Popular Geopolitics, Empathy, and Cultural-Media Geographies in *Doctor Who* Fandom

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ABSTRACT

The popular British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) show *Doctor Who* has been airing since 1963, boasting more longevity than any other televised science fiction program. The main character of *Doctor Who* is simply known as the Doctor, a Time Lord from the planet Gallifrey who uses a TARDIS (Time and Relative Dimension/s in Space) to travel anywhere in space and time, frequently with a human, female companion. Within the show, time is nonlinear and instead of dying, the Doctor regenerates into a new physical form, remaining a Time Lord but appearing phenotypically different from their previous form. For thousands of fans (known as Whovians within the fandom), the show has provided comedic entertainment, emotional support, and intellectual curiosity. Its plotlines are steeped within science fiction/space opera themes of time travel, alien invasion, good vs. bad, justice, love, and robotic innovation. Within these nodes of science fiction exist rich commentary on social themes including, but not limited to, racism, classism, colonialism, animal exploitation, teenage pregnancy, politics and hierarchy, mental illness, and anthropomorphic effects of natural disaster. From a cultural geography standpoint, the show possesses a multitude of points of analysis. This dissertation builds upon a growing scholarship within science fiction geographies, an intellectual branch of geography rooted in cultural and political landscapes, engaging with topics such as alternative histories, technological innovation on the landscape, and invader politics. Thus far, however, little published geographic research has explored the fan geographies of science fiction, which is expressed as the ability of science fiction fans to see the world through a lens of their fandom, dynamically altering their personal geographies. Regardless of the writers' original intentions, many episodes follow a story arc that may influence viewers' opinions towards certain social, cultural, and political landscapes, creating a fan geography where Whovians perceive their daily landscapes through a lens of their fandom. Can fan geographies of *Doctor Who* allow viewers to reimagine their daily geographies through the show's influence? This dissertation engages with this question to understand how (if at all) *Doctor Who* fans experience their daily geographies through a lens of the show.

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INTRODUCTION

Intersecting Cultural-Media Geographies and Science Fiction

For decades, geographers have studied the intersections between media landscapes and the implications of media on perceptions and experiences of place, as well as political ideologies and popular culture (Burgess and Gold 1985; Bell 1998; Lukinbeal 2005; McHugh 2005; Hoffman et al. 2007; Bushman and Davis 1997; Jazairy 2009; Laberge 2011; Christensen 2013). These intersections are often rooted in themes of humanistic and emotional geographies in which landscapes are interpreted through the lenses of media and hegemonic structures. Within academic literature, hegemony has been widely defined, and usually said definition follows the discipline in which it is being used as vocabulary. However, Kioupkiolis (2017) offers a definition which both defines hegemony for broad intellectual purpose and strongly parallels the use of hegemony in this research. According to the scholar, "'Hegemony' turns on the construction of a collective identity out of a plurality of groups and demands, the interplay of force and consent, representation and discourse (or ideology), and the need to engage with both civil society and state institutions in order to bring about historical change" (pg. 1). Therefore, hegemony can be understood to comprise the thoughts, actions, and ideologies that are seen as normative, where deviating discourse is viewed with apprehension. Essentially, hegemonies constitute the silent application of power such that the masses don't necessarily perceive that their worldviews and actions are being manipulated. Thus, within this research, the hegemonic structures through which *Doctor Who* fans engage with the show are the normative thoughts and actions of the fans themselves, shaped by the society in which they operate. The media influence upon which I focus here is that of science fiction. Science fiction can be broadly defined as "the presence of central narratives containing story lines about the impact that scientific developments *per se* could have on human society in the future, the present, or, through the device of time

travel, in the past" (Gold 2001). Therefore, science fiction speaks to the forward (or regressive) progress we have made technologically, socially, and culturally, and through metaphor and analogy lends insight into our trajectory given a continuation of our current modes of social reproduction. Attempting to understand the intricacies of how our current hegemonic systems influence the course of our societal framework is an art, and "…all art demands metaphor. And in order to do good art you've got to be able to incorporate metaphors in an interesting way" (Graffin 2014, *The Humanist*[1]). Through fantastical landscapes, time travel, distant galaxies, and interaction with alien races, science fiction speaks through metaphor in ways that critically examine our own daily landscapes by comparison, whether active or passive.

