

How Has the Portrayal of Women on the Television Series *Doctor Who* Evolved from 1963 to 2019?

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Abstract

This essay examines the question, "How has the portrayal of women on the television series Doctor Who evolved from 1963 to 2019?" First, the universe of Doctor Who and all its complexities are established, explaining how the show has lasted as long as it has with a revolving cast of characters. In addition, this essay defines the portrayal of a character and what that entails. This essay then delves into the lives and personalities of six major female characters on the show. They include Susan Foreman, Sarah Jane Smith, Ace, Rose Tyler, Amy Pond, and the Thirteenth Doctor. Their actions, words, and character developments are all scrutinized and examined in this essay. Eventually, it becomes apparent that the role of women in the series has evolved and expanded. Over time, they are given more chances to be independent and have storylines outside of their relationships with male characters, especially the Doctor. They make decisions for themselves and challenge the Doctor on his actions and views on the universe. Eventually, women on the show take the lead, which is made apparent by the recent casting of the show's first female Doctor. By the end of this essay, the conclusion is reached that the role of women on Doctor Who has evolved by allowing these characters to have bigger parts and more complex backgrounds. Furthermore, women on the show can carry their own storylines and are not controlled by other characters' decisions or relationships with them.

Introduction

“An Unearthly Child” — the first episode of *Doctor Who* — premiered on 23 November 1963. It was advertised as “an adventure in time and space” in British TV listings, starring William Hartnell as The Doctor.¹ It was met with generally favorable reviews and was given a “Reaction Index of 63” out of 100. This was close to then-current averages for the premieres of television dramas (sixty-two) and children’s television shows (sixty-four). Additionally, it was described as a “cross between Well’s Time Machine and a space-age Old Curiosity Shop, with a touch of Mack Sennett comedy” as well as praised for being “written imaginatively enough to appeal to adult minds and would, no doubt, prove to be quite intriguing as it progressed.”²

These findings proved that the BBC was headed in the right direction with *Doctor Who*, so the company acted accordingly. However, no one could have predicted just how far the show would go. Today, the show reaches millions of people with every episode. In fact, the premiere of the reboot-series’ Season 11 – on 7 October 2018 – averaged about 8.2 million viewers alone.³ In addition, as of 2006, it holds the Guinness World Record for being the longest-running science fiction television show.⁴

This is all possible thanks to the unique traits of the show’s main character, the Doctor. He is part of the alien race Time-Lords from the planet Gallifrey and possesses the ability to regenerate into a new person instead of dying.⁵ As a result, the show can continue with an ever-changing cast of characters. The one constant, however, is the Doctor’s spaceship called the TARDIS, which stands for “Time and Relative Dimension in Space.” In essence, it can travel anywhere in all of time and history, which allows the Doctor to go on many wild and daring adventures. Furthermore, he often has companions that travel with him—usually female ones. These companions change along with the Doctor, sometimes leaving him and other times getting left behind. This unique aspect then allows for the show’s longevity.

Consequently, over the years, *Doctor Who* has gone through quite a few changes. As society evolves, so does its culture, which includes television shows. The role of its female characters has arguably changed the most, made especially apparent with the

¹ “Radio Times’ TV listing,” *The Radio Times*, November 23 1963, www.bbc.co.uk/archive/doctor-who/6405.shtml.

² “An Audience Research Report,” *British Broadcasting Company*, 30 December 1963, www.bbc.co.uk/archive/doctorwho/6406.shtml.

³ Hannah Mays, “Jodie Whittaker’s Doctor Who debut is most watched launch for 10 years,” *The Guardian*, 8 October 2018, www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2018/oct/08/doctor-who-jodie-whittakers-debut-is-most-watched-launch-for-10-years..

⁴ Beth McLoughlin, “Doctor Who named longest-running sci-fi TV show,” *Campaign*, 29 September 2006, www.campaignlive.co.uk/article/doctor-named-longest-running-sci-fi-tv-show/595605..

⁵ Jason Lobořík, *Doctor Who: Character Encyclopedia* (London: DK Publishers, 2013), 4.

recent casting of Jodie Whittaker as the first female Doctor.⁶ Character portrayals depend on various factors, but they are most influenced by the society within which they are created.

