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GENDER BENDER: HOW LIMITATIONS AND FLUCTUATIONS OF THE  
DOCTOR'S PERFORMANCE IN "DOCTOR WHO" CREATE A LIMINAL SPACE  
OF GENDER

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This thesis, written by Arianna Navarro, and entitled Gender Bender: How Limitations and Fluctuations of the Doctor’s Performance in “Doctor Who” Create a Liminal Space of Gender, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgement.

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Florida International University, 2022

## DEDICATION

For my daughter, for whom I would always be willing to travel across time and space.

## ABSTRACT OF THESIS

# GENDER BENDER: HOW LIMITATIONS AND FLUCTUATIONS OF THE DOCTOR'S PERFORMANCE IN "DOCTOR WHO" CREATE A LIMINAL SPACE OF GENDER

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The purpose of this thesis is to explore how the concept of gender travels between traditional masculine and feminine norms in the science fiction TV series "Doctor Who." This analysis examines the regeneration episodes in the re-booted series, as each plays an intricate role in how the Doctor's new identity will be performed throughout their reign.

The first female lead in the traditionally male role has circumvented gender binaries by allowing the female Doctor to perform under an umbrella of masculinity and femininity, making her performance not binary, but multigendered. This paper examines how gender signifiers fluctuate and shift based on a specific stage of performance, which contributes to the repetition needed within society to change views on traditional gender norms. This research suggests that humans continuously embody both "masculine" and "feminine" gender traits and operate in a liminal space of societal gender structures, promoting a new cultural norm.

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## INTRODUCTION: “Doctor Who” and the Performance Theory of Gender

"We're all capable of the most incredible change. We can evolve while still staying true to who we are." (“The Woman Who Fell to Earth” 50:34)

Living in a new “Golden Age” of television, showrunners have been able to push boundaries like never before, especially within the science fiction genre. The sci-fi series *Doctor Who* recently moved the needle further when in 2017, the show announced that its traditionally male lead role of the Doctor would be played by a female for the first time in the show’s history. Since *Doctor Who* debuted in 1963, the show has featured its male protagonist traveling through space and time via a spaceship called the TARDIS (Time and Relative Dimension in Space). The doctor, a quirky humanoid alien Time Lord from a planet called Gallifrey, spends his time exploring near and distant worlds, and he always managing to “save the day” armed with nothing more than a way with words and a handy sonic screwdriver. The first doctor, played by William Hartnell, performed the role for three years until he had to retire due to illness. Instead of showrunners abandoning the show, they created a new and intricate characteristic of the Doctor: regeneration (Disanza 1). Given that the Doctor is an alien, this transformative ability was not too farfetched. In October 1966, Hartnell’s Doctor “died” and regenerated into the second Doctor, played by actor Patrick Thoughton. Regeneration became a vital component of the show and enabled the series to continue until present day. The Doctor regenerates every few seasons, wearing a new face and costume, embodying all the characteristics of each past Doctor, while occasionally adding new quirks to the mix.

Once it was announced in July of 2017 that actress Jodie Whittaker would be taking over the role of the Doctor, fans of the show were divided, some praising the decision, while others (typically male fans) condemning it. Fans vocalized their grievances mostly through social media forums, especially Twitter. One fan on twitter stated the show runner Chris Chibnall “ruined my childhood,” (@cookson2011) while another was adamant about the idea that the Doctor was a “timelord. Not a time LADY” (@LukeCSGO\_). British journalist Piers Morgan also joined in on the negative backlash and tweeted, “Very disappointed Dr Who is now a woman. Massive insult to the non-binary gender-neutral community.” Overall, the general consensus of the people upset with the casting was that the show had fallen victim to the “PC brigade” as one fan put, and become part of the “liberal agenda.” Given that the show’s protagonist had been traditionally a male actor for over fifty years the casting decision was jarring for many fans, which resulted in their struggle or refusal to accept this sudden change. Although the concept of Time Lords being able to change genders has been portrayed throughout the show, it had never affected the show’s lead until now. Besides the Doctor, the only other prominent Time Lord to change genders was the Doctor’s archnemesis, the Master, who changed into Missy. This change was overall well received and not as controversial, as Missy is not the lead, and actress Michelle Gomez performed the role under stereotypical gender structures down to her attire, a Victorian era dress. The Doctor’s change on the other hand became a major focal point of the fandom’s discourse, also known to fans as the “Whoniverse.” Some fans were wondering how the Doctor would be able to realistically embody a woman, while other fans were despondent that the Doctor would now lose his “mojo.” In Neta Yodovich’s study regarding the female fans’

reaction to the announcement, she notes a few examples of internet quips from disgruntled and gatekeeping male fans who felt the role was taken over by “social justice warrior” feminists:

The news was met with vibrant, heated online discussions and a deluge of negative responses.

While some fans posted reaction videos of little girls crying with excitement (Annie Flury 2012; Will Butler 2017), others declared their plans to abandon the show: “no more *Doctor Who* for me and my son” (Seamus Duff 2017). Opposers to the casting were disgruntled over the loss of a male role model and protested against a casting that was motivated by the need to “please the PC (political correctness) brigade” (BBC 2017). (qtd in Yodovich 2)

Fans were accustomed to seeing a male lead with mostly female companions, which in part played a role in the negative reaction from some of the fanbase. Even though the show has been well ahead of its time regarding the tackling of controversial social issues (the issue of slavery in “The Planet of the Ood,” a lesbian kiss in “Deep Breath,” the nod towards non-conventional sexuality in “Love and Monsters”), the series has always overwhelmingly subscribed to traditional binary masculine and feminine norms.

