
SuperWhoLock: The Face of the New Super-Fandom

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For almost every movie, TV show, book, or musical artist, there is a fan base that dedicates themselves to the entertainment they love. Fan bases—or fandoms—for TV shows, movies, and bands have been observed for many years, and it is accepted that they play a huge part in the success, or lack thereof, of an entertainment medium. Sometimes called a “cult following,” a fandom plays a large role in determining how popular a TV show is, and has even been powerful enough to bring shows back after their cancellation. Three of the shows with an influential “cult following” are BBC’s *Sherlock* and *Doctor Who* and the CW’s *Supernatural*. Each one of these shows have been positively affected by their fans, with NPR going as far as saying that one of the main reasons for *Supernatural*’s success is their fan base (Ulaby 1).

One of the aspects of fandoms that has not been studied is when fandoms come together to form a super-fandom. This happened recently when the fan bases from *Supernatural*, *Doctor Who*, and *Sherlock* merged to form what is known as the SuperWhoLock fandom. This fandom has gained popularity over the past few years, and has garnered support on social media. A couple of the most talked about shows on the website Tumblr are *Sherlock* and *Doctor Who*, with popular actors Benedict Cumberbatch and Misha Collins being the most reblogged on Tumblr (Ulaby). This is a fairly new fan base, however, and has not been discussed as a whole, despite their impact on social media. While the separate fan bases have been discussed by scholars, the only people who notice this new fan base are those who go on Twitter, Tumblr, and Facebook. As the fandom grows, however, it continues to impact the shows involved. It brings a new face to the modern fan base and shows how super-fandoms may grow in the future.

The SuperWhoLock fandom is a discourse community with the common goal of promoting and discussing *Supernatural*, *Doctor Who*, and *Sherlock*, even when a show is not currently airing.



Figure 1: Popular SuperWhoLock picture posted online

You do not have to like all three shows to be a member of the fandom, but most members do. Members post texts that discuss main ideas about the show, the character, and the actors. They also

post pictures and gifs relevant to all three shows. Oftentimes these pictures are accompanied by captions that show the fan's reaction to the pictures and the underlying themes related to it. To promote the show, members try to share it as much as possible, using hashtags to get the show to trend on Twitter.

This fandom communicates with its' members using social media, with the majority of the fandom using the social media website Tumblr. Because Tumblr is a public website, often people who are not in the fandom can see the posts as well, which helps with promotion. This also helps spread the news of events, interviews, and any new episodes that may be airing.

The SuperWhoLock fandom uses social media to spread and promote shows that have become more and more popular over the past few years. With the rise of the SuperWhoLock fandom, it is evident that it is affecting not only social media, but also the reputation and ratings of *Supernatural*, *Doctor Who*, and *Sherlock*.

Methods

To learn about the SuperWhoLock fandom, I first found scholarly articles about the individual fan bases of each show. After learning about the individual fan bases and their impact, I looked for any scholarly articles that had to do with the SuperWhoLock fandom as a whole. However, I did not find any.

To learn about the members, I went onto social media and looked up “#SuperWhoLock,” “#Supernatural,” “#Sherlock,” and “#DoctorWho.” Then, I studied the specific posts that came out of each tag, what type of post it was, and the content. It was especially interesting to study the fan base after the airing of the *Sherlock* season three finale and during the weeks when there would be a hiatus in *Supernatural*. The websites I studied were Twitter, Facebook, and Tumblr to see what was posted about *Supernatural*, *Doctor Who*, and *Sherlock*. After observing each post, my attention turned to specific SuperWhoLock blogs. The Tumblr blogs I observed were *theonamedwinchester*, *tinkertailersoldierspy*, *moofasa*, and *keep-the-fxing-faith*.

