

Written by Watsons an Introspective Look at Oneself Through Sherlock Holmes

[ABSTRACT]

Through survey-based data collection and comparison to Sherlock Holmes, I will attempt to figure out who *I* really am. Data will be collected from myself, friends, and strangers regarding our opinions on Holmes, and with the exception of the strangers, our opinions on myself. Analysis of the data will be done through a symbolic interactionist lens, which emphasizes the way in which the “I” and “Me” of one’s Self is created through their social interactions. The goal of this study is to allow me a comfortable space in which to examine how my Self is perceived, how that affects who “I” am, and to get introspective for once in my damn life.

[RESEARCH QUESTION]

First and foremost I would like to have an idea of who *I* am. What parts of me have I put in Sherlock Holmes? What parts of Sherlock Holmes have I stolen and codified in myself? There’s no real Q1, Q2, Q3 etc. delineation because these two questions are intertwined and one will inform me of the other. There is no causation or correlation, there is just an exchange of qualities that I wish to pinpoint the original source of.

Holmes is written by Watson, and in that regard I am written by all of the people I surround myself with and the ways in which they perceive me.

[LITERATURE REVIEW]

The main two sources I am taking inspiration from are a psychology study done at the University of New Brunswick in Canada, and the sociological school of thought called symbolic interactionism. While these two inspirations are from different disciplines, I think the framework of symbolic interactionism can be an interesting way to describe my later methodological reasons for my adjustments in the recreation of the experiment.

The school of symbolic interactionism was founded by George Herbert Mead and Charles Horton Cooley, with one of the foundational texts being a collection of Mead's lectures published posthumously by his students called *Mind, Self and Society*. According to this line of thought, it is the daily interactions between individuals that create society. When you interact with someone you are creating, repeating, and preserving the various mechanics which shape our world - think of manners as an example. We learn how to use proper manners through our interactions with other people and we internalize and adapt from those interactions. If your mother scolds you for having your elbows on the table, you learn that this is a social no-no and are likely to show distaste for it in other interactions, leading to the idea that "elbows on the table aren't good manners," to be perpetuated. According to Mead himself, "The self, as that which can be an object to itself, is essentially a social structure, and it arises in social experience." (Mead, 1955) meaning that the self is reflexive within society - we interact with it and change it with our interactions. Mead focuses a lot on the fact that a self can be reflexive only once it becomes a social object.

Mead also believed that a person's sense of Self is internally broken into different points of view: the "Me" and the "I." Surprisingly for an early 20th-century philosopher, Mead explains the difference between the two in a fairly straightforward manner: "The "I" reacts to the self which arises through the taking of the attitudes of others. Through taking those attitudes we have introduced the "me" and we react to it as an "I." (Mead, 1955) The "Me" is socialized, it's the result of who you become once you internalize others perceptions of and reactions to you, whereas the "I" is the uninhibited self, who you are before these internalizations. It's important to note how Mead emphasizes that the "I" and "Me" are working in a constant cycle - you are in your "I" state, interact with others and come out of that interaction in a "Me" state, only for you to start acting a way in accordance to the "Me" all the time, making that become your normal "I."

Through the cyclical cycle of the "I" and "Me" society is created, our rules and rituals are codified within us. Not only that, but one's sense of self is also always in this fluctuating, cyclical state. It is with this concept of sense of self in mind that I will go forward into analyzing myself.

[METHODOLOGY]

The research for this project would come in 3 parts: [1] a recorded adjusted recreation of the MacNeill & DiTommaso experiment [2] a survey of strangers and [3] a survey of friends. Here I will expand on what these pieces entail.

[1] Recorded Adjusted Recreation of the MacNeill & DiTommaso Experiment

The MacNeill & DiTommaso experiment had people complete two assessments: one was a 36 item self-assessment of adult attachment filled out in relation to themselves and the second was a sixteen personality factor questionnaire filled out in relation to their favorite media character. Specifically, the 36 item self-assessment was the 1998 version of the ECR developed by Brennan et. al., and while there is an updated version of the test from two years later the point of this portion is to replicate the experiment to the best of my ability. When it comes to the sixteen personality questionnaire, the experiment used the original Cattell 16 Personality questionnaire from 1957.

I will screen record myself taking both assessments. For the ECR, I will be thinking about myself and answering accordingly. Then I will write down the name of my favorite fictional character and what piece of media they are from - for me, this will be Sherlock Holmes and I will reference my two favorite pieces of Holmes media: The four season series referred to as “Granada Holmes” which ran on British television from 1984 to 1994 and FOX’s *House M.D.* which ran from 2004 to 2012. It’s important that I note these programs because Holmes has been recreated and reimagined over 200 times over the last couple hundred years, and one’s preferred Holmes says a lot about them. After that, I will take the Cattell personality questionnaire while thinking about Sherlock Holmes.

What makes this an adjusted recreation is that I will also take the Cattell personality questionnaire while thinking about myself. This is so I can compare the results I get in regards to both Holmes and myself.

My main critique with the original experiment is that the way in which someone describes their favorite character is deeply personal and clouded by things like their favorite version of said character and their personal interpretations of said character. I've always read most versions of Holmes as a queer man, however that's not a sentiment every Holmes fan shares. In order to correct this in some way, I plan on involving both strangers and my friends.