Regarding early science fiction television, Helen Merrick argues that “One very powerful image of masculinity in sf from the 1930s to 1950s was that of the ‘super-man’. The superhuman qualities of such characters often lay in their intellectual and scientific superiority, rather than a more traditional masculine physicality” (3). The Doctors have always been given an authoritative nature, incessantly quick-witted, and highly

intelligent. These are traditionally "masculine" tropes within the context of the science fiction television, and especially within the context of the Whoniverse, as the Doctors' companions have historically been mostly female and submissive. The repetitive performances of "masculine" male doctors and "feminine" companions instilled a gender hierarchy in the show that has translated off screen to support traditional ideological roles of men and women. Overall, the decision to cast a woman has sparked discussion and debates among fans and within academia regarding the concept of gender roles in current science fiction television, specifically considering how masculine and feminine norms are being performed, perceived, and altered.

While the series has generally ascribed to traditional gender structures, the Doctor has also always exhibited traits that were contradictory of the overall narrative of the show. The Doctor's abhorrence of violence is a direct contradiction of traditional masculine tropes, especially within the science fiction television genre where men are touted to be fearless and strong. In "Fifty Years in the Tardis: The Historical Moments of Doctor Who," James Chapman writes that the character of the Doctor always "seems to not remember where he has come from; he is suspicious and capable of sudden malignance; he seems to have some unidentified enemy; he is searching for something as well as fleeing from something" (4). Throughout the series the Doctor has always exemplified what it means to be a traditional hero: male, clever, assertive. Yet at the same time, the Doctor has also been shown to be sensitive, emotional, and compassionate. In the season five episode "The Beast Below," Matt Smith's doctor is appalled to discover a society built upon the suffering of an innocent creature. However, his anger eventually supersedes his hurt and compassion, and the character is able to

maintain his traditional masculinity. The Doctor's philosophical and softer nature, while not as prominent in comparison with his strong assertive nature, has always existed. The Doctor is always in a space where he is searching for the answer to an existential question that he is the one who asked and only he knows the answer to. In "Conclusion: The Future of Masculinity on Television," Rebecca Feasy states that "we have observed science fiction and fantasy television position the American hero as a sensitive new man..." (153). While this references American male heroes, the Doctor has consistently fallen under this umbrella as well. Given that the Doctor is now played by a female, traditional feminine traits should not be a surprise. The Doctor refuses to use actual weapons and cites the sonic screwdriver as the only tool that is really required to help the fight for others.

Ultimately however, while *Doctor Who*'s new hero embodies a female without subscribing to traditional gender stereotypes, the character is simultaneously being restricted by societal expectations. The Doctor's ability to shift between humanoid genders allows fluctuations in his/her performance of gender and creates fluid notions of what it means to be a male or female. The performance theory of gender that gender theorists Irving Goffman and Judith Butler utilize allows gender identity to be viewed under a fluctuating lens, not tied down by binary systems. By analyzing the show's portrayal of its first female lead, this paper will apply intersections of Judith Butler's and Irving Goffman's gender performance theories, Thekla Morgenroth and Michelle K. Ryan's theory of gendered misalignment, and the genre of science fiction television to examine how Whittaker's embodiment of the character expresses specific performative

acts or “signifiers” that reconceptualize and readjust the role of “The Doctor.” At the same time, her portrayal remains based on dominant culture’s accepted gender norms.

Jodie Whittaker’s Doctor builds on gender theorist Judith Butler’s notion that gender is a social construct in which the social conception of binary “masculine” and “feminine” traits is reaffirmed, as the Doctor must navigate in space between societal gender norms. Judith Butler and gender theorist Irving Goffman believe gender is performative, where Butler argues that the concept of “gender” is based on repetitive acts that appeases and creates a social narrative, and Goffman feels that humans operate on a stage in which they must perform to the satisfaction of their audience (society). In Erving Goffman’s text “The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life,” he argues that there is no innate gender, but rather that binary gender structures are built from societal/cultural structures and context, that is, traditional “feminine” and “masculine” roles. Butler also argues that the concept of gender has been produced via historical repetition of performed “acts” thus solidifying certain “signifiers” of what it means to be “masculine” and “feminine.” In “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An essay in Phenomenology and Feminist theory,” Butler states that:

This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing a set of meanings already socially established; it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation. When this conception of social performance is applied to gender, it is clear that although there are individual bodies that enact these significations by becoming stylized in gendered modes, this “action” is immediately public as well

(9)

These acts or “signifiers” are created over time through demonstrations of accepted social norms of masculinity or femininity. Gender is essentially produced and embodied through individuals via these norms, making these actions “natural” through repetition “because we’ve seen them so many times and assume them to be true in a biological or absolute sense” (Madden 157). Regarding repetitive representations of gender, Al Valetin agrees with Butler as she states “Therefore, we learn what is expected of us in terms of our behaviors, actions, and dress and try to adhere to those standards to avoid social sanctions.” (178). Butler also elaborates on how humans perform gender based on existing spaces, writing, “... the gendered body acts its part in a culturally restricted corporeal space and enacts interpretations within the confines of already existing directives” (9). Over time, these performed “stylized acts” or “signifiers” come to represent what is standard gendered behavior towards its audience (society). It is only natural for humans to believe and embody what is thrust upon them repeatedly as what is acceptable gendered behavior, i.e., traditional gender norms: men are strong and assertive, women are soft and nurturing. However, “signifiers” can change and shift, resulting in varied performances of gender which can also play a role in altering cultural norms.