As well as observing the SuperWhoLock fandom, I was also interested in collecting information from members about their experience in the fandom. To do this, I created the website *ashleysuperwholockproject.tumblr.com* and asked for submissions answering questions related to their experience in the SuperWhoLock fandom, how long they had been a member, and what they believed impacts the show. As of April 2nd, 2014, I had three submissions from *tubajedi*, *heavymetalinmyveins*, and *hophopheroinex*. In addition to the submissions, I had two Tumblr posts regarding whether or not they felt the SuperWhoLock fandom was negatively or positively affecting Tumblr, with users reblogging the post they agreed with. For those who were not a member of the community, I created a survey meant for those who may interact with fans of the show to gauge their reaction to the show and the fandom itself. As of April 3, 2014, 31 people had taken the survey on *surveymonkey.com*.

How the SuperWhoLock Fandom Communicates

The main sources of communication for the SuperWhoLock fandom are social media websites like Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr. While Tumblr is the most important source of communication, there are many fan sites dedicated to SuperWhoLock on Twitter and Facebook. On Twitter, actors Misha Collins (@mishacollins) and Jared Padalecki (@jarpad) help members of the *Supernatural*-side of the fandom figure out what is going to happen on future episodes and entertain them with the antics of the main actors of the show. Many people on Twitter consider themselves to be members of the SuperWhoLock fandom, and dedicate their account to tweeting about the three shows. When the season three premiere of *Sherlock* occurred, the show and its characters trended on Twitter. The same is true for many episodes of *Supernatural*. Twitter is also a good place to promote events and get them trending. During the weekends, oftentimes popular fan

pages will host marathons of one of the three shows in order to watch the show and discuss as a group. These fan pages will come up with hashtags to help the event trend. Once the event is trending, word will spread and people who may not have heard of it on Tumblr can join in after seeing it on Twitter.

On Facebook, all three shows have millions of “likes” on their official Facebook page. *Supernatural* has 14 million “likes,” *Sherlock* has 3 million, and *Doctor Who* has 4 million. These official pages give the average fan a glimpse as to what is going to appear next on an episode, as well as promos and videos that may not be seen on TV or on the official website. Last week, *Supernatural*’s Facebook page offered fans a chance to interact with Misha Collins, one of the stars of the show. This helps fans get answers to the questions they often discuss on message boards. In addition to these pages, there are many “SuperWhoLock” pages that post pictures and screenshots of funny and cute SuperWhoLock pictures.

Tumblr and the SuperWhoLock Fandom

Tumblr is the main source of communication between members of the SuperWhoLock fandom. Members of the community communicate with each other by following blogs relevant to the SuperWhoLock fandom, and reblogging their posts. The blogs that a user follows is not public; however, a user is notified when they are followed. That way, if a SuperWhoLock user is followed by another member of the community, they can follow back and see other posts relevant to the fandom. This is often called a “mutual follow” and it helps members of the community see the latest posts about *Supernatural*, *Doctor Who*, and *Sherlock* and anything that promotes them.

The second way to communicate on Tumblr is through reblogs. When users reblog a post, they show it to their followers and add it to their blog. This helps promote artwork, gifs, and pictures related to the SuperWhoLock fandom. Also, many popular users use Tumblr to communicate events and contests that are going on with either the CW or individual events. Whenever the fandom wants to get together and re-watch episodes, a popular user will create an event and promote it by posting and re-posting it onto their Tumblr. That way, other users will reblog it onto their blogs, and when the event or giveaway happens, almost everyone in the fandom is aware of it. An example of this would be an “Angel Rewatch” event centered around *Supernatural* character Castiel, scheduled for March 8th and 9th. Word spread quickly around Tumblr about the event, starting from many popular SuperWhoLock blogs and spreading to non-popular SuperWhoLock blogs.

Because the majority of SuperWhoLock members communicate on Tumblr, what is re-posted and what is popular with fans shows a lot about the fan base as a whole. Benedict Cumberbatch and Misha Collins are considered sweethearts to most of the Tumblr community, and on April 1st, 2013, members of the community added Misha Collins’ face to any post possible, an event called the “mishapocalypse” (see Figure 2.) The event was so popular that Misha Collins tweeted, “This #mishapocalypse is worse than an ordinary apocalypse. I’ve signed up for facial identity surgery so I never have to see that face again.”