In this dissertation, I will explore to what extent, if at all, science fiction television works to construct a re-interpretation of place as potentially more peaceful and compassionate, regardless of the intentions of the show's writers. The science fiction program of focus is *Doctor Who*, the longest-running BBC science fiction program in the world (Dinnick 2012). I specifically analyze the show's impact on empathy and compassion, geopolitics, and landscape perception to address the central goal of the research: to embark on a cultural geographic survey of the show's ability to influence perceptions of place and critical geopolitics. As a genre, "science fiction is just one of the many genres that allow for examination of contemporary social, cultural, and political themes, even as those themes are disguised within future spaces or future places" (Ginn 2010, pg. 175). Science fiction has often constructed an alternative geopolitical vision of the world, and audiences consuming these media are entrenched in geopolitical meanings projected through the plotlines of science fiction, and in some ways, are co-creators of the meanings of the shows they watch. Geopolitical messages in the media influence how a

[1] https://thehumanist.com/magazine/november-december-2014/features/into-the-fold-of-humanism

viewer will place their everyday experiences within context to the rest of the world, constructing an emotional geography of the world at the individual scale. *Doctor Who* is a vehicle through which to study the impacts of popular culture on viewers' empathy, geopolitical engagement, and landscape perceptions: the show has enjoyed a prominent role in the popular culture of television since the early 1960s due to its compelling storylines and intricately detailed plotlines of science fiction, creating a cult-like following that is increasing exponentially (Porter 2012). However, its importance is more significant than as a form of entertainment; in conjunction with the increased relevance of the media in our personal lives, the show arguably has the capacity to influence viewers to reconsider their daily geographies as more compassionate and peaceful. Episodes from virtually each season of *Doctor Who*, I argue, offer a broader (and empathic) social commentary on issues including classism, apathy towards natural disaster victims, mental illness, and social control through forced domination by a higher power. Such episodes attempt to create an emotional connection between the viewer and the marginalized subject, thus potentially sparking an empathetic bond that by design may influence viewers to change how they perceive "otherness" in their own lives. I use this case study of *Doctor Who* to contribute to the strength and relevance of emotional geographies and media geographies within mainstream understandings of place by reiterating the role of media in knowledge creation and the increasing role of media in influencing our daily movements, thoughts, and actions (which can be holistically defined as our personal geographies).

Purpose and Goals of Dissertation

This dissertation builds upon a growing body of research on emotional geographies, popular geopolitics, and geographies of science fiction. The overarching goal of my dissertation is to study how plotlines and themes present within selected episodes of *Doctor Who* contribute

to a burgeoning fandom in which place-making and empathy are intimately linked among *Doctor Who* viewers. I accomplish this goal by addressing the following research questions:

1) To what extent do the plotlines and themes in *Doctor Who* encourage viewers to consider place as more peaceful and compassionate than reality? What do these more ideal places look like?

2) What role does empathy from both individual viewers and from the plotlines of episodes play in the fandom created among the *Doctor Who* franchise?

3) How do *Doctor Who* fans use social media to engage with geopolitical figures and occurrences through a lens of their fandom?

Each question outlines what I will explore within each chapter as I characterize the emotional geographies and geopolitics present within *Doctor Who*. Taken in conjunction, these research questions contribute to a holistic analysis of the fandom, place-making, and popular geopolitics of the franchise, as well as providing a broader commentary on the wealth of cultural geographic concepts that can be teased out of science fiction.

