanded upon exponentially in more recent years. In a more recent study done in 2008 this was directly applied to sports.^{xxvii} At the University of Rome, neuroscientists recruited professional basketball players, professional watchers (journalists and



A Closer Look at Fandoms

Annie Halseth

coachers), and students who had never played basketball. They then had the subjects watch videos of free throws while monitoring brain activity through TMS (transcranial magnetic stimulation). While all the subjects brain activity perked up while watching the free throws, the students showed a more generalized activity while players and experts showed activity in the specific motor areas involved in shot taking. What this research shows is that fans' brains are vicariously experiencing the activity they are watching.

In his book, "The Secret Lives of Sports Fans: The Science of Sports Obsession,"^{xxviii} Eric Simmons takes this a step further. He postulates that being an intense sports fan can give you higher self-esteem, but failure of that team can also lead to depression and a threat to personal self-image. More so than in other fandoms, being a sports fan is intrinsically linked to self-image in a personal and even spiritual manner.



The Day the Beatles Ran a Relay Race

The Beatles were not an athletic group of boys. All members of the band smoked and hardly ever exercised. Yet, while shooting [*Help!*](#) the crew challenged the band to a relay race. The Beatles readily accepted and to everyone's surprise, especially their own, they won.

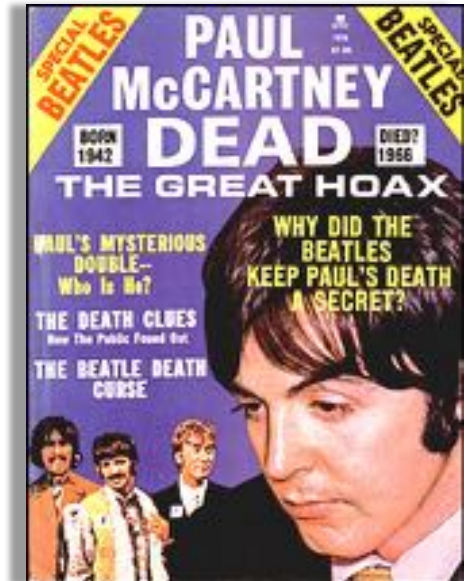


Paul McCartney is Dead

We interrupt this program to inform the readers that Paul McCartney of the rock band, the Beatles, is dead. At 5am on Wednesday, November 9, 1966 McCartney left Abbey Road studios after a recording session for "SGT. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" and crashed his Austin Healey car. McCartney was pronounced dead on the scene.

So why is this news hitting the stands so late? Simply put, Capitol Records wasn't about to let McCartney's death stop the Beatles' lucrative career. William Shears Campbell was employed to take McCartney's place in the band. The remaining members of the band, John Lennon, George Harrison and Ringo Starr have left us clues scattered in album covers and song lyrics that lead us to the truth.

For emotional support during this trying time, please feel free to call our toll-free help line or leave a comment below detailing your favorite McCartney Moment. Rest in Peace, Paul.




PAUL IS DEAD CLUE #1



ON THE SGT. PEPPER'S ALBUM THERE'S A FLOWER ARRANGEMENT THAT APPEARS IN THE SHAPE OF A LEFT HANDED BASS (PAUL'S INSTRUMENT). LOOK CLOSER AND YOU'LL SEE THAT THE FLOWERS ALSO SPELL OUT "PAUL" FOR THE DECEASED BEATLE.

PAUL IS DEAD CLUE #2



THE VOLKSWAGON CAR ON THE COVER OF ABBEY ROAD DISPLAYS A LICENSE PLATE THAT SAYS "28IF". WHEN THIS ALBUM CAME OUT PAUL WOULD HAVE BEEN 28 IF HE WAS STILL ALIVE.

PAUL IS DEAD CLUE #3



ON THE BACK COVER OF ABBEY ROAD THERE ARE A SERIES OF 8 DOTS NEXT TO THE WORD "BEATLES". THESE DOTS CAN BE CONNECTED TO FORM THE NUMBER THREE. NOW THE BACK COVER READS "3 BEATLES" AS PAUL IS NO LONGER A LIVING MEMBER.