[2] A Survey of Strangers

The group of strangers will essentially act as my control group. A total of 10 strangers collected through word of mouth, and asked to fill out a two point questionnaire: "When you are asked to think of Sherlock Holmes, what movie/tv show/book/game comes to mind first?" and "Out of these sixteen qualities, which three do you think relate the most to Sherlock Holmes?" The point of this is to collect a group of people who have not already had their views of Holmes tainted by my incessant talking about him.

These people are going to represent the general consensus of Holmes's character, which will be contrasted to the consensus of Holmes's character created by my friends. I also plan to have these responses be from people who are of the same age range as my friends, which would be between the ages of 20 and 30 in order to create some level of similarity between the group that will make the contrasting of them more interesting to examine.

[3] A Survey of Friends

A total of 10 of my friends will respond to the same two point questionnaire. The thought behind having a friend group and a group of strangers is that I assume the friend group will fall

more into line with the way I view Holmes, which will help me pinpoint what personality traits I emphasize when talking of Holmes to others.

However, I will also ask my friends to do the same second question but this time to think of me. They will list which three of the sixteen personality traits they attribute to me. This question will be asked first, in order to not have their responses be clouded by what they said about Holmes. I already assume that their opinions on Holmes will be clouded by their opinions on me, so asking about myself first is more likely to yield results that are as uninfluenced as I can make them.

[RATIONALE]

The Data

According to the MacNeill and DiTommaso research, a person who has an anxious attachment will report their favorite character to have standoffish and anxious characteristics. However, the opinions of a superfan are not the same as the opinions of a casual fan or non-fan. This is why I am planning on asking strangers and friends about Holmes's personality. This baseline of Holmes as a character will help me see if I truly fall in line with the results of the study. I also want a more rounded view of the character in order to see what parts of his personality I focus on when speaking about him - which will be shown in both my responses to the larger questionnaire and my friend's responses to the smaller questionnaire.

After all of my data collection, I will have my attachment style assessment, opinions from both myself and friends on my own personality, and opinions from my friends, strangers, and myself on Holmes's personality. I plan on taking this data and looking for patterns in how

Holmes is described - what words are used by my friends to describe both myself and Holmes? What words are used in both my descriptions of myself and strangers' depictions of Holmes? I will also be looking at whether or not I fall within the MacNeil and DiTommaso results and internalizing what that says about my needs.

Our self identity is in part a mash-up of how we internalize others' opinions of us, which in this case will be my data; I am also going to internalize all of this information and try to make sense of who I've become over my years of loving Holmes content. According to George Herbert Mead, "There are parts of the self which exist only for the self in relationship to itself. We divide ourselves up in all sorts of different selves with reference to our acquaintances," (Mead 1955). One of those different selves is the self we are when we speak of our favorite characters, or the self we are when taking a self-assessment test, or the self we are when we're with our friends. Who am *I* if all of these I's are Me?

Why Holmes?

Besides the fact that I've been a Holmes fan since childhood, the original Holmes stories are written through the point-of-view of John Watson. A best friend who internalizes his own opinions and experiences with Holmes and puts them on the page - but also these men are created by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and are born out of his life, experiences, needs, and wants. When it comes to the audience's perception of Holmes, the character is created through our internalization of the way John Watson writes him, therefore I am just continuing a loop of self-identification through the written opinions of others.

I have been told by therapists that I'm self aware but not introspective, this paper is an attempt to grow more introspective within a framework that I am well-versed in and with the comfort of Holmes alongside me.

[PRELIMINARY INFORMATION & DISCUSSION]

While thinking about this project, I spoke about it to a friend who immediately responded with a "GAY" once I brought up the idea of asking friends about their view of Holmes. It was with that immediate response that I realized I need to reach out to strangers in order to have a control group. This conversation was arguably the beginning of my research.

In order to keep my results as honest as possible, I will only be asking for participation from friends whom I have not spoken to about my plans. Therefore people such as the previously mentioned friend and another friend will not be asked to participate, despite us being close. Also because this is a survey of friends, I will not be including my partner, taking the increased level of intimacy into account.

I am also coming into this study with a previous attachment style test under my belt. Back in the fall of 2019 I took an abnormal psychology course that had us take a shortened version of the official attachment style questionnaire. My result back then was "Anxious Preoccupied," which is why I felt the MacNeill and DiTommaso study would be an interesting one to recreate.

[TIMELINE]

I will be dividing the timeline up between the three workshops.

Workshop 1: Proposal - explaining what the project is, how I intend to see it through, and what I hope to gain from it.

Workshop 2: Data & Observations - this will be a run down of the data and the information I can glean from it, may have sections of the finished paper written up as well.

Workshop 3: Final Paper Draft - this will be a draft of the complete research paper where I will be explaining my findings and doing my soul searching as to what all of this says about me.

[REFERENCES]

- MacNeill, A. L., & DiTommaso, E. (2022). An Attachment Perspective on Favorite Media Figures. *Psychological Reports*, 125(3), 1457-1468.
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- Mead, G. H. (1955). The Self. In C. W. Morris (Ed.), *Mind, Self and Society* (10th ed., pp. 135–226). Chicago University Press. (Original work published 1934)