The geographical relevance of this dissertation is rooted in space-place transformations. Space, as abstracted geographical landscapes, surrounds each viewer of media. The place, as space entrenched with social, historical, cultural, and political meaning and context, which surrounds each viewer is influenced by the messages of the media itself and internalized through a lens of the viewer's own lived experiences (for further foundations of space-place interactions, see Tuan (2001). For example, a viewer that is consuming media focused on discrimination and othering, such as propaganda videos, political rallies, or programs from certain news outlets, has their viewing space entrenched with negative discourse surrounding "the Other[2]," creating a

[2] The exact interpretation of whom/what is "the Other" varies and it is fully noted that it can be taken as problematic to refer to a "singular and amorphous 'Other' in geographic scholarship (Inwood 2013, p.721). In the case of this research, it is not attempted

viewing place that is characterized by said discourse. Place influences the dynamics of a broader culture, and therefore the place surrounding each viewer who has consumed these types of inflammatory media contributes to a broader culture of discrimination, othering, racism, and intolerance. Conversely, a viewer who is consuming media focused on compassion and empathy is having their viewing space entrenched with positive discourse surrounding "the Other," presumably creating a viewing place characterized by such positive discourse.

While the focus of this dissertation is to explore how, if at all, *Doctor Who* has the capacity and efficacy to encourage viewers to envision place as more peaceful and empathetic, it must be also be considered that this television show may *not* inspire compassion or empathy for the Other, or perhaps any compassion developed through watching the show is simply cognitive, without transcending into political and social activism. There are, of course, limits to which a television show can influence the development of empathy among its viewers, and such empathy can manifest itself in several forms, whether political, cognitive, fleeting, or permanent. Further, science fiction as a genre can present limits on how intimately its viewers can apply themes from the genre to social, political, and cultural dimensions in their own lives. For some viewers, science fiction may represent a form of escapism. Through the very fantastical themes in which science fiction speaks through metaphor to provide commentary on the socio-political tensions surrounding the viewer's spaces and places, the viewer can also experience a distancing from the messages put forth because of their escapist desires. Therefore, throughout this dissertation, I continually reiterate that peace and empathy possibly achieved through the consumption of science fiction is ultimately at the hands of the viewer and developed (or not developed) through

to define a singular Other; rather, in each article associated with the dissertation, special care is taken to make note of the discourse surrounding the use of this term and situate it within the context of the research. The papers attempt to advance understandings of the dynamism of the term as outlined by Inwood (2013) and the language used avoids contributing to discourse that situates the term as a static and singular representation.

a lens of their own experiences and unique desires for viewership. In this dissertation, I do not argue that *all* individuals who consume science fiction, and more specifically *Doctor Who*, will experience an increase in empathy or rethink place as more compassionate. Further, I do not set out to concretely answer the question of whether the show can spark social change by creating more compassionate places. My goal in this dissertation is to contribute to the development of critical discourse around the presence of geopolitics and emotional geographies within the science fiction genre, with an extended focus on *Doctor Who,* and by doing so, also explore if (or how) science fiction engages certain people or fans to engage with place more empathically. Before beginning to answer these questions, it is necessary to discuss the genesis and foundational plot of this popular television show.

The Doctor Who Franchise

Doctor Who began as a proposal for a children's television show in 1963 by creators Sydney Newman and Donald Wilson, focused on educating youth about historical time periods (Muir 1999). Newman described the premise of the show as follows:

> "I dreamed up this old man of 760 years of age who fled from a distant planet in a time-space machine. Being so old, he is somewhat senile and doesn't know how to operate his machine…The rest of the series dealt with these Earthlings trying to get back to Earth, the old man trying to get back to where he came from and no one knowing how to operate the machine" (p. 10).