PAUL IS DEAD CLUE #4



IF YOU PLACE A PENCIL HALFWAY THROUGH THE BASS DRUM ON THE COVER OF SGT. PEPPER'S YOU SEE THE WORDS "ONE IS THE ONE". THE FIRST TWO NUMBERS CAN BE CONSIDERED AN 11 FOR THE 11TH MONTH (NOVEMBER) WHILE THE 11 CAN BE THE ROMAN NUMERAL FOR 9, NOW THE MESSAGE READS 11/9 NOVEMBER 9TH HE (JASON POINTING UP TO PAUL) DIED. BECAUSE THE BEATLES STOPPED TOURING SUDDENLY IN 1966 PAUL IS SUSPECTED TO HAVE DIED ON THE 11TH OF NOVEMBER IN THE YEAR 1966.



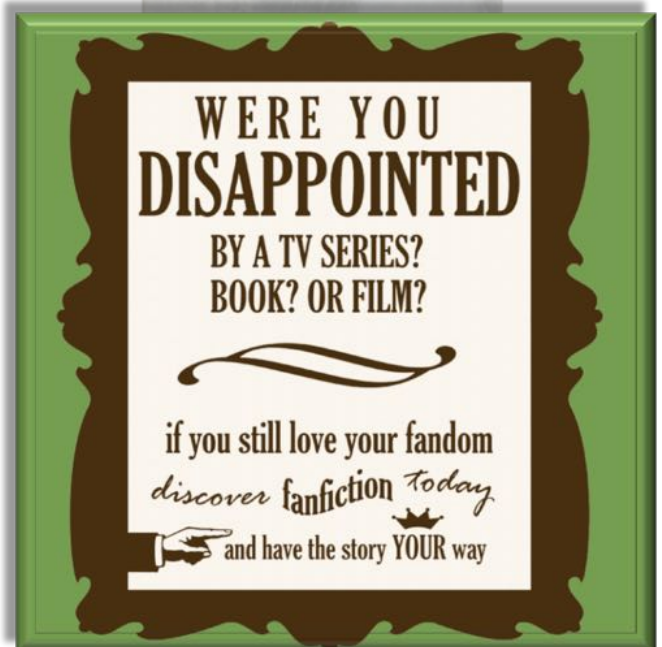
Amateur Writers with Millions of Readers

The term fanfiction tends to bring with it the stigma of the obsessed fangirl who cannot separate fiction of reality. This stereotype was introduced early in the history of fanfiction with the evolution of the [Mary Sue](#) character, which saw its beginnings in Star Trek fanfiction. The Mary Sue character comes into existence when a, typically female, writer creates a perfect character and inserts it into the fictional world. This character has especially negative connotations because of the erotic fiction that came to be associated with it.

Yet the negative connotation that the Mary Sue character brought to fanfiction seems to be leaving the genre. To understand the complex nature of fanfiction it is interesting to consider some of the earliest examples that date back to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and his iconic character, Sherlock Holmes. Despite Holmes's immediate popularity, Doyle never cared for the character and it irritated him that people were so enamored of him.^{xxix} After a few years of writing Holmes, Doyle decided to kill off the character and so in 1893 he throws the beloved detective off of a cliff, and his fans were not amused. Doyle says of his decision to kill Holmes, "I have been much blamed for doing that gentleman to death, but I hold that it was not murder, but justifiable homicide in self-defense, since, if I had not killed him, he would certainly have killed me."^{xxx} With Sherlock's death the Strand (the paper in which Doyle published his stories) lost over 20,000 subscribers and the magazine barely survived. According to legend, men around London wore black mourning crepes on their hats or on their arms.^{xxxi} The



The original illustration
of Sherlock Holmes'
Death



A Closer Look at Fandoms

Annie Halseth

fans resorted to some of the first published fan-fiction and 8 years later, in 1901, the pressure was so great that Doyle began writing prequels and in 1903 Holmes was officially brought back from the dead.

Well-known and published authors such as Cassandra Clare, author of the *Mortal Instruments* series, and Meg Cabot, author of the *Princess Diaries*, admit to having grown up writing Harry Potter and Star Wars fanfiction respectively. Some authors, such as J.K Rowling embrace and encourage the fanfiction community while others, such as George R.R. Martin and Anne Rice actively discourage it. Orson Scott Card, author of *Ender's Game*, actively supports the fanfiction community and has even held a contest in which the winner had their work published in his anthology and became canon. "Every piece of fan fiction is an ad for my book," Mr. Card says. "What kind of idiot would I be to want that to disappear?"^{xxxii}

However, the legalities behind fanfiction are under fierce debate. Several authors have been sued in the past decade for appropriating other author's published work. The term '[fair use](#)' is often cited when defending fanfiction. The term allows the publication of 'transformative' content. Yet the vagueness of 'transformative' has caused millions of dollars to be spent in court attempting to clearly define 'transformative'.