Figure 2: This is a picture posted during the mishapocalypse.

This April Fool's prank was planned out and executed by the SuperWhoLock fandom. This shows that there are many members of this fan base, and that they have an impact on the website.

However, many members of the fandom stated that the mishapocalypse could be a negative side effect of the fandom, since it is like spamming someone. Another aspect of the fandom's popularity is the amount of gifs from the shows that are added to non-fandom text posts. All of the Tumblr users interviewed agree that oftentimes when someone outside of the community makes a text post, a member inside of the community will add a "reaction gif" from *Supernatural*, *Doctor Who*, or *Sherlock*. A "reaction gif" is a gif that is posted to show a Tumblr user's reaction to a text post or picture, often using funny movies and TV shows to add to the original post. Many Tumblr users who are not a part of the SuperWhoLock fandom use *Doctor Who*, *Sherlock*, and *Supernatural* gifs to add to original text posts, which helps spread awareness of the series.

The blogs I studied showed the same type of text that is common within different fan bases: gifs of the episodes and pictures of the actors involved in the shows. One user, tinkertailersoldierspy1976, only posted gifs and pictures from the most recent episodes of *Supernatural* and *Sherlock*. Other users have reblogged this user's posts, adding the latest *Supernatural* and *Sherlock* gifs to add to their profile, even if they were not members of the fandom. This helps make the shows well known to all members of the Tumblr community, and if the posts are popular enough, they make more people interact with the SuperWhoLock fandom. Since Tumblr is a public forum, everything posted is public for the entire website to see. However, since only certain blogs are followed, it is possible to avoid what is posted by the SuperWhoLock fandom. Many members just follow specific blogs that post nothing but content relevant to the fandom, and other members take part in other related groups with similar postings. Many people outside of the fandom can also see these posts through the blogs that users outside the fandom follow. Since people outside of the fandom will reblog a funny post from somebody inside of the fandom, members of the general public will oftentimes see a post relating to *Doctor Who*, *Sherlock*, or *Supernatural*. This shows that on Tumblr, people from outside the fandom are able to get involved with the shows, which increases their popularity and awareness towards both SuperWhoLock and the shows that the fans love so much.

Impact of the SuperWhoLock Fandom

With any entertainment medium, the fandom plays a large role in not only how the TV show is made and if it is aired, but how people perceive it. One of the ways that the SuperWhoLock fandom impacts social media is by changing how people perceive the show. According to a survey on Tumblr, 34 out of 37 people say that the SuperWhoLock fandom has had a positive impact on the website (ashleysuperwholockproject). While Tumblr is a SuperWhoLock-friendly website, another survey indicated that over 70% of the people surveyed believe that the fandom has a "positive" or "neutral" effect on social media, and 100% of the people surveyed go on all different types of social media. Both of these show that a fandom can influence how people perceive a show on social media, since many people use the fandom to determine what they think of a show. Tumblr user tubajedi agrees with this notion, saying, "If someone hasn't seen one of the shows in the trio and sees how the rest of us treat that show, they may be interested in checking it out." According to hophopheroinex, "People nowadays judge an entire group by a few numbers. So if one were to encounter two pricks from a fandom. . . well—there you go a fandom judged and overgeneralised without looking at the entire picture" (hophopheroinex). This shows that the way that people perceive a fandom can often correlate with how people perceive a show, and if the fandom is perceived well enough, it will help affect ratings and the overall popularity of a show. Over the past few years, the *Supernatural* side of the fandom has been growing, with the show now having as many "likes" on Facebook as NCIS, even though NCIS is much more popular (Ulaby 1). The

SuperWhoLock fandom has the power to bring awareness to all three shows, as well as the power to change how people perceive the shows, both on and off of social media.