Given decades of episodes and several regenerations of the show's protagonist, this description no longer accurately covers all the intricacies of the central plotline of *Doctor Who,* as the show continues in its ninth series today. The main character of *Doctor Who* is simply known as the Doctor, a Time Lord from the planet Gallifrey who uses a TARDIS (Time and

Relative Dimension/s in Space) to travel anywhere in space and time, frequently with a human, female companion. Within the show, time is nonlinear and instead of dying, the Doctor regenerates into a new physical form, remaining a Time Lord but appearing phenotypically different from their previous form. The Doctor's regenerations up to the current season have been visually male. In July 2017, however, it was announced that the 13th Doctor (succeeding Peter Capaldi) would be played by a female, actress Jodie Whittaker. I will, therefore, use the pronouns they/them/theirs to account for the Doctor's gender fluidity.

All regenerations of the Doctor are primarily non-violent in their rivalries and struggles with nemeses throughout the show; while notable exceptions exist (the Doctors have taken the lives of others, in cases of rage, duress, and extreme necessity), their "weaponry" consists of a Sonic Screwdriver, psychic paper, and extreme intelligence and reasoning skills, all used in a manner that rarely inflict significant harm on another being but rather engages them mentally and emotionally, often foiling an evil plan. The Doctors often pacifist approach to conflict may contribute to the show's ability to include messages of peace and social responsibility in a context of using logic and rationality to solve problems and disputes rather than through violent force. While I derive this synopsis from my own experiences in watching the show, more information and further detailed explanations can be obtained from the BBC (http://www.bbc.co.uk).

The show is inherently classified as science-fiction due to its focus on time travel, alien species, and space-age technology, amidst plotlines that provide commentary on real social injustices through a lens of fantasy. Further, the show has existed as a venue for social commentary since its beginnings in the 1960s: the show "became the first entertainment program to air on the BBC after a full Saturday of grim assassination news coverage" (Muir 1999, p. 12).

This assassination, of course, was of U.S. President John F. Kennedy on Friday, November 22, 1963. Early episodes featured plotlines of non-human creatures with sophisticated weaponry, interactions with species seen as "the other" and as separate from the Doctor and his companions as protagonists, enhanced humans (superhumans, enhanced through technology) and historic chronicles of figures such as Marco Polo and representations of Aztecs. Today, the show continues to provide commentary on the geopolitical environment in which the episodes are produced.

Research Positionality

Before presenting the larger relevance and disciplinary context of this dissertation, I will briefly explain how I situate myself as a geographic researcher in relation to the research. First and foremost, I consider myself a humanistic geographer. Equated with the French School of Human Geography (see Paul Vidal de la Blache 1926) and Park's Chicago School pragmatism, humanistic geography is concerned with understanding the products of human activity as equated with events valuable and meaningful to humans, and applying these meaningful experiences to understanding sense of place and individual interpretations of place (Tuan 1976; Ley and Samuels 1978; Pocock 1981; Smith 1984; Daniels 1992; Adams, Hoelscher, and Till 2001). As a humanistic geographer, I combine traditional theories and methodologies of cultural geography with new literatures in peace and media geographies to capture and understand how messages of peace (and, alternatively, messages of violence) are distributed and made socially important through the media and influence the daily spaces and place-based experiences of humans. My interests lie in gauging science fiction's capacity to engage with messages of peace and

awareness of social injustice to its viewers globally[3], and analyzing how these messages enable a potential geography of social efficacy in terms of influencing people's behavior in and through placemaking.