While Whittaker’s casting builds on Butler’s and Goffman’s performance theory, it also complicates Morgenroth and Ryan’s theoretical framework regarding the concept of gender “alignment,” which essentially means that if a person acts according to traditional feminine norms and has “the ‘right’ set of genitals” (Morgenroth and Ryan 10) then gender alignment has occurred. Gender thus can be displayed by performative attributes, such as: character, costume, script, and stage, with the performance in front of

the “audience” and the self (Morgenroth and Ryan 8). The 2017 Doctor’s ability to traverse a liminal space of gender structures creates new “signifiers” that ultimately determine her own liminality, causing a “disruption” within gender alignment. However, Morgenroth and Ryan propose that when “disruption occurs, adjustments are made to reconcile the various different elements” of alignment (11). For example, if a trans woman refuses to act in alignment with traditional feminine “signifiers” (Butler 528) her “character would not align with her costume and script in the eyes of the audience” (Morgenroth and Ryan 12). The “misalignment” or “gender trouble” is what forces someone to “realign” for the benefit of the audience (society). In the new iteration of *Doctor Who*, these “misalignments” also contribute to new “signifiers” regarding the concept of gender “alignment,” emphasizing the disconnect between the binary systems of sex and gender. In other words, Whittaker’s performance operates between gender structures, and in doing so, it grants her Doctor a liminal space in which gender performance is in constant misalignment, creating new “signifiers” are developed, and gender “misalignment” occurs. Since Whittaker’s performance as the doctor produces a societal misalignment, she complicates the idea of what it means to be a woman; her reign as the Doctor creates “gender trouble.” Throughout Whittaker’s first season, Doctor remains confined within a liminal space between genders due to what the audience and fanbase are willing to accept, which begins a journey in which the Doctor is allowed to explore the concept of what it means to be “multigendered,” or identifying with more than one gender (Morgenroth and Ryan 4)). Essentially, I consider the term “multigendered” to be an additional category of gender structure, with its own social signifiers, freeing humans (and aliens) from the confines of a binary gender system.

This paper will generally focus on the show's revival, or according to the fandom "New Who" (2005-2022), with a specific focus on the thirteenth doctor (Whittaker). I am looking specifically at the regeneration episodes of New Who and how each one sets the tone for the regenerated Doctor's performance. The show's tone constructs a narrative that showcases predominant masculine norms performed via a male body throughout each regeneration, except for the last one. This paper seeks to explore why there is a variation in tone, if the Doctor is technically still the same person. Given that the re-boot had the luxury of exploring inclusiveness in a way that its predecessor wasn't able to, New Who is more relative to my argument since Whittaker's Doctor finds herself trying to appease an audience who perceives gender as binary due to repeated societal signifiers.

In trying to balance between male and female norms, the series has produced a characterization that is now "multigendered." I will study the "gendered misalignments" that occur in the regeneration episode of the thirteenth Doctor, how they relate to previous incarnations of New Who, and how they determine new "signifiers" of what it means to be "multigendered." The analysis of Whittaker's Doctor will demonstrate that her embodied experience of being the first female Doctor contributes to the disruption of gender norms, while simultaneously having to remain confined within them, thus pushing a narrative of the concept of "multigendered." I ultimately argue that men and women tend to exhibit both traditional "masculine" and "feminine" traits, hence the idea that binary gender is a false societal construct, since we all operate in a space where we signify either traditionally masculine or feminine norms at any given time. Throughout her reign, the thirteenth Doctor portrays the idea that one can be inherently "multigendered," and specifically within the first episode of her regeneration. Overall,

this paper seeks to examine how Whittaker's embodiment of the character expresses specific performative acts "or signifiers" that readjust the role of "The Doctor" within a confined space of the dominant culture's accepted gender norms. This constriction has allowed the character to exhibit signifiers under a "multigendered" lens, granting a different take on what it means to be neither "male" or "female." I argue, due to this restriction to traditional masculine "signifiers," that the new Doctor and Time Lords in general do not fall in line with earthly binary antiquated notions of sex and gender, allowing them to identify as "multigendered." This allows the Doctor to "perform" within a liminal space where being "feminine" and "masculine" are one and the same. The Doctor being a female has allowed the character to perform traditional female norms more freely, while still exhibiting traditional male norms, thus rendering her performance "multigendered."

## II: A Brief History of “Doctor Who” Regarding Race and Gender Norms

“People assume that time is a strict progression of cause to effect, but actually from a non-linear, non-subjective viewpoint — it’s more like a big ball of wibbly wobbly... time-y wimey... stuff.” (“Blink” 17:09)

*Doctor Who* is unique in that it remains complicit in a cultural ideology, while simultaneously deconstructing dominant ideologies regarding gender, creating a performance that is now “multigendered” via multiple elements of film language. For the purpose of my argument, I am going to contextualize the “stage” of the show specifically focusing on the first episode in comparison to the previous regeneration episodes for each Doctor. The “stage” refers to “the physical and cultural environment in which gender/sex is performed and is set up to enable and reinforce the performance of binary gender” (Morgenroth and Ryan 10). The stage can include physical spaces and “backdrops of culture” (roles), language (pronouns), and laws (legal sexes) (Morgenroth and Ryan 10). When gender is performed “incorrectly,” the audience can either feel threatened with the performance or embrace the “gender trouble” and shift their binary views, thus changing the “stage.” Film rhetoric scholar David Blakesley defines the concept of film language as the visual elements of a film, or in this instance, a television show. These elements would be camera movement, mise-en-scene, editing, cinematography, etc. Regarding the language of film, Blakesley states that “visual”, is the “ideological apparatus” that has a “determinative influence” on what is seen at the “moment of perception” (115). The Doctor’s performance of masculine norms throughout the series has cemented a heteronormative ideology in the Whoniverse, also contributing to problematic ideologies

within the science fiction genre. Now that the Doctor is a woman, the show has the ability to offer up a new ideology that recognizes the character's multigendered status. Similar to Morgenroth and Ryan's assertion that the self is part of the audience, Blakesley also feels that what we see is a result of what we already know or would like to believe. "The viewer is implicated in the effects of meaning propagated by the visual system" (Blakesley 115). The beauty of film and television is they can create meaning and convey messages that can challenge ideological perspectives and alter the "stage" of a cultural norm. This type of "pamphleteering" is what I outline as the performance of the "characters" (actors) and the "stage" (*Doctor Who*), and the cultural norms and fandom surrounding it.