No matter how hazy the legalities, fanfiction is a thriving business. Author E.L James has openly admitted her lucrative *50 Shades* novels stemmed from *Twilight* fanfiction, and Amazon now offers informal publication of fanfiction that other pay a small fee to read.^{xxxiii}

Come Together

Covering a Beatles song is almost a rite of passage in the music world. Artists from Florence and the Machine to Arctic Monkeys to Russell Brand and Bill Cosby have covered songs. *Yesterday*, written by McCartney, remains the most covered song in history with over 2,500 recorded covers.

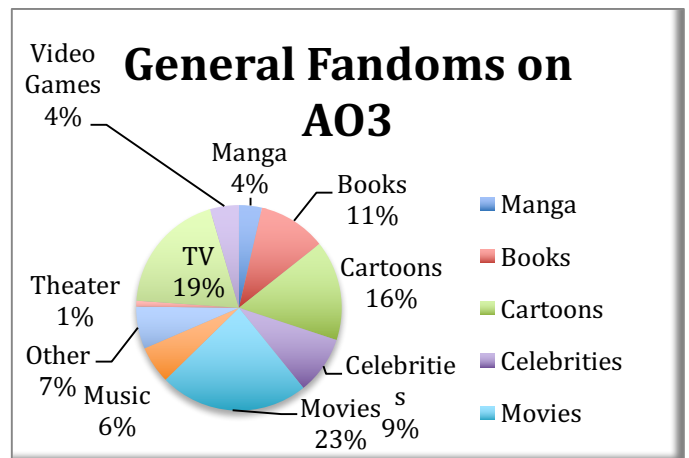
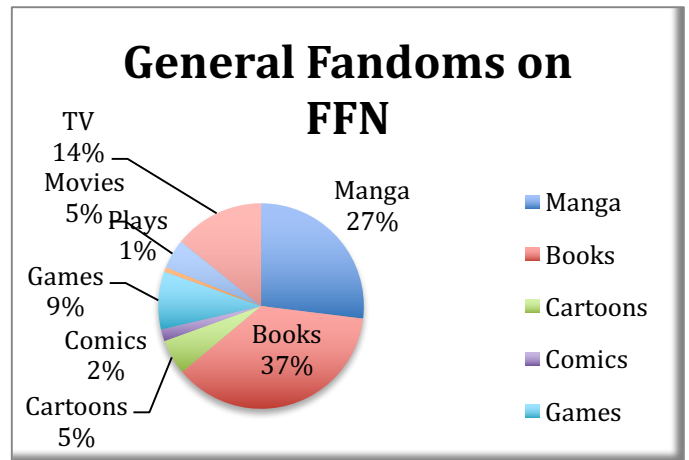


A Closer Look at Fandoms

Annie Halseth

Online there are two main sites that house the majority of the internet's fanfiction, *Fanfiction.net* and *Archive of Our Own*. These two sites house hundreds of thousands of works. With *Fanfiction.net*, created in 1999, and *Archive of Our Own*, created 2008, many third party fandom specific sites have declined in popularity.

Star Trek, a fandom that is infamous for its fanfiction, has a very small presence on the Internet. *Fanfiction.net* has roughly 40,200 Star Trek works (which is very small compared to Harry Potter that has nearly 750,000 works) and *Archive of Our Own* has 36,444 works. The 3rd party fanfiction sites I found for Star Trek had relatively few works and most had been inactive for at least a year. Another relatively active fandom is the Tolkien fandom (though the output of new works has been steadily decreasing in recent years). A popular fan site for Tolkien fanfiction, *Henneth Annun*, has recently moved all of its archives over to *Archive of Our Own*.



From these trends it would seem that with the creation of *Archive of Our Own* most 3rd party sites are losing popularity with the fanfiction community. Even *Fanfiction.net* is struggling to compete in the new fandoms with *Archive of Our Own*. This may be because of *Archive of Our Own*'s more liberal tagging system (you can tag a story with anything you can think of, which is not possible on *Fanfiction.net*) and their relaxed ratings (very few, if any, works are removed for being inappropriate or for violating a copyright).