My personal background and intellectual lens as author must also be acknowledged. This dissertation, and all commentary on compassion, empathy, and geopolitics, comes from the perspective of a North American, white, middle-class, cisgender, able-bodied, asexual female. While discussions of empathy are as objective as possible, the interpretation of empathy in this dissertation may differ from how empathy is both defined and felt by individuals in different populations. Further, one's geographical location also influences how they will respond to the show. Hofstede's (1984) framework for understanding national cultures lends evidence to this: if we explore differences between the United Kingdom (the country from which the show originates and continues to boast a dedicated fandom[4]) and Japan, we can see these differences highlighted: Japan is the host to a growing *Doctor Who* fandom that can be strongly attributed to several aspects of the show that mirror the country's values in Power Distance, Individualism, Masculinity, Uncertainty Avoidance, Long Term Orientation, and Indulgence. It is for these same reasons (albeit, different aspects of each dimension) that the show has drawn in and maintained so many UK fans for decades, but also alienated some of these fans (such as Anglo-Saxon fans who are tired of the White Male dynamic perpetuated in the show). Being a multifaceted show open to multiple interpretations, *Doctor Who* has the capacity to appeal to many audiences in different countries with different cultural organization and social structures,

[3] It must be noted throughout this research that while science fiction media (film, television, novels) is widely consumed across the world, there exist limits on the accessibility of these resources, particularly in areas where internet access is limited and in socioeconomic circumstances that prohibit consumption of these forms of media. Therefore, by "global level," the research is addressing those populations that have access to science fiction media.
[4] https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2013/nov/24/doctor-who-biggest-show-world-bbc-simulcast

thus speaking to its growing global popularity. No research is apolitical, and all results, discussions, and implications are addressed through a lens of the researcher's experiences, knowledge, academic training, and my own hope for a more peaceful and compassionate world. Further, I am also a fan of *Doctor Who* (and a self-proclaimed Whovian) who has experienced mentally intensive reactions to the show, which also influences the depth of the research and author reflexivity. While academic integrity is maintained, and discussions are as objective as possible, the dialogue created in this dissertation is ultimately influenced by my own positionality and should be known to the reader.

Relevance of Dissertation

Disciplinary

Geographies of Science Fiction

This dissertation will contribute to a growing body of literature on science fiction geographies. To date, no published geographic literature focuses directly on the *Doctor Who* franchise, highlighting the timeliness and necessity of this research. Considering the long-term fandom surrounding the show since its genesis in the 1960s and a growing fandom amongst children and teens because of the 2005 revamp, *Doctor Who* occupies a prominent role in the science fiction media landscape, and therefore, a lack of geographic literature focusing specifically on this show highlights the need for increased academic attention toward the geographies of science fiction.

Geographies of Media

This dissertation contributes to current discourse surrounding how media influence perceptions of space and place through the creation of cognitive spaces of safety and of danger.

Media influence, reinforce, and manipulate how we see and engage non-media landscapes and as viewers, how we see spaces of violence and peace. Media tell us where it is safe to go, who is safe to be around, and where it is unsafe to go, and who to avoid. I explore with my focus groups (as elaborated in the second chapter), discourse in *Doctor Who* that relates to othering, discrimination, racism, and classism. A viewer's perceptions of landscapes may change in light of the focus group interactions; that is, a viewer's perception of certain social dynamics and structural hegemonies associated with said landscapes may shift after participating in the focus group.

Relevance to Geography as a Whole

Broadly, this dissertation contributes to the intellectual wealth of the discipline of geography by highlighting the interconnectivity of space, place, and society. All geographic research, whether human, physical, or applied/GIS, involves these three components and my dissertation is no exception. Viewers of *Doctor Who* occupy a space within a broader structure of culture. Their spaces are imbued with the themes and messages from the show, influencing a transformation of the abstracted space into a place. This place, influenced by the show's plotlines, contributes to a broader culture in which that individual viewer practices their self-reproduction. Collectively, these individual viewers form part of the broader society that operates under this structure of culture. This is also influenced by a circulation of cultures, a broader geographical concept which forms a significant framework for this research. My dissertation highlights the importance of understanding space-place-culture dynamics, a progression that influences *all* geographic research, as well as how the circulation of culture influences broader development and manipulation of hegemonic knowledge (i.e., how media consumption may influence a wider population's worldviews and mobilities).