By definition, a portrayal is “the way that someone or something is described or represented in a painting, film, book, or other artistic work.”⁷ Therefore, analyzing the portrayals of various female characters from *Doctor Who* would allow for one to see how they have, or have not, changed over time. This would then lead to a deeper understanding of the show’s place and purpose within today’s culture.

The Beginning: Susan Foreman

From 1963 to 1964, Susan Foreman was the First Doctor’s first companion and his granddaughter. She was played by Carole Ann Ford and was typified as an ordinary teenager, meant to give younger viewers someone with whom to identify.⁸ Beyond that, her character did not have much of a personality. Ford even complained that she was a frustrating character to play because Susan was never allowed to develop or grow.⁹ This was mostly because she played the role of the damsel in distress, waiting for the Doctor to rescue her, having “little to do other than look pretty and frightened.”¹⁰

After fifty-one episodes, Susan Foreman left the Doctor, or rather, the Doctor left her. She fell in love with a man named David Campbell, a resistance fighter from the 22nd Century.¹¹ She wanted to be with him but also desired to stay and take care of her aging grandfather. The Doctor, on the other hand, believed that it would be selfish of him to let her do so. In order to let her live her own life, as he believed was best, he locked her out of the TARDIS. After a tearful farewell, the Doctor left, and Susan remained on Earth to begin a new life with David.¹²

Thus, it is clear that, at least at first, female characters did not have much of a role to play in *Doctor Who*. Susan Foreman was more of an audience stand-in at best or a one-dimensional, token sidekick at worst. The fact that, in the end, she did not even get to choose to leave, the Doctor is supportive of this interpretation. In essence, he took away her agency, deciding he knew what was best for her, while she did not. Thus, the portray-

⁶ Camilla Turner, “Doctor Who: Jodie Whittaker becomes 13th Time Lord, urging fans ‘not to be scared by my gender,’” *The Telegraph*, 17 July 2017, www.telegraph.co.uk/tv/2017/07/16/doctor-jodie-whittaker-replace-peter-capaldi-time-lord-regeneration/.

⁷ “Portrayal,” *Cambridge Dictionary*, Cambridge University Press, dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/portrayal.

⁸ James Chapman, *Inside the TARDIS: The Worlds of Doctor Who* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 23.

⁹ Benjamin Cook, “Who on Earth is... Carole Ann Ford,” *Doctor Who Magazine*, December 2010, web.archive.org/web/20140322111800/http://benjamincook.net/writing/doctor-who-magazine/interviews-and-articles/who-on-earth-is/carole-ann-ford/.

¹⁰ Chapman, *Inside the TARDIS*, 23.

¹¹ Chapman, *Inside the TARDIS*, 23.

¹² Lobarik, *Doctor Who: Character Encyclopedia*, 173.

al of Susan Foreman shows that female characters were not vital contributors to *Doctor Who*'s storyline early on in the series.

The Redefinition: Sarah Jane Smith

The next major female character came in the form of Sarah Jane Smith, played by Elisabeth Sladen from 1973 to 1976. She was a companion to the Third and Fourth Doctors and quickly became a huge fan favorite.¹³ This is in part because she broke from the traditional female companion role; instead of being yet another damsel in distress, Sarah Jane was a feisty investigative journalist.¹⁴ After her first meeting with the Doctor, she sneaked onto the TARDIS and followed him to the Middle Ages in order to discover the whereabouts of several missing scientists.¹⁵

This firecracker spirit often led her into more than a few sticky situations, but she and the Doctor always managed to make it out, forming a strong bond along the way. They were so close, in fact, that Sarah Jane never quite recovered after the Doctor left her on Earth with no explanation or warning.¹⁶ This would not be the last people saw of her, though. The character's popularity eventually led to a lead role in one of the rebooted series' episodes, "School Reunion," alongside David Tennant's Tenth Doctor. Not long after, she earned a show of her own with *The Sarah Jane Adventures*.¹⁷