Another way that the SuperWhoLock fandom impacts their shows is by changing the way the show is written, and adding different plotlines to the shows. Elisabeth Reh, in her article, "A Study In Gender: BBC's Sherlock and Gender Identities in the Transmedia Fandom," mentions how the *Sherlock* side of the fandom changes the gender identities of a story passed down over generations. Reh argues that BBC's adaptation changes the masculinity of the main character and breaks it down for the fans of the show. She also argues that fanfiction helps depict Sherlock Holmes in a different light than originally created, saying, "A large number of the fandom members are female while the series itself deconstructs traditional images of masculine identity" (Reh 3). Reh says that Watson and Sherlock were meant to be very masculine characters, but in a feminine-based fandom the characters have changed, including the sexuality of Watson and Sherlock: "Furthermore, a fact appearing in every episode of the series, people tend to think that Watson and Holmes are a homosexual couple. Although Watson denies this vehemently, there are some hints in the series the impression that the detective and his companion have a relationship or at least have a *very* close friendship" (Reh 6). SuperWhoLock is changing how Sherlock is perceived compared to how he was in past adaptations, and showing how a feminine fandom can change the masculinity of certain characters. This is often caused by how social media portrays the characters, and how they feel the characters should interact. Many Tumblr users write fanfiction and create art that depicts the characters in a different way than originally intended by the writers. Sherlock is no longer the same character he was in the original story, and the main reason for this is the power of the SuperWhoLock fandom. On *Supernatural*, often the fandom is written back into the storyline. During the episode "The Real Ghostbusters," Sam and Dean arrive at a convention dedicated to a series of books called *Supernatural*, based off of their own lives. Sam and Dean then have to deal with people who are dressing like them, much like real-life *Supernatural* conventions. This shows how the writers of the show are aware of the SuperWhoLock fandom, and that they will write it into the show's plot, which is extremely unusual. This connects to Reh's main point that the writers will reflect upon how the fan base wants the characters to behave, which ultimately impacts how the show is written and how the characters develop.

Despite their small size, the SuperWhoLock fandom has had a large impact on social media and bringing awareness to their shows. According to a NPR article, where the *Supernatural* fandom lacks size it makes up for in passion and dedication towards the show. The author discusses how a show with very low Nielsen ratings manages to have such a large impact on social media: "Its Nielsen ratings are, frankly, not that great. Yet *Supernatural* has lasted for nine seasons (so far), partly because its fan base makes up in engagement what it lacks in size" (Ulaby 1). Even though, ratings-wise, not a lot of people watch *Supernatural*, the fandom has shown to be relevant on social media by constantly posting pictures and gifs about the show to be shared and reblogged by others. Even popular authors are known to write SuperWhoLock fanfiction, because of the anonymity of fanfiction websites: "And *Supernatural* fan fiction has been penned by no less of a literary personage than S.E. Hilton, who's much better known for authoring classic young adult novels, including *The Outsiders* and *That Was Then, This Is Now*" (Ulaby 1). This shows that even well-known figures can get involved with fandoms and communicate the goal of the community. 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.

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Conclusion

Entertainment mediums always have a fan base that is dedicated to what they love to watch or listen to. Oftentimes, these types of groups communicate with each other to discuss why they love TV shows, music, and movies. The impact of fandoms is studied through and through, but nobody has studied the impact of a super-fandom. The SuperWhoLock fandom is a new super-fandom that has helped bridge the gap between three fandoms that before had nothing to do with each other, and now have a large impact on social media. Even though the shows themselves have small ratings, SuperWhoLock has garnered a large support on social media and has become well-known because of the posts that are made on Tumblr and other types of social media.

The SuperWhoLock fandom is an example of how three small fandoms can come together and build up a fan following for different TV shows. Most of the 31 people surveyed have admitted that they knew someone involved with the SuperWhoLock fandom, and most of it relates to how much relevance the SuperWhoLock fandom has on social media. Fandoms can affect not only their own reputation, but also how their own shows are impacted and even how they are written.

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