Methodological Implications

This dissertation employs mixed-methods techniques to address the goals of the research, including qualitative methodologies of focus groups, critical episode analysis, and literature review, and quantitative methodologies in data mining and Likert scale exercises. The critical episode analysis and literature review in Chapter I serves to provide a theoretical framework for the applied techniques in Chapters II and III, and takes inspiration from the work of Warren (1996), who conducted analyses of the cultural and social implications of episodes from the television series *Thriller*. In Chapter II, this dissertation contributes to a small, growing body of literature on using focus groups and film to explore the creation of empathy and compassion among viewers because of the medium consumed (Bissell, Manderson, and Allotey 2000; Woelders 2008). To expand, Bissell et al (2000) present a case study of using focus groups in Dhaka, Bangladesh to show former child workers from a garment factory a documentary film from UNICEF that outlines the experiences of other child workers from these factories. The researchers found that the focus group participants could express qualitative gains in compassion and empathy through viewing the film. Although this focus group methodology was used in a documentary setting, science fiction can also often speak meaningfully and empathically towards a familiar reality for many viewers. Thus, the focus group methodology remains relevant. I use the focus group methodology here to further illustrate the utility of focus groups to understand connections between empathy and media consumption. Chapter II also demonstrates a use of Likert scales to quantitatively measure the emotions and viewpoints of focus group participants. The use of this quantitative measure is inspired by Rhind et al (2011), whose work outlines the use of Likert scales within a focus group to gauge participants' emotions and make inferences towards the larger relevant population. Finally, Chapter III demonstrates a use of social media

data mining to understand how fans of *Doctor Who* engage with their fellow Whovians, following a methodological framework described in Stavros et al (2014). These researchers mined social media data to provide a glimpse into how fans demonstrate their enthusiasm toward professional sports teams. Collectively, these methodologies are well-suited to my research and can be applied in a manner that effectively addresses the research questions behind this dissertation.

Theoretical Frameworks

My dissertation is based on several theoretical frameworks, the first being the theories of estrangement and alienation as they relate to the consumption of science fiction media. Theoretical constructs related to estrangement and alienation which can influence the consumption of popular geopolitics. The philosophy of cosmopolitanism is one that also deeply influences my research. I situate my research as influencing cultural change from the level of the individual viewer, which directly ties into geographies of empathy and tolerance as they relate to cosmopolitanism, explained here by Warf (2015):

> "…the Stoics suggested that we think of ourselves as surrounded by a series of concentric circles of compassion in which each individual is located at the center of progressively larger webs of mutual obligation extending from the self and family to community to region to the world, with declining obligations to those farthest removed from ourselves. Cosmopolitanism advocates extending the innermost circles outward, to encompass ever larger domains of humanity" (pg. 930).

I attempt to explain cultural transformation through space-place metamorphosis as facilitated by media at the viewer level, connecting such an analysis to cosmopolitanism, which

recognizes cultural change through the bottom-up approach[5]. Cosmopolitanism is an ideal philosophical framework for my research in that it takes place in the geographical imagination—an imagined community and a common humanity not constrained by borders (Warf 2015). As Rifkin (2009) writes, cosmopolitanism is a theory which balances commercial and empathic frameworks, and "to be cosmopolitan is to be open to 'the other' and to be comfortable amid diverse cultures...honed to a sophisticated sense of selfhood as a result of intense exposure to and empathic connection with diverse others" (pg. 431-432). In each of the following papers, I describe research which explores if and how *Doctor Who* implores viewers to take on an increased cosmopolitan worldview, as performed through fans engagement with empathy and popular geopolitics. Popular geopolitics can be defined as a "particular subset of political geography in which daily-lived experience of geopolitics is the subject manner of interest" (Dittmer 2010), in which geopolitics constitute political study under geographic considerations.

My dissertation applies estrangement, alienation, and cosmopolitanism as theories that relate to empathy through evoking insight and perspective into a subject other than oneself. I apply these theories to popular culture of science fiction and its associated popular geopolitics, by shedding light on the intricacies and importance of studying the influence that media plays on global daily reproduction and formation of hegemonic structure.

