

# The effects of aging on the well-known sherlock holmes



A commonality among most of the human race is the fear of what aging does to the body. Crafting a character famous for a sharp mind, not for bodily infirmity, Arthur Conan Doyle brought Sherlock Holmes to life and into the homes of many through his creative story telling. Holmes is known for his excessive brilliance and arrogant personality which tended to set him apart from the crowd. Mitch Cullin's "A Slight Trick of the Mind," shows the reader that even Sherlock Holmes experiences the indicators of one getting older. Mitch Cullin brings back an aged Holmes to show the reader the devastating effects of old age on the things most important in one's life. Holmes's very identity—defined by his intellect, work, and relationships—all suffer irredeemable blows with his increasing memory loss.

Cullin's novel is placed in Sussex, England long after Holmes' retirement. The reader is introduced to Holmes' longtime fascination, beekeeping, in more depth. Along with the reintroduction of the bees, the reader is also acquainted with his caretaker and her son. Throughout the novel, the story of Holmes' retirement is laid out as he works to remember the events that took place. Along with the overlying story, the reader experiences Holmes' learning to love and care for others; a trait he seems to grasp as he gets closer to the end of his life. Cullin portrays any person dealing with elderly symptoms through the well-known and publicly riveted Sherlock Holmes.

Holmes, in his prime, was seen as a man with "sharp and piercing" eyes along with a "thin, hawk-like nose [that] gave his whole expression in air of alertness and decision" (Doyle, vol. 1, 11). His features matched his intellect in being both sharp and striking. He was also commonly explained as having "ignorance...as remarkable as his knowledge" due to his lack of trust in

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anyone's judgment but his own (Doyle, vol. 1, 12). Throughout Doyle's creation, Holmes was always on his feet, one of the rather exciting aspects of himself for the reader. He was always one step ahead of other characters no matter the situation, which is what led to him having an intriguing nature about him. Sherlock's intellect was above the rest, causing his brain to appear almost un-human when compared to others.

During one of his mysteries, Holmes explains his intellect in comparison to a more simple-minded human by saying with "most people, if [someone describes] a train of events to them, they will tell you what the result would be" (André, 117). This meaning that they would be able to put events together in their mind and from that information come to a conclusion. Holmes argues that different from this, "there are a few people (like himself), [where] if [someone] told them a result, [they] would be able to evolve from their own inner consciousness what the steps were which led up to that result" (André, 117). By this, he is saying that these people are able to use analytical reasoning to uncover the steps that led to the resulting factor. His deductive skills were better than any other within the occupation and he took great pride in that.

Cullin, fast-forwarding the reader many years in the future, starts his story by introducing a 93-year-old Sherlock Holmes. Holmes is described as "[using] two canes, his body [remaining] unbowed, and [that] the passing of years hadn't dimmed his keen gray eyes, [and his new} snow-white hair, (was) thick and long, like his beard," creating a different visual for the readers than what was described in Sherlock's earlier adventures (Cullin, 3).

As Holmes has gotten older, he talks about his loss of loved ones and the <https://assignbuster.com/the-effects-of-aging-on-the-well-known-sherlock-holmes/>

impact and regret he has from those fallen relationships. He lost two dear friends a short time apart; “ Dr. Watson (was) someone who had passed beyond his kin... coupled with the recent loss of Mrs. Hudson” which led to what “ felt like a door slamming abruptly shut on everything that had previously shaped him” causing him to feel alone in the world (Cullin, 194).

The reader can see a once arrogant man, has become more humble hearted in his hope to keep anyone around through is last years. Cullin shows how age can affect ones desire for company and ability to ask for help. Sherlock becomes aware of his newfound inabilities that somehow, others around him are able to do; for example his slow pace and his weak limbs. He, as a character, needs to learn to make adjustments within his personality to help welcome these changes. Though these changes are significant, he is still known to the world as the brilliant Sherlock Holmes, causing his job life to deteriorate as well.

Sherlock Holmes, in Doyle’s creations, was always better than the rest. As discussed above, he used his analytical deductive skills to help solve these seemingly impossible crimes. In the stories, he is commonly reached out to over the police force due to his ability to take the case to the extra step it needs to be solved. One thing that was unique of Holmes was his memory capabilities. In a psychological study of the character of Sherlock, the author compares the novice to the expert. In terms of deduction they claim “ experts set themselves apart from novices by their knowledge and long-term memory (LTM) organization” (André, 111). Within their example they explain that an experts “ superiority comes from the nature and organization of their knowledge... [and how it is] acquired and reorganized in memory as <https://assignbuster.com/the-effects-of-aging-on-the-well-known-sherlock-holmes/>

expertise develops” (André, 111). This article helps support the fact that Holmes had a special mind in relation to others around him. Sherlock Holmes was built to be a detective. Similar to this, in Doyle’s words, Holmes’s deductive skills are “one of the peculiarities of his proud, self-contained nature... [where he] docketed any fresh information very quietly and accurately in his brain” remembering every small detail he came across within the case (Doyle, 1035). Holmes’s career not only defined his personality but also gave him a place to be himself. As the years progressed, he lost touch with that side of himself due to his uncontrollable memory loss.