While the representation of women and gender in recent science fiction television and *Doctor Who* has made some progressive strides, there are still issues with the limited scope of progressive growth allowed to be shown on screen. Since its debut in 1963, *Doctor Who* has been guilty of promoting masculine gender norms through its use of consistent male leads with subservient female companions. When the *Doctor Who* series first aired, it was created as a historical and educational show, specifically targeting young viewers, prompting the fanbase to associate the intellectualness, cleverness, and heroism of the Doctor to his masculine persona. The Doctor's obedient female assistant became a staple of the show, promoting a masculinity vs. femininity hierarchy that has created lasting effects on how heteronormative performances are portrayed on the show. Throughout the development of science fiction television and film roles specifically, "female characters have gradually emerged from male-dominated discourse power, from being misunderstood as "irrelevant" to being protected and appreciated as "dolls" (Tang

3); women who are based on the idea of a “perfect woman,” one who is white, heterosexual, submissive, and ascribes to European beauty standards. William Hartnell’s first Doctor was an old white man, surly and grouchy, whose female companions served more as décor than actual partners. In “Gender Bending and the Feminine Subject in Science Fiction Film,” Christine Cornea remarks how even the female action heroes of the 80s had their “heroic status written upon their bodies, in terms of their pumped-up musculature and/or their physical fighting skills” (17). On the other hand, female action heroes also tend to be hypersexualized (e.g., superhero comics) appeasing the male gaze, denoting a narrative that female action heroes should be one or the other. The science fiction television show *Doctor Who* is no stranger to falling under the confinement of operating under binary restrictions of traditional gender roles. Year after year, Doctor after Doctor, the male protagonist traveled through time and space saving the universe from impending doom, his attractive female assistant (among others) submissively trailing along.

In 1989, *Doctor Who* went off the air, to be re-booted in 2005 with actor Christopher Eccleston playing the lead role of the Doctor, and the show’s ninth incarnation of its titular character. “New Who” was more prone to push the boundaries of dominant culture, however it still struggled with inclusivity. As the years went on, the Doctor’s companions gradually became more assertive and independent, however the lead role was still only given to white men, despite having the show providing various instances where it was established that Time Lords included people of color, and that their DNA allowed them to shift genders. The Doctor did not have an official Black companion until the 10<sup>th</sup> Doctor’s (David Tennant’s) reign, where he was partnered with

Black actress Freema Agyemen playing the role of Martha Jones. Even though women have been provided roles as scientists within science fiction films, they were usually “undermined either in their characterization as a love object or sidekick to a more commanding male hero or by the way their professional status was usually confused to those science that could be more readily associated with “feminine” (i.e. medical or biological sciences)” (Cornea 160). Unfortunately for Martha’s character, she fell into both of those categorizations. Martha was the Doctor’s level-headed, highly intelligent sidekick who was a medical doctor, and also completely in love with her traveling companion. However, in Martha’s case, the Doctor was still reeling from his leftover feelings for his previous incarnation’s love interest and companion, Rose Tyler (Billie Piper). While the Doctor was given a female person of color as a companion for the first time, her character was reduced to suffering an unrequited love for the Doctor. Her character was assertive, intelligent, and strong yet the traditionally feminine television trope of submissiveness and infatuation with the male lead was regardless applied to her character.

Fast forward to 2017, when actress Jodie Whittaker finally broke the 55-year reign of male Doctors and became the thirteenth and first female Doctor within the Whoniverse. Though this breakthrough of casting was not without its own set of issues. The casting of Jodie Whittaker prompted more discussions of race representation on the show, as the series still struggles with issues of inclusivity. Whittaker is white and represents traditional Euro-centric beauty standards. At the time of Whittaker’s casting, there had never been a Black Doctor, but given the opportunity to push the boundaries with gender, the show pulled back from also pushing the boundary of race in the lead

role. One of the most problematic issues with the new Doctor's "stage" is that for the first time in New Who, she is traveling with the greatest number of companions during a regeneration episode. The companions also include two people of color, Ryan and Yaz (the first Asian companion), along with Ryan's step-grandfather Graham. The Doctor has only been given one POC recurring companion in the role of Martha Jones, who happened to also be hopelessly in love with him. Now with the show's first female Doctor, she automatically receives a large number of companions, one of whom is also a first for the show (Yaz). The "stage" has limited the Doctor's presence, in a sense, as the show's most diversified cast has been placed with the first female Doctor, as if to lighten the "wokeness" and keep it from being placed solely on Whittaker's shoulders. Due to these various aspects of the show, a situation was created where the showrunners have to be careful with how far they take the role of the first female Doctor throughout the first season.