A Closer Look at Fandoms

Annie Halseth

Site	Fandom	# of Works	# of Authors	# of Reviews	# of Members
A Teaspoon and an Open Mind	Doctor Who	41012	4811		
Harry Potter Fanfiction	Harry Potter	84662	38582	2159700	93855
Beatles Fanfiction Directory	Beatles*	249			
The Avengers Fanfiction	Avengers	4200			
Ad Astra	Star Trek	1881	158	13196	387
The Kirk/Spock Archive	Star Trek	5547	785	66381	8302
Faerie	Tolkien	1544			
Tolkien Fanfiction	Tolkien	1047			
Lord of the Rings Fanfiction	LOTR	4710	1250	31745	5374
Many Paths to Tread	Tolkien	3152	183	3338	338
Henneth Annun**	Tolkien	3049			

Table showing some third party sites and the number of works available

Across the Universe

Across the Universe is a movie directed by Julie Taymor in 2007. It is centered around Beatles songs and features 33 of their songs with only around 40 minutes of actual dialogue (the movie runs at 133 minutes). The movie takes place in the 60s and tackles issues such as the [Vietnam War](#), [sexuality](#), [drug use](#), [racism](#) and the [free love](#) movement. Paul McCartney says of the film, "What's not to like?"

Tumblr: The Heart of Modern Fandoms

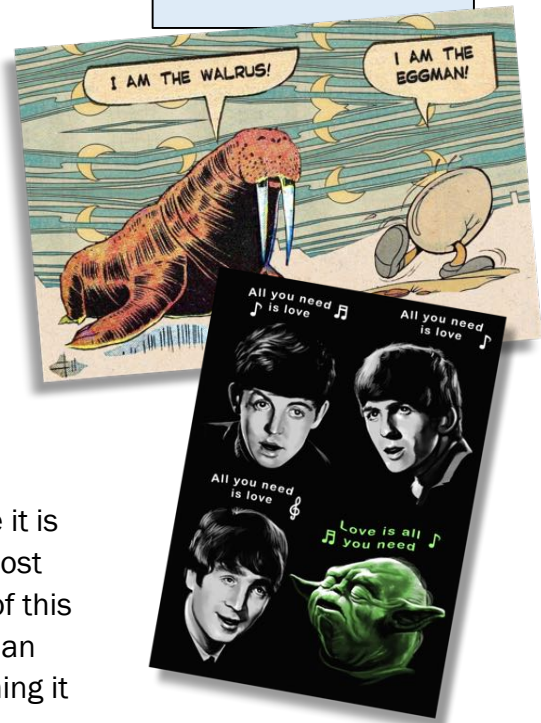
It is not an exaggeration to say that Tumblr has become the hub for the majority of online fandom activity. Delving into the site is like falling down a rabbit hole, you're never sure what you're looking at and if you can ever leave.

To better understand the Tumblr community, I created a Tumblr account and followed members of the Tumblr community who had amassed thousands of other followers. These primary members usually subscribed to one or two main fandoms and posted several times a day about these fandoms. These posts could be original content, but more often than not they were re-blogging posts from other members' blogs. I spent several hours looking through these blogs and taking notes on overarching trends as well as which members seemed to be most influential in some of the fandoms.

I decided to focus on the *Supernatural* fandom since it is perhaps the most prevalent on Tumblr. One of the most interesting trends I found was the pervasive nature of this fandom. For example, the *Supernatural* fandom has an infamous habit of hijacking any type of post and turning it into a *Supernatural* centric post using one of their thousands of gifs. A recent example of this would be a scientific post about a physicist's theory that building a wall could potentially prevent tornadoes in tornado alley. This post was reblogged with gifs from *Attack on Titan* and *Doctor Who* until, finally, *Supernatural* took over.

This phenomenon was even documented in a BuzzFeed article that trended in 2014. One of the most popular posts featured in this article features a character from the show that represents Death who is acting out the main subject of the post.

The Beatles on Tumblr



A Closer Look at Fandoms

Annie Halseth

The *Supernatural* fandom is infamous on Tumblr to the extent that other fandoms seem to expect their presence on unrelated posts.

Supernatural fans are also some of the most supportive of other members of the fandom. Many of the personal posts from users reference personal experiences with the fandom outside of Tumblr. For example, a post from a *Supernatural* fan features her senior picture and her quote, which is a very obscure quote from the show. The caption reads, “When you’re SPN AF and no one understands your senior quote.” This supportive atmosphere, while not unique to the *Supernatural* fandom, seems more obvious than in other fandoms. This facet of the fandom likely stems from the cast and crew of the show itself. The *Supernatural* cast and crew regularly tour and give panels around the country. These panels give fans the chance to meet each other, as well as the cast, and to form friendships that continue in real life and on the Internet.