This expanded universe brought with it added praise and analysis of the character. Elisabeth Sladen felt that Sarah Jane "was the kind of character that [people] needed at that time. So she took on the companion that had to be for the series and the companion that [people] wanted."¹⁸ Another explanation offered up to explain the character's popularity is that her "jolly-hockey-sticks good nature" made her the most beloved of all.¹⁹ In fact, even one of the show's writers admitted that Sarah Jane was his favorite. In an interview, Toby Whithouse noted that she "redefined the role of the companion. And there are elements of Sarah Jane Smith that you can see in every companion afterward... She changed the companion from being a rather helpless hysteric to being a feisty, opinionated, strong equal to the Doctor."²⁰

Overall, these elements all help to typify Sarah Jane Smith. This character

¹³ Martin Barber, "Doctor Who: Elisabeth Sladen talks," *BBC*, 22 August 2006, www.bbc.co.uk/norfolk/content/articles/2006/04/19/film_doctor_who_lis_sladen_interview_feature.shtml.

¹⁴ Daniel Martin, "Doctor Who: the five best and worst companions," *The Guardian*, 28 March 2007, www.theguardian.com/culture/tvandradioblog/2007/mar/28/doctorwhothefivebestandw.

¹⁵ Loberik, *Doctor Who: Character Encyclopedia*, 153.

¹⁶ Loberik, *Doctor Who: Character Encyclopedia*, 153.

¹⁷ Martin, "Doctor Who: the five best and worst companions."

¹⁸ Barber, "Doctor Who: Elisabeth Sladen talks."

¹⁹ Martin, "Doctor Who: the five best and worst companions."

²⁰ Kevin Wicks, "Interview: Toby Whithouse on Cast Changes for 'Being Human,' 'Doctor Who,'" *BBC America*, www.bbcamerica.com/anglophenia/2012/02/interview-toby-whithouse-on-cast-changes-for-being-human-doctor-who/2/.

broke down barriers in terms of what it meant to be a companion, which has especially resonated with audiences even to this day. Her adventures continued even after her tenure on the original series ended, adding more stories to the continuously expanding *Doctor Who* universe. Boundless admiration for Sarah Jane shows that her influence expands further than almost any other character's, besides the Doctor himself.

Thus, with all this evidence, it is clear that the role of female characters on *Doctor Who* changed during the time of Sarah Jane Smith. Gone were the days of helpless companions, and in came a new era of independent, strong-willed women. However, it is important to note that there were still some similarities between her and previous characters. Sarah Jane did not choose to leave the Doctor, but was instead left behind, just like Susan Foreman; things were not as starkly different as they appeared to be. Nevertheless, this should not detract from the progress made by Elisabeth Sladen's portrayal of the iconic Sarah Jane Smith.

The Modernization: Ace

Towards the end of the original series of *Doctor Who*, another female companion was introduced who would become especially popular with audiences. Her name was Ace, and she was portrayed by Sophie Aldred from 1987 to 1989. Ace also proved to be a break from the traditional companion template, often being cited as the "first companion [audiences] all either knew, could be, or could spot on the street."²¹ In addition, her background was particularly unique; Ace had a rough relationship with her mother and lost a friend at a young age. This later resulted in her developing an intense, rebellious streak and a penchant for blowing things up.²² Up until this point, characters like Ace had never been placed in the public eye before. As Sophie Aldred put it, "there were no equivalent young female roles on television who were doing realistic, down-to-earth, tomboyish things," which made the character particularly revolutionary during that time.²³

One moment that best exemplifies Ace's unique personality is when she is confronted by Daleks, machine-like aliens that are the Doctor's worst enemy. Instead of running away scared, or screaming for help, she takes matters into her own hands and beats up one of them with a baseball bat.²⁴ No character on the show had done this before or has since, marking a truly distinctive moment in *Doctor Who* history. Moreover, Ace is the only arsonist to have traveled with the Doctor; she even created her own special

²¹ Andrew Younger, "Doctor Who: how Ace set the template for modern companions," *Den of Geek*, 5 January 2015, www.denofgeek.com/tv/doctor-who/33496/doctor-who-how-ace-set-the-template-for-modern-companions.

²² Martin Barber, "Doctor Who: Ace visitor in Norwich," *BBC*, 4 February 2008, www.bbc.co.uk/norfolk/content/articles/2008/02/04/doctor_who_sophie_albred_20080204_feature.shtml.

²³ Barber, "Doctor Who: Ace visitor in Norwich."