Nevertheless, the stage was set for Jodie Whittaker when the 55-year reign of male Doctors was finally broken, awakening a Whoniverse discourse where intersections of gender roles and performativity occurred that eventually bled into the realm of academia. Whittaker had to now perform the Doctor's character within a carefully crafted space, where masculine and feminine norms live symbiotically. According to Morgenroth and Ryan, the "character" is based on "an interplay of societal forces (e.g., acceptability and availability of different gender labels in the culture or context) and an internal sense of self" (9). The "character" role that Jodie Whittaker performs is one that does not have binary and traditional signifiers. While the previous Doctors all wore their masculinity on their sleeve, with feminine traits occasionally seeping out, Whittaker's "character" is

functioning in between genders more than ever before. “The regenerated Doctor represents an immediate threat to traditional, socially constructed gender roles through her failure to conform to them” (Disanza 8). Whittaker’s “misalignments” instead construct a narrative in which the traditional concept of gender is in a constant state of flux, applying previous traditional masculine binary characteristics within the same character, but a different body. The concept that gender is constructed via performance plays a critical role in the analysis and understanding of Whittaker’s Doctor as the actress must perform a traditionally male character within a female body. While Whittaker's doctor has disrupted the gender hierarchy of the show, she still operates within a space in which she must conform to "masculine" tropes perpetuated throughout the show’s history. This actually allows the Doctor to perform in a space where she can freely travel not only between time and space, but between gender norms, contradicting earthly ideas of binary gender structures.

### III: A Chronological Look into the Regeneration Episodes of “New Who”

"It's been a long time since I've bought women's clothes." (“The Woman Who Fell to Earth 58:57)

Each New Who regeneration episode has overall the same basic formula (with some minor variation): the enemy is introduced, meet cute ensues with soon to be companions (if not the same as previous season), Doctor struggles with “rebooting” throughout the episode, Doctor eventually saves the day, and then finally picks a new costume (a staple of the show). In the premiere episode of the show’s 2005 reboot “Rose,” we are introduced to the Doctor’s companion Rose who works in a clothing shop with little to no life direction. After the shop closes, as she is trying to turn in the shop’s earnings, she is attacked by aliens called Autons who have taken the form of plastic store mannequins. As she is backed up against an elevator door, the new Doctor, played by Christopher Eccleston makes his initial appearance, takes Rose by the hand and says, “Run!,” portraying the traditional masculine heroism his previous incarnations have also displayed. Throughout the episode, the Doctor and Rose spend a good amount of time running, always with the Doctor in the lead. This minute interaction sets the tone for not only the first episode, but also for the rebooted series as a whole. This new Doctor was still subscribing to masculine heteronormative traits with minimal focus on his traditional feminine traits. This new Doctor was someone who recently committed genocide against the Dalek race in order to save his home planet of Gallifrey. This new Doctor is dark and mysterious and still reeling from the pain of having to commit an act so incredibly opposite to his own beliefs. As each new Doctor took on the role with their regeneration,

they were that same Doctor, little by little building and adding on to their own character, however always under the umbrella of masculine heteronormativity, in full alignment with their gender performance.

Each recent reincarnation was a dashing young Doctor, until Peter Capaldi took over the role in 2013, and then the Doctor sported an older face for the first time since the show's original run. When his companion Clara Oswald (Jenna Coleman) has difficulty accepting his new "look" in Capaldi's first official episode, close friend of the Doctor Madame Vastra (Neve McIntosh) questions Clara's reaction with great disdain. She tells Clara that the Doctor wore a "younger face" for Clara and everyone else. When Clara asks why, Madame Vastra tells her the obvious answer, "To be accepted" ("Deep Breath 14:26). Capaldi's Doctor was the first time in New Who that the Doctor had gone through a "drastic" change, and Coleman's reaction was a product of what the audience became accustomed to. Her reaction stems from her inner self and what has been programmed to be the norm and acceptable; in this case, ageism is the subject of the conversation. I believe that Capaldi's Doctor eased Whittaker's takeover, as the audience had already dealt with a completely different regeneration than what they were used to with the past three Doctors.

Once Whittaker's Doctor crashes into the bus during her premiere episode "The Woman Who Fell to Earth," she immediately takes control of the situation, asserting herself as the leader. Whittaker's initial appearance on screen provides the first example of "gender trouble" or "misalignment" that the regeneration episode exemplifies. Her "character" has little choice but to balance herself within an in-between space since the

“stage” in which she performs is still adapting to new gender norms within the Whoniverse. “Taking charge” is a traditionally masculine trait that she portrays, as we must remember, she has been the Doctor for over 1,000 years at this point. However, this also defends the pattern that the Doctor’s feminine traits have been within him as well: the Doctor’s “compassion, her slowness to resort to violence, her opposition to weapons, warmongering and imperialism,” which have been there with each previous regeneration (Disanza 9). The Doctor’s history of performing masculine and feminine traits contributes to the idea that the Doctor has never been “male” or “female,” as the Doctor has been emitting “misalignments” since the protagonist’s first incarnation. The Doctor’s new regeneration “reminds audiences that the Doctor, their hero, has rarely if ever fit that ‘hard, small cage’ of traditionally defined masculinity” (Disanza 9). A “multigendered” Doctor would be allowed to have both masculine and feminine traits because, one: The Doctor is an alien, hence not tied down by earthly binary concepts of gender, and two: The Doctor’s repetitive multigendered traits create a narrative in which gender can freely occupy a liminal space within the Whoniverse. However, a multigendered Doctor can also cause some confusing notions about what it means to be a “man” or a “woman,” as challenging traditionally binaries often do.