Cullin wrote his novel as a reflection of Sherlock’s scattered memory. He never writes a story to its entirety before switching to the next plot. This gives the illusion that Sherlock is trying trigger memories to any one of the storylines. In the movie branch of this novel, Mr. Holmes, Sherlock is shown with progressive memory loss when his doctor assigns him the task of making a dot in a book for every name or event he forgets throughout a single day. When looking back at the notebook later in the film, the viewers notice that the number of dots on a page increase significantly at a rapid pace. These two examples help to show how his memory loss was best projected to the audience.

One of the major storylines within the plot was one involving Holmes’ last case as an independent detective. He spends the entire novel searching for clues and answers as to why he decided on retirement and how he, at one time, was able to deduct clues so quickly. There is a part in the book, as stated by Mitch Cullin in an interview, where Sherlock gets off of the plane in Japan and realizes that forty years ago, he would’ve picked up on so many

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details within his surroundings, where today he was just taking in the beauty (“Sherlock’s”). As Holmes’ memory gets worse, he is often found crying out “I don’t know” and “I haven’t got a clue” to himself as he is trying to find answers that are no longer there (Cullin, 120). The progressiveness of his symptoms and his reaction to them help show how this loss is affecting his love of deduction. He can try his best but it is shown in the novel that he isn’t as sharp as he once was. But with the loss of his memory, he began creating relationships that without the need for help; he would not have been able to create.

In Sherlock Holmes’ earlier years, the detective often came off as a stubborn man. He was far more intelligent than others, so that he had a difficult time relating to them. He often made fun of people and their simplistic comments. When it came to relationships in general, he struggled to make that connection. In “The Sign of Four,” Sherlock is quoted saying that “love is an emotional thing, and whatever is emotional is opposed to that true cold reason which [he places] above all things” (Doyle, 157). Here Sherlock explains his little need for any sort of love being that he has cold hard reasoning to put his effort into. Even when Sherlock and his brother Mycroft are together in stories, there is more of a competitive chemistry between the two than anything. Sherlock always has to be the best at what he does. Throughout all of the stories of Sherlock Holmes, he is seen as having only a few relationships that he approves of. These include John Watson, Mycroft, and his one true love, Irene Adler.

Watson and Holmes met while looking for a place to stay. Upon meeting each other and every day after that, Holmes continued to amaze Watson.  
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This amazement gave Holmes a thrill he continued to strive for which also allowed him to accept Watson and his above average, but below his own, intellect. His second known friend also happens to be his brother, Mycroft. Mycroft and Holmes look out for one another throughout the stories but are also highly competitive between the two. They enjoy being around each other because unlike others, they are able to mentally challenge each other. Holmes' third friend or more of a love interest is Irene Adler. It is quoted in "A Scandal in Bohemia" that "to Sherlock Holmes she was the woman" (Doyle, vol. 1, 240). He was infatuated with her and the way her brain worked but due to work related instances the two were unable to continue growing that relationship. So, Sherlock had a few close friends but other than that was not able to develop other strong connections. But as he got older, he discovered that those tight relationships were all that really mattered.

Holmes, in his later years, is shown to have lost everyone he had once had in his life, this including his dear friend Watson and his brother Mycroft. The reader though, is still able to see what a struggle it is for Sherlock to create any form of relationship. He has a housekeeper that lives with him named Mrs. Munro along with her son Roger. Both do not tend to get along with each other very well. Sherlock is seen at the beginning of the novel, being annoyed with her presence and even scowling at her to leave. Mrs. Munro on the other hand, sees Holmes' aging as more of a burden and is not interested in dealing with it. She isn't always caring towards him when he seems to be having a bad day but rather tells her son "he's in a queer mood... (and only the) Lord knows why" (Cullin, 197). They bicker back and forth, but Holmes is thankful for her presence.

Though his relationship with Mrs. Munro is rocky, he develops a solid fathering/grandfathering relationship with Roger saying that “ he rarely enjoyed the company of children, (but) it was difficult avoiding the parental strings he harbored for Mrs. Munro’s son”(Cullin, 12). Roger takes up an interest in Holmes “ spying on him from the garden pathways” and anywhere else he can, just to learn how to deduct like he can (Cullin, 197). Through meeting the boy, Sherlock learns the meaning of love and caring for someone other than himself. The two shared an interest in both investigation and a unique love for bees. When Roger is injured caring for Holmes’ bees, Sherlock experiences a new emotion wondering “ why...the tears (had) come...(and) why while resting in bed, then pacing the study, then going to the bee yard the next morning... did [he] find his head touched by his own hands and his fingertips wetted” (Cullin, 191). He experiences an overwhelming sense of sadness being that the boy was injured, something he had never cared enough to feel before. Holmes, due to his old age, was able to let people close to him that he wouldn’t have normally allowed. Age helped open his eyes past his originally restricted vision.

Between Doyle’s and Cullin’s versions of Sherlock Holmes, there are few but extreme differences between the characters. Holmes displays changes to his physical and mental state as he ages over the years causing how he treats himself and others to change significantly. Though Holmes will always be stubborn, he became more welcoming to outsiders as his years went on. He realized that he is not any better than anyone else and that he needed to accept help when it was given. He learned to move on from the past and to create new relationships with ones he thought of as important. Overall



Cullin's story shows that with old age, Holmes became a more humane person. He was able to use his past experiences as reference to change his future.