²⁴ Lobarik, *Doctor Who: Character Encyclopedia*, 7.

explosive, which she named Nitro-9.²⁵ Despite these differences, she and the Seventh Doctor proved to be an explosively-dynamic team, being viewed as more of “a double act” than the typical “Doctor and [his] assistant” pairing audiences had become so accustomed.²⁶

Furthermore, the introduction of Ace brought other firsts to the television screen. This character enabled the show to bring up themes of “teenage angst, racism, and eventually sexual awakening... a notable first for not only *Doctor Who*, but all genre TV of that age.”²⁷ Additionally, while other female companions had been “a bit glam [and] girlie, [with] lots of screaming,” Ace got to wear Doc Martens and a bomber jacket, and hold her own during adventures.²⁸ She slowly became a separate entity from the Doctor, growing to be more than just his companion. Over the course of her time on *Doctor Who*, Ace embarked on a journey of her own, transforming from an “immature and emotionally scarred teenager... into a confident young woman.”²⁹ This evolution, however, extended beyond Ace’s character development.

The introduction of such a distinctive character as Ace marked the beginning of an era of more realistic, modernized characters on *Doctor Who*. Audiences began to see more and more of themselves in the people on their television screens, especially for those on the fringes of society. Ace not only laid the groundwork for later companions in the series but also displayed a maturity and fearlessness that was truly ahead of its time. She was allowed to develop in ways previous characters were not, could make decisions for herself, and progressed beyond what the Doctor wanted her to be. Thus, with Ace, the show entered a new era of storytelling that would change the portrayal of female characters on *Doctor Who* forever.

The Revival: Rose Tyler

After its almost two-decade-long hiatus, *Doctor Who* started up again in 2005. With it came an all-new cast, including the Ninth Doctor and his latest companion Rose Tyler, played by Billie Piper from 2005 to 2006. Meant to act as an audience surrogate to help introduce a new audience to the show, lead writer Russell T Davies chose the name because he felt it was “the most British name in the world” and wanted to subvert a recent trend of companions with boyish names, like Ace.³⁰ For many people on the show, it was important to showcase a truly authentic, quintessentially female character. Piper once said

²⁵ Loborik, *Doctor Who: Character Encyclopedia*, 7.

²⁶ Simon Brew, “The Den of Geek Interview: Sophie Aldred,” *Den of Geek*, 14 February 2008, www.denofgeek.com/tv/doctor-who/19406/the-den-of-geek-interview-sophie-aldred..

²⁷ Younger, “Ace set the template for modern companions.”

²⁸ Barber, “Doctor Who: Ace visitor in Norwich.”

²⁹ Younger, “Ace set the template for modern companions.”

³⁰ Benjamin Cook and Russell T. Davies, *The Writer’s Tale* (London: BBC Books, 2008), 24.

that “[Rose is] both strong-willed and vulnerable... that is a really healthy representation of women. Instead of showing a female character endlessly striving towards perfection, here, we saw a range of genuine female reactions. The show seemed to say, it is OK to cry [and] it is OK to question yourself.”³¹ This furtherment of genuine representations of female characters on the show also creates compelling role models for young girls. Christopher Eccleston, who portrayed the Ninth Doctor, added that “[s]o far there has been no heroine out there for eight to 12-year-old girls, but [Rose] is one... [Billie Piper] carries the series with me.”³²

Additionally, *Doctor Who* allowed Rose to be the Doctor’s equal. At one point, she absorbs deadly energy in order to save the Doctor from a huge fleet of Daleks.³³ In an analysis of this scene, script editor Helen Raynor felt it gave Rose a chance finally to match him with a gesture that is so noble, and strong, and heroic, and clever.” Russell T Davies also believed that this moment helped typify the character as being “braver than brave and more loyal than anyone else in the universe.”³⁴ She was willing to die in order to save his life. All of these characterizations proved to audiences that a female character is more than her pretty face, and can be a hero in her own right.