Throughout regeneration episodes, dialogue plays an important role in not only the show’s ideology, but how the Doctor portrays their character, especially as they mentally and physically struggle with their new identity and body. Whittaker and the cast use language playfully referring to the concept of gender, establishing the wibbly wobbly nature of not only time, but of gender as well. Throughout the premiere episode, the Doctor pays homage to the concept of gender identity and how it can be a fluctuating

process, at least for Time Lords. During the Doctor's entrance scene on the train, she questions why Yaz keeps calling her "madame" to which Yaz responds "Because you're a woman," prompting the Doctor to become surprised and ask if "it suits" her. In the Whoniverse and in Time Lord DNA, it is known that they can regenerate into either a "male" or "female" body, though the Doctor has never personally experienced this, hence her genuine surprise, though also acceptance of the fact that "he" is now presenting as a female.

Like the Doctor's previous incarnations, this Doctor is confused about who they are, but given the context of the traditionally male role, Whittaker's Doctor's dialogue takes on alternative meanings. Morgenroth and Ryan agree with Butler in that heterosexual "signifiers" are important elements of gender/sex "script," thus becoming an "integral part of our culture's conceptualization of gender/sex" (90). Not only has the Doctor's physical body changed, but their sex and gender are changed as well, leaving the Doctor with more confusing feelings than normal as she tries to adjust to this new version of herself, reflecting the audience's adjustment as well. The Doctor now must infuse her masculine traits within her regeneration yet perform them as a female. Eventually, in the middle of the episode, the Doctor faints from not being fully regenerated, as the process takes time. This is common amongst Time Lords as a whole since it takes time for their bodies to "reboot" and has happened with every New Who regeneration. Once she wakes up, she informs her companions that she is not yet who she is supposed to be, and her brain and body are still "rebooting." Her companions look upon her with confusion as they are not used to seeing a person act in a bewildered, yet incredibly clever, fashion. They are especially confused when she purposely injures

herself in removing the tracking device implanted in her body by the other alien on the train. Even more confounding for them is the fact that she is a woman. A woman who has taken complete control of the situation and is leading them around the city while leaving them with little to no agency. The Doctor is firing on all cylinders throughout the first episode, typical of every other previous male doctor, leading their female companions to safety and saving the day with little input from them about doing otherwise. The Doctor's "masculine" tendencies are seeping through her performance as a woman, justifying what it means to be "multigendered."

Once she informs her companions that the devices implanted in them will eventually kill them, they automatically join her side in order to find a way to stop this from happening. They completely entrust their lives to the Doctor, as a result of her performance as an assertive, domineering, clever, and intimidating figure; traits typically shown on screen by men, signifying these shifting traits as elements of the "multigendered." When the Doctor first runs into the antagonist of the premiere, Stenza warrior Tzim-Sha, on the street, she again shows herself taking control when she yells at him not to move. As Tzim-Sha runs away, she quickly follows him, leaving her companions aimlessly trailing behind. After a failed attempt at stopping Tzim-Sha, the Doctor and her companions regroup in a warehouse where she begins to brainstorm a way to defeat him. When she realizes that she doesn't have her sonic screwdriver, she proclaims "I can build one! I'm good at building things. Probably," thereby giving her female persona the traditionally masculine trait of a "builder," and again leaving her companions thoroughly confused.

While she is never given the opportunity to admire her body as her predecessors have, she is given language to convey a narrative of the Doctor's "multigendered-ness." The Doctor also portrays "feminine" traits such as the abnormal existential pontificating regarding her regeneration. Whittaker's Doctor is given for the first time in New Who, a "stage" to deeply consider what it means to find yourself a new body while trying to retain old memories of the self. When the Doctor regenerates, he usually focuses on superficial physical aspects and tries to gather himself together in order to find a way to save the world. While Whittaker subtly does this (for example, she bemoans that her new nose is unreliable), she is also given special dialogue regarding the fact that this is her most unusual regeneration. Once she begins constructing the screwdriver, Gran and Graham remark on how she doesn't look "alien," implying that aliens must look a certain way in order for them to quantify as "alien;" whereas Judith Butler notes that performing a gender qualifies someone as "human." (Cornea 12). The Doctor appears human, and appears female, and embodies semblances of masculinity and femininity, thus the Doctor does not need gender to qualify as human, allowing her to embrace and embody the concept of multigendered-ness. While she is building the screwdriver she states:

There's this moment, when you're sure you're about to die, and then...you're born. It's terrifying. Right now, I'm a stranger to myself. There's echoes of who I was and a sort of call towards who I am. And I have to hold my nerve and trust all these new instincts, shape myself towards them. ("The Woman Who Fell to Earth" 29:08)

When she references that she was "about to die," she is discussing the exact point of regeneration. The Doctor admits that the process is terrifying and leaves you grasping for

the previous versions of yourself. She ultimately realizes her “new instincts” and “shapes” herself towards them. She must essentially configure herself into this new body, while still carrying the traditional masculine traits of all of her previous incarnations. This configuration or “shaping” results in a new form of gender identity for the Time Lord, as Whittaker’s portrayal does not fall into traditional feminine or masculine norms. She is assertive, clever, and immediately takes charge. She questions police officer Yaz about what exactly happened on the train and makes Yaz feel intimidated by her presence, which is an occurrence traditionally seen on television stemming from a female-male employee/boss relationship. She calms Graham, who is an older white male, by telling him “Don’t be scared,” and to stick with her to find answers. The Doctor has always been the one to solve problems with his quick wittedness and years of experience. Whittaker is embodying the Doctor’s traditionally “masculine” traits and performing them via a woman’s body, hence juxtaposing the very concept of a binary gender structures. There is even a brief montage where she dons pieces of welding attire one by one, typical of 80s male action heroes, again defying cultural norms about how a female hero should be portrayed and showing the Doctor’s character consistently operates within fluctuating space between “male” and female” norms.