The friendships on Tumblr act as a sort of support group for many people. Posts that seem prevalent throughout the fandom (as in are found on multiple blogs) include education and awareness about mental illness, LGBT issues, and feminist issues. The show *Supernatural* has created a community that supports each other in difficult times when many members may feel uncomfortable discussing these issues outside of the Internet. One of the cast members from *Supernatural*, Jared Padalecki, acts as a spokesperson for those suffering with mental illness and has created his own foundation, “Always Keep Fighting,” that raises awareness and funds towards this cause. Padalecki has suffered from depression and has become a spokesperson for mental illness in general. He continues to create a dialogue within and without the



A Closer Look at Fandoms

Annie Halseth

Supernatural fandom that inspires thousands of people and has turned him into a hero on Tumblr.

Another interesting aspect in the *Supernatural* community on Tumblr is the age range of the fans. Members' personal posts document everything from high school drama to watching the show with their own children. This range likely comes from the longevity of the show. *Supernatural* is currently airing its 11th season and is set to run for at least another two. The show is also available on Netflix and is thus gaining new fans all the time.



The End

Fandom studies were founded in the early 90s and have since been the subject of academic research as well as a fascinating cultural phenomenon. Fandoms continue to evolve and the scope of the research is constantly changing to encompass more diverse areas. Fandom studies include research in sports, religion and even politics. Celebrity fandoms have been around since the beginning of time as people worshipped their rulers, deities or perhaps Lord Byron, who was considered the first ‘modern’ celebrity.

Yet fandoms have a history of negativity. Even the first academic book on fandoms, Henry Jenkin’s 1992 *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, has been criticized for its demeaning and sometimes patronizing tone. Science fiction fandoms such as *Star Trek*, *Star Wars* and *Doctor Who* have a long history of being associated with the geek and outcast stereotype. As recently as the *Big Bang Theory*, which is an immensely popular TV sitcom, these fandoms are portrayed in a negative light and are associated with anti-social behavior.

In recent years such events as Comic Con have helped to make fandom culture more mainstream. *Marvel* has remade classic comic book heroes into silver screen heroes that have immense mainstream popularity as well as a fandom culture that involves Tumblr, fanfiction and shipping. The Internet has allowed even obscure and niche fandoms, such as *My Little Pony*, to create communities. Fandoms are a large part of mainstream popular culture due to their wide dissemination on the internet as well as the increasing popularity of the ‘geek’ culture.

AND IN THE END
THE LOVE YOU TAKE
IS EQUAL TO
THE LOVE YOU MAKE

THE LOVE YOU MAKE

-
- ⁱ Macrone, Michael. *Its Greek to Me!* New York: Cader, 1991. 204. Print.
- ⁱⁱ Jenkins, Henry. *Textual Poachers:: Television Fans and Participatory Cultures*. 20th Anniversary ed. New York: Routledge, 2013. *University of Denver*. Web.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Joyce-Nyack, Ashley. "Superwholock: The Face of the New Super-Fandom." *Stylus Knights Writes Showcase Special Issue* (2014): 12-17. 2014. Web. May 2016.
- ^{iv} Baker-Whitelaw, Gavia. "Does 'Supernatural's Rating Spike Have 'queerbaiting' to Thank?" *The Daily Dot*. N.p., 16 June 2014. Web. 15 Apr. 2016.
- ^v Joyce-Nyack, Ashley. "Superwholock: The Face of the New Super-Fandom." *Stylus Knights Writes Showcase Special Issue* (2014): 12-17. 2014. Web. May 2016.
- ^{vi} Barton, Kristin M.; Lampley, Jonathan Malcolm. *Fan CULTure : Essays on Participatory Fandom in the 21st Century*. Jefferson NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2013. Ebook Library. Web. 15 April. 2016
- ^{vii} Jester, Alice. "'Supernatural' Breaks down Fourth Wall." *Variety*. N.p., 14 Apr. 2010. Web. 15 Apr. 2016.
- ^{viii} "'Supernatural' Season 11 News: Show Officially Renewed for Season 12, 13; Sam, Dean to Be Killed by Werewolves in Episode 17 'Red Meat'?" *Lawyer Herald RSS*. N.p., 25 Mar. 2016. Web. 12 Apr. 2016.
- ^{ix} Booth, Paul, and Peter Kelly. "The Changing Faces of Doctor Who Fandom." *Participations: Journal of Audience & Reception Studies* 10.1 (2013): 56-72. May 2013. Web.
- ^x Minkel, Elizabeth. "Why It Doesn't Matter What Benedict Cumberbatch Thinks of Sherlock Fan Fiction." *NewsStatesman*. N.p., 12 Oct. 2014. Web. 15 May 2016.
- ^{xi} Maloney, Devon. "Sherlock Isn't the Fan-Friendly Show You Think It Is." *Wired.com*. Conde Nast Digital, 24 Jan. 2014. Web. 27 May 2016.
- ^{xii} Romano, Aja. "Why Fans Are Outraged at Sherlock and Watson Reading Sexy Fanfic." *The Daily Dot*. N.p., 16 Dec. 2013. Web. 27 May 2016.
- ^{xiii} "How Franz Liszt Became The World's First Rock Star." *All Things Considered*. NPR. 22 Oct. 2011. *NPR Music*. Web. 14 Apr. 2016.
- ^{xiv} *Ibid.*