What really made Rose different, however, is that she started a trend of the Doctor’s companion developing a romantic interest in him. This especially came to the forefront of the show when the Doctor regenerated into his Tenth self, played by David Tennant. In an interview, Piper commented that there was a “different kind of energy” between the two characters, with Tennant adding that “the audience would get to see the Doctor-companion relationship [develop] and [become] something that it maybe [hadn’t] before.”³⁵ By the end of their series together, Rose admits to the Doctor that she loves him, but he does not get the chance to confess to her in return. In a commentary on this scene, writer Julie Gardner declared that she would “confirm to the world” that the Doctor was going to “say it back.”³⁶ Nevertheless, despite their relationship never coming to fruition, Rose and the Tenth Doctor set a precedent that remained throughout the

³¹ “Doctor who? The Time Lord’s companions since 2005 have their say,” *The Guardian*, 28 September 2013, www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2013/sep/28/doctor-who-companions-billie-piper-catherine-tate-karen-gillan.

³² Tom Bishop, “Revitalized Doctor Who takes off,” *BBC*, 9 March 2005, news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/4331559.stm.

³³ Lobarik, *Doctor Who: Character Encyclopedia*, 150.

³⁴ *Doctor Who Confidential*, series 1, episode 13, “The Last Battle,” directed by Gillane Seaborne, narrated by Simon Pegg, featuring Russell T. Davies, Christopher Eccleston, and Billie Piper, aired 18 June 2005, in broadcast syndication. BBC, 2012, DVD.

³⁵ “Q&A: David Tennant and Billie Piper,” *SFX*, 31 March 2006, web.archive.org/web/20060428090917/http://www.sfx.co.uk/features/q_and_a_david_tennant_and_billie_piper.

³⁶ *Doctor Who*, series 2, episode 13, “Doomsday Comemntary,” directed by Graeme Harper, written by Russell T. Davies, featuring David Tennant and Billie Piper, aired 8 July 2006, in broadcast syndication, BBC, 2009, DVD.

rebooted *Doctor Who* – of romance being a central theme of the show.

Altogether, Rose is arguably one of the best companions to create for the revival of *Doctor Who*. She was, like Ace, a realistic human being who did not need the Doctor to define herself to the audience. The Doctor and Rose were allowed to be equals, complementing each other in ways other companions were not quite able, due to the romantic subtext lining their interactions. Moreover, Rose became a role model for young girls in an era that lacked such characters. With all this to consider, it is clear that Billie Piper's distinctive portrayal helped cement Rose as one of the best companions of all time.

The Entanglement: Amy Pond

Amelia "Amy" Pond was portrayed by Karen Gillan from 2010 to 2012 and was introduced alongside the Eleventh Doctor in the fifth series of the rebooted *Doctor Who*. Right from the beginning, it is clear that this companion will be different from the rest, as the Doctor first meets Amy as a spunky seven-year-old girl. He has to leave not long after but assures her that he will be right back. In a way, he does keep this promise, though for the Doctor, it is five minutes, for Amy, it is twelve years. Throughout her childhood, she insists that the Doctor is real, but no one else believes her, leading to her treatment by several psychiatrists.³⁷ Thus, the Doctor does not influence Amy's life solely during their time together, but as she grows up as well. Gillan once noted that "[the audience is] really seeing her life pan out... [and watching] her grow up before [his or her] very eyes. She starts off as a little girl, then a young woman."³⁸ Amy goes through much more than her previous counterparts, with the Doctor affecting her worldview and beliefs into adulthood. She is much less trusting and more cynical than other people, developing a tough exterior as a result.³⁹ Thus, Amy became the first companion to be so all-encompassingly influenced by the Doctor.

Additionally, Amy was engaged by the time she started exploring time and space. With previous companions, their romantic relationships became secondary concerns once the Doctor entered their lives. However, Amy's relationship with her fiancé Rory strengthened, once he started traveling with them; eventually, the audience even saw them get married.⁴⁰ As a result, Amy began to break the mold of the Doctor's

³⁷ *Doctor Who*, series 5, episode 1, "The Eleventh Hour," directed by Adam Smith, written by Steven Moffat, featuring Matt Smith and Karen Gillan, aired 3 April 2010, in broadcast syndication, BBC, 2010, DVD.

³⁸ Todd VanDerWerff, "Karen Gillan," *The A.V. Club*, 25 August 2011, tv.avclub.com/karen-gillan-1798227152.

³⁹ *Doctor Who Confidential*, series 5, episode 1, "Call Me the Doctor," directed by Gillane Seaborne, narrated by Alex Price, featuring Steven Moffat, Matt Smith, and Karen Gillan, aired 3 April 2010, in broadcast syndication, BBC, 2010, DVD.

⁴⁰ Chris Haydon, "Doctor Who: the evolution of Amy Pond," *Den of Geek*, 7 September 2011, www.denofgeek.com/tv/doctor-who/20937/doctor-who-the-evolution-of-amy-pond.

companions, developing a romantic interest in him. She even had a child with Rory, named Melody.⁴¹ However, the Doctor still impacted Amy's life, despite her creating one outside of his travels. For one, since Melody was conceived on the TARDIS, she became a Time-Lady in her own right, with regeneration powers akin to the Doctor's. Melody was also kidnapped and brainwashed to kill the Doctor, losing contact with her parents. Furthermore, since she also changed her appearance when she regenerated, it was eventually revealed that Melody was River Song, another traveling companion of the Doctor's that Amy and Rory had met before.⁴² Moreover, when Amy and the Doctor met when she was a child, there was a crack in the space-time continuum in her bedroom, which he investigates. By the end of the fifth series, it turns out that Amy is connected to the cracks, with them being formed in an explosion on her wedding day.⁴³ Thus, it becomes clear that Amy is also unique in that her connection to the Doctor is further-reaching than either of them could have guessed.

Furthermore, Amy's personality is rather unique. Gillan has said that she did not want to "conform to what works - or what has worked - in a companion... the whole, likeable, girl-next-door business."⁴⁴ She is also "feisty and outspoken and a bit of a number," arguably the wildest companion the Doctor has traveled with thus far.⁴⁵ As such, Amy stands out as a wild card and free spirit throughout her time on *Doctor Who*.

Overall, Amy Pond is more unique than she seems at first glance. She is the first companion to meet the Doctor as a child, before later traveling with him as an adult; her wild personality was also influenced by this impromptu visit. Additionally, her relationship with Rory does not deteriorate over time, as has happened with other companions' relationships. Furthermore, her life is incredibly entangled with the Doctor's in ways that no other character's ever has. It is with this information that one can conclude that Amy Pond is a clear departure from the typical female character found on *Doctor Who*.

The Metamorphosis: The Thirteenth Doctor

In 2017, it was announced that Jodie Whittaker would take on the role of the Doctor, becoming the first woman on the show to do so. This revolutionary moment was

⁴¹ Lobarik, *Doctor Who: Character Encyclopedia*, 15.

⁴² *Doctor Who*, Series 6, episode 8, "Let's Kill Hitler," directed by Richard Senior, written by Steven Moffat, featuring Matt Smith, Karen Gillan, and Alex Kingston, aired 27 August 2011, in broadcast syndication, BBC, 2011, DVD."

⁴³ *Doctor Who*, Series 5, episode 13, "The Big Bang," directed by Tony Haynes, written by Steven Moffat, featuring Matt Smith, Karen Gillan, and Arthur Darvill, aired 26 June 2010, in broadcast syndication, BBC, 2010, DVD.

⁴⁴ "Doctor Who star Karen Gillan defends 'too sexy' Amy Pond," *The Telegraph*, 15 June 2010, www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/doctor-who/7828765/Doctor-Who-star-Karen-Gillan-defends-too-sexy-Amy-Pond.html.

⁴⁵ Daniel Martin, "Doctor Who: why we will miss Amy Pond," *The Guardian*, 31 August 2012, www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/tvandradioblog/2012/aug/31/doctor-who-farewell-amy-ponds.

met with praise and criticism alike, but ultimately, Whittaker was deemed perfect for the part.⁴⁶ Once audiences met her, she was described as being “intensely moral, a little distracted and bursting with energy... both the Doctor we know and a new version of the Time Lord.”⁴⁷ Thus, she is a distinct departure from previous female characters since *Doctor Who* began.

While only two seasons with Whittaker as the Doctor have been released, there is plenty to unpack in terms of her portrayal of the iconic character. One fan noted that she is “channeled the best elements of recent Doctors (Matt Smith’s whimsy, David Tennant’s frenetic energy, Peter Capaldi’s wry humour...), but above all she’s made the role her own.” Another remarked that “[Whittaker’s] Doctor is a whirlwind of likeability and energy,” becoming a powerhouse of a character in her own right.⁴⁸ Here, it becomes evident that the Doctor is now more than her gender, with audiences reacting more to her as a character than as a woman. In addition, the new series showrunner Chris Chibnall has said this Doctor is “incredibly lively, warm, funny, energetic, inclusive – she’s the greatest friend you could wish to have as your guide around the universe.”⁴⁹ As such, while this Doctor may be different from past ones, she is not so dissimilar to previous companions. Ace was a force of nature, making explosives to get herself in and out of trouble. Rose had a warmth and compassion that brought a human touch to the Doctor’s alien whimsy. Amy’s spirit provided many humorous and exciting moments to the show. With Whittaker’s Doctor, while she may not be human, her personality brings reminders of companions past along the way. Her portrayal is not as unique as one might first assume.

However, as Jodie Whittaker’s tenure as the Thirteenth Doctor has only just begun, audiences have much more to anticipate. For now, her character is an explosive enigma, both familiar and original. Her portrayal is also drastically different from and similar to past female characters on the show. As the Doctor, Whittaker has become what no other actress has before; nevertheless, her personality is also reminiscent of prior portrayals of female companions. Overall, one can conclude that Jodie Whittaker’s Thirteenth Doctor shows that great progress has been made in terms of how *Doctor Who* treats its female characters. Things had significantly changed since the days of Susan Foreman back in 1963.

⁴⁶ Turner, “Jodie Whittaker becomes 13th Time Lord.”

⁴⁷ “Doctor Who: Everything we know about Jodie Whittaker’s new Doctor,” *The Radio Times*, www.radiotimes.com/news/2019-01-07/doctor-who-jodie-whittaker/.

⁴⁸ “Doctor Who half-term report – how is Jodie Whittaker’s first series doing so far?,” *The Radio Times*, 11 November 2018, www.radiotimes.com/news/tv/2018-11-11/doctor-who-half-term-report-how-is-jodie-whittakers-first-series-doing-so-far/.

⁴⁹ “Everything we know about Jodie Whittaker’s new Doctor.”

Conclusion

A staggering number of characters have entered the world of *Doctor Who* since its inception in 1963. This has helped transform it into a staple of British culture, with children “born knowing what a Dalek [and] a TARDIS [are].”⁵⁰ Thus, the show is able to provide them with many role models to follow, showcasing the different types of people living around the globe. As times change, these portrayals tend to do the same; they reflect the culture and ideas they were created in. As *Doctor Who* has existed for over fifty years, it makes for an excellent case study. One can examine how character representations have evolved, which prevents other factors – such as genre and medium – from interfering in that analysis.

Female characters are especially fascinating because their role in society has transformed substantially since the 1960s, which is then reflected in the media. For *Doctor Who*, this is made apparent by the casting of Jodie Whittaker as the first female Doctor. This is a far cry from the days of Susan Foreman when she was only needed to be attractive and cry for help.

Therefore, one can easily conclude that the portrayal of female characters on *Doctor Who* has evolved from 1963 to 2019. However, that is not the question needing an answer; the real query is how these characters have been altered.

With Susan Foreman, she was not given much in the way of character development, instead of being used as a way to advance the plot. This became a staple of the companion character until Sarah Jane Smith crushed that stereotype. Instead, the companion became someone who challenged the Doctor and forced him or her to view the universe in a new light. Ace then took the role a step further, having a storyline of her own and defining herself beyond her relationship with the Doctor. This then became a trend with later companions, including Rose. She had a life outside the Doctor’s traveling but eventually fell in love with him, setting another precedent on the show. Amy was ever more intertwined into the plot, becoming more than the ordinary girl she initially seemed. Finally, the Thirteenth Doctor was given the green light to headline the show in 2017; this also reflects a growing trend within the series where women get to take the lead. Overall, these facts show how the role of women on *Doctor Who* has evolved to let them be more powerful and capable. They can hold their own in the face of danger, and grow from these experiences. Thus, *Doctor Who* has become a show where its female characters accurately reflect the modern world and how far it has progressed.

⁵⁰ VanDerWerff, “Karen Gillan.”

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