Once the Doctor officially interacts with Tzim-Sha during the climax of the episode, she realizes he is there to use Earth as a hunting ground and the Doctor assertively and sternly tells him that Earth is not allowed to be used that way. In this scene, the Doctor asserts her control over the protection of Earth, as each of her predecessors have done usually within the first episodes. For example, Eccleston tells Rose he can feel the rotation of the earth, Tennant orders the Sycorax to leave Earth, and

Smith tells the Atraxi prison that they have no right to threaten Earth. Whittaker's Doctor is also given the traditional masculine trait of "protection," performing her character under a "misalignment," which is usually an "alignment" reserved for men. Towards the end of the episode, the Doctor rallies her companions to eventually defeat Tzim-Sha, but at the expense of a very rare death of who the audience thought would be a prominent character, Ryan's Gran. This is when the Doctor begins to exhibit "feminine" traits more prominently than other New Who Doctors. She begins to act as a maternal guidance for Ryan, as opposed to the previous incarnations who played more of a sexual character to their companions.

The first three New Who doctors were young cis-men and were the object of desire by women on the show. While The Doctor does exemplify similar traits from her previous selves, the character is also inhibited by the gender portrayed on screen. Whitaker has been essentially reduced to a maternal role in how she relates to her younger male companion, while every other New Who Doctor has been portrayed as a sexual figure, rather than a paternal one. In each New Who regeneration episode the male Doctor has been an object of some instance of sexual or romantic desire. When Christopher Eccleston's Doctor first met Rose's mother in his premiere episode she made a point of telling him that she was in her "dressing gown," and suggestively saying that "anything could happen." In the episode, "New Earth," Rose (who is already falling in love with the Doctor) gazes into the Doctor's eyes and tells him "...traveling with you... I love it." While in "The Eleventh Hour," future companion Amy Pond lustfully looks at Matt Smith's Doctor changing into his new costume, and in "Deep Breath" Clara Oswald struggles with her own issues with ageism and no longer being physically attracted to the

Doctor as she once was. Whereas in Whittaker's premiere episode, her relationship with her main young companion Ryan Sinclair (Tosin Cole), takes on more of a parental role, something never seen before in any of New Who's regenerations. After Ryan's paternal grandmother passes away in the fight with the episode's antagonist Tzim-Sha, the Doctor becomes a motherly figure for him. Later in the episode, she looks on as he is trying to ride his bike (something he admitted early on that a disability makes difficult to do), symbolically taking the place of his grandmother who throughout the episode was Ryan's main caregiver and motivator. At the funeral she comforts Ryan about his absent father, which also perpetuates the narrative that the Doctor has become a motherly comforting figure to Ryan. While the male Doctors have also comforted people along the way, including their companions, it was always presented as a sidebar and not necessarily as a main plot point of an episode.

The show's initial representation of the female Doctor essentially tries to erase all sexuality from the role's previous incarnations, not allowing Whittaker's female Doctor to take on that sexual nature of the Doctor's identity. It begs the question of why the female Doctor takes on every aspect of the Doctor except for sexuality? Disanza states that the show "normalizes" the Doctor's regeneration by not drawing too much attention to it. I argue instead that the show *dismisses* the regeneration so as to not provoke the already unsteady audience's reaction to the first female Doctor. In each New Who regeneration, the Doctor comments on his body, face, hair, etc., and yet in this new version, the Doctor has to be told she is a woman, meaning she is never given the opportunity to first see for herself, as the other Doctors have done. She never comments any part of her female body, as once again, this may be seen as somewhat sexual, and this

version of the Doctor does not seem to be allowed to take that role at the start of her portrayal. The Doctor has always had relationships with women, “signifying” a trait of a heterosexual male, however the concept of “signifiers” becomes convoluted and unclear with the Doctor being a female. In “Doing Gender” West and Zimmerman, state “The physical reconstruction of sex criteria pays ultimate tribute to the ‘essentialness’ of our sexual natures- as women or as men.” (22). If the Doctor is now considered a “female,” then her attraction to women would qualify her as a lesbian, whereas if the Doctor is seen as a man embodying the physical being of a woman, the attraction to men would outwardly be aligned with heterosexual nature of a woman, but inwardly be misaligned with a heterosexual male. Due to this potentially confusing situation for the audience, the first episode feeds into traditional systems of gender as the Doctor has her sexuality stripped away. If the Doctor were to be considered “multigendered” from the initial premiere episode, this would have given the Doctor the freedom to operate in a liminal space not tied down by the binary structural systems of sex and gender. This does not happen until well into season two where companion Yaz begins to show a romantic connection to the Doctor, as opposed to the previous Doctor’s regenerations where there was a romantic or sexual interest out of the gate. However, given that there is an eventual romantic connection, it reaffirms the idea that the Doctor is in fact “multigendered” with no ties to either heterosexuality or homosexuality, as that would place them in a non-liminal space.

Towards the finale of each regeneration episode, the Doctor embarks on one of the most important journeys to cementing a new identity: a costume. One of the characteristics that poses a threat to heterosexual norms is the clothing that The Doctor

dons for the role. Morgenroth and Ryan define costumes in “broad terms, including aspects of the body (e.g., genitals, breasts, body and facial hair, and muscle mass- all of which align more with what is considered sex) as well as the presentation of the body (e.g., makeup and clothes- which align more with what is considered gender), all of which is informed by cultural gender norms” (9). The “costume” essentially helps the “character” define themselves for the audience and thus be able to play their socially accepted role. They also argue that it is “impossible to distinguish between the body itself and the presentation of the body” (Morgenroth and Ryan 9). In other words, facial hair can be worn by any human being, hence its removal is what exemplifies cultural gendered norms. The “body” serves as a “medium” for communication and performative acts that frame individual gender. Like the Doctor’s predecessor’s, Whittaker’s character is given the opportunity to choose her “costume.” As opposed to Missy’s traditional and satirical take on being a woman by choosing to don a Victorian ensemble, the new Doctor conferred with costume designer Ray Holman to create a gender ambiguous look, with hints of masculinity and what I perceive as “signifiers” of “multigendered-ness.” Whittaker’s character does not dress for the male gaze, veering from the typical sexualization of female science fiction heroes, most notably female comic book heroes. She is also not “pumped up” in order to showcase her dominance. She is undoubtedly the leader of her troop and the only thing that signifies this, is the presentation or “performance” of her “character.”