^{xv} "Lisztomania: How Franz Liszt Became Music's First Panty-Dropper." *CMUSE*. N.p., 27 Jan. 2015. Web. 12 Apr. 2016.

^{xvi} "How Franz Liszt Became The World's First Rock Star." *All Things Considered*. NPR. 22 Oct. 2011. *NPR Music*. Web. 14 Apr. 2016.

^{xvii} Davies, Hunter. *The Beatles*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1996. Print.

^{xviii} "Beatles Reaction Puzzles Even Psychologists." *Science News*. N.p., 29 Feb. 1964. Web. 15 May 2016.

^{xix} Lewis, Jordan G. "Love, Love Medulla: The Neuroscience of Beatlemania." *Psychology Today*. N.p., 6 Feb. 2014. Web. 12 Apr. 2016.

^{xx} Goldhill, Olivia. "The Most Committed Fans in the World: One Directioners versus Beatlemania." *The Telegraph*. Telegraph Media Group, 18 Nov. 2014. Web. 18 May 2016.

^{xxi} *Ibid.*

^{xxii} Blood, Anne J., and Robert J. Zatorre. "Intensely Pleasurable Responses to Music Correlate with Activity in Brain Regions Implicated in Reward and Emotion." Ed. Marcus E. Raichie. *PNAS* 98.20 (2001): n. pag. *PNAS.org*. PNAS, Sept. 2001. Web.

^{xxiii} Schrieber, Leanne. "This Is Your Brain on Sports." *Grantland*. N.p., 04 Nov. 2011. Web. 15 May 2016.

^{xxiv} Serazio, Michael. "Just How Much Is Sports Fandom Like Religion." *The Atlantic*. Atlantic Media Company, 29 Jan. 2013. Web. 18 May 2016.

^{xxv} Liu, Joseph. "'Nones' on the Rise." *Pew Research Centers Religion Public Life Project RSS*. N.p., 09 Oct. 2012. Web. 15 May 2016.

^{xxvi} Di Pellegrino, G., L. Fadiga, L. Fogassi, V. Gallese, and G. Rizzolatti. "Understanding Motor Events: A Neurophysiological Study." *Experimental Brain Research* 91.1 (1992): 176-80. *Springer Link*. Web. 18 May 2016.

^{xxvii} Aglioti, Salvatore M., Paola Cesari, Michela Romani, and Cosimo Urgesi. "Action Anticipation and Motor Resonance in Elite Basketball Players." *Nature Neuroscience* 11.9 (2008): 1109-116. Nature Publishing Group, Sept. 2008. Web.

^{xxviii} Simons, Eric. *The Secret Lives of Sports Fans: The Science of Sports Obsession*. Berkshire: Overlook Express, 2014. Print.

^{xxix} Miller, John J. "The Burden of Holmes." *Wall Street Journal*. N.p., 23 Dec. 2009. Web.

^{xxx} *Ibid.*

^{xxx}_i Duane, Diane. "The Affair of the Black Armbands (or, The Death of Sherlock Holmes and How The World Took It) - Out of Ambit." *Out of Ambit*. N.p., 16 Jan. 2012. Web. 14 Apr. 2016.

^{xxx}_{ii} Alter, Alexandra. "The Weird World of Fanfiction." *Wall Street Journal*. N.p., 14 June 2012. Web. 15 May 2016.

^{xxx}_{iii} Lee, Angela. "Time Traveling with Fanfic Writers." *Participations: Journal of Audience & Reception Studies* 8.1 (2011): 78-80. Web.