Dissertation Outline

In this section, I explain the format in which I organize my dissertation. I utilize the option of three publishable articles, tied together with an introductory and concluding portion which links the three articles with a broader commentary on emotional geographies within science fiction

[5] For more discussion on cosmopolitanism, see Tuan (2010) at http://chronicle.com/article/A-New-Cosmopolitanism/124131

media, and the role that *Doctor Who* plays in encouraging geographers to consider geographies of peace and compassion within media, and how such discourse may shape various cultural landscapes.

Article Descriptions

The dissertation is split into three articles which are both distinct and intimately related. Geographically, they engage with the *Doctor Who* franchise at multiple scales: 1) analyzing individual episodes through the lens of social theories of alienation, popular geopolitics, cosmopolitanism, and empathy, 2) individually, through interaction and observation of viewers; and 3) at the broader fandom-level, through social media analysis.

The first article, "Science Fiction as Reinterpretation of Place: Conceptual Frameworks for Studying Empathy and Critical Worldbuilding in *Doctor Who,"* sets the theoretical framework for the dissertation by employing a literary analysis of published works in science fiction theory, psychology, media geography, and communications. These literatures document and reiterate the significant role that media play in influencing and maintaining a certain worldview across geographic boundaries, as well as how science fiction may (or may not) contribute to empathic feelings towards a subject by the consumer and viewer. The article then highlights episodes of *Doctor Who* that reiterate the findings from the literature review, providing opportunities for the reader not only to see how the show addresses media circulation, empathy, and social awareness, but also how media in general can be used to study these concepts.

The second article, "Accessing *Doctor Who's* Influence on Empathy, Geographic Awareness, and Geopolitical Understandings through Focus Group Methodology," puts the theoretical concepts of the first article into action by directly engaging with individuals as they view the television show. A total of three focus groups were held with three distinct populations

in each group: (1) fans of the show (self-proclaimed Whovians), (2) people who have never previously seen the show, and (3) people who dislike the show, having previously watched at least one episode. Each participant was shown the same episode, and took a Likert scale survey pre- and post-viewing to test their levels of empathy, geographic awareness, and general attitudes towards science fiction as influenced (or not influenced) by the episode. Overall, this paper examines previously underdeveloped analysis and discourse on the intersections between fandom and the consumption of media, and resultant effects of such intersections on perceptions of empathy and landscape within a television show.

The third and final article, "'Doctor Who Predicted Brexit': Fan Geographies and Engagement Between Geopolitics and *Doctor Who* on Social Media," engages with the fan geographies of the broader *Doctor Who* fandom as they influence geopolitical landscapes on social media. Using Brexit and the election and inauguration of Donald Trump as case studies, this article documents an analysis of public posts on Facebook that show an individual discussing one or both geopolitical events through a lens of their *Doctor Who* fandom. Through references to Donald Trump as a bothersome alien invader, to wishing the TARDIS could be used to go back in time and stop Brexit, members of the *Doctor Who* fandom shape the online geopolitical landscape associated with these events, using fandom to blur the lines between fantasy and reality.

Comprehensively, these articles bring to light several aspects of cultural geography that have yet to remain explored in geographies of science fiction. For example, while research in this sub-discipline has certainly explored empathy, geopolitics, and landscape, no published work to date has engaged with these topics through a lens of *Doctor Who.* Further, the study of fan geographies (at least under this specific name) has not been the focus of science fiction geography research to date, filling a much-needed gap in scholarly knowledge.

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CHAPTER I: SCIENCE FICTION AS REINTERPRETATION OF PLACE: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS FOR STUDYING EMPATHY AND CRITICAL WORLDBUILDING IN DOCTOR WHO

Abstract

As a facilitator of estrangement and escapism, and a narrator of alternative geographies and landscapes, science fiction presents an opportunity to alter