Wearing a “costume” is a method in which we present ourselves to society. Depending on our clothes, people can make assumptions or judgements about who we are. Regarding gender, clothing plays a major role in allowing people to determine what

gender someone identifies with. Someone's costume is thus a "signifier" that people perceive as belonging to one gender or another, e.g., pants are traditionally male clothing, whereas dresses are traditionally female clothing. However, when "misalignments" occur, I argue this can create new cultural "signifiers" if the act is repeated, especially repeated on a large scale (major television show).

In *The Geek Feminist Revolution*, Kameron Hurley observes that 'human beings are, if anything else, dedicated to upholding their narrative of the way the world is supposed to be, whether or not that world ever truly existed' arguing that the 'explosive backlash against women in geek and popular culture' is rooted in misogynist desire to preserve hegemonic control over the fictional world, the terms of its production and the society that the fiction reflects. (qtd. In Disanza 2)

The continuous male Doctors provided a narrative that only a male was capable of playing that role, so when a female Doctor was announced it was expected that there would be backlash from the fan base. The repetitive nature of the show's male led to an audience that perceived that role to be a constant, and thus accepted and expected the Doctor to remain male. In other words, the Time Lord regenerating and regenerating as male solidified a narrative where gender roles "preserves the traditional image of a hero" (Disanza 2). The Doctor regenerating as a female challenge "a binary conception of gender that structures a very particular world-view." (Disanza 2). Her costume in the show displays an outright contradiction for the male gaze, purposely and tactfully portraying its hero as simply a hero, and not specifically a "heroine" by making her clothing traditionally feminine. The audience must remember that The Doctor is an

incarnation of all the previous Doctors, so some semblances of them are going to be present in Whittaker's costume. Her suspenders are like Matt Smith's Doctor, who wore them with a bow tie, while her trench coat is similar to David Tennant's trench coat. Jodie Whittaker wears what was once seen as traditionally "male" clothing, however pants and trench coats are no longer concrete signifiers of male characteristics and can be perceived as a signifier of the "multigendered." The Doctor emphasizes the reality that all humans have traditional "feminine" and "masculine" traits, and only through repetitive programming (i.e., television shows) will society accept this liminal space of gender as the norm.

#### IV: CONCLUSION

"Whole worlds pivot on acts of imagination." ("The Tsuranga Conundrum" 24:35)

In *Doctor Who*, the doctor has always displayed traditional characteristics of both genders, with masculinity being the most obvious and prominent one. Since in the most recent iteration of the *Doctor Who* series its action hero embodies a female, the ongoing discussions have focused on the fluctuating representation of women and gender roles. Feasy argues that some men are seen to "embrace traditionally feminine qualities such as affection, sensitivity, and emotionality while others are struggling to talk to male friends and family members, straining to secure intimate male friendships and desperately searching for new ways to bond with their children." (154). Contemporary men embracing "femininity" and contemporary women embracing "masculinity" is causing a new narrative of misalignments, allowing us to leave the realm of binary structures. The repetitive nature of the Doctor shifting between traditional cultural gender norms can allow the audience to perceive the essence of being multigendered, instead of falling into a space where a person must be one or the other.

Regarding television, repetitive "scripts" have the power to influence the audience's ideology and thus its standard societal structures. "Scripts" refer to "gendered behaviors that are also informed by gender norms and stereotypes and include a number of aspects such as gendered preferences and gendered traits" (Morgenroth and Ryan 9), (e.g., men liking cars and being assertive, women liking makeup and being emotional). Scripts, and thus behaviors, are ultimately what indicates who someone is, and what their character entails. The Doctor's script henceforth has the power to change its audience's

ideology concerning traditional gender norms and show how easy it is for someone to fluctuate within a liminal space of gender. “Intersecting identities can give rise to new, more empowering ways to perform gender, including scripts and costumes that disrupt the gender/sex binary” (Morgenroth and Ryan 9). The most ironic part of the show’s “script” is that it had to appease a portion of the fanbase who were not happy with the recast but has inadvertently created a character that exhibits both traditional gender norms.

Towards the end of the premiere episode, the Doctor tells her companions about all the losses that she has experienced. They may be gone from the world, but they are never gone from her. “I make them a part of me,” she states. Her character is the result of the embodiment of not only all the previous male Doctors, but also every living thing she has lost. When Yaz asks the Doctor if all the crazy events that occurred throughout the premiere episode have been “normal” for the Doctor, the Doctor does not respond with yes or no, but with “I’m just a traveler. Sometimes I see things need fixin’,” implying that the Doctor does not subscribe to any type of “label” or binary that would disrupt the liminal space the character consistently travels in between. Whittaker’s Doctor has laid the groundwork for the concept of being “multigendered” within a major science fiction television show, and especially one that’s aimed at young audiences. Not only does the Doctor “save the day” in the series, but the character is also playing a part in transforming an audience to be more receptive to nontraditional gender structures. The Doctor is the multigendered hero that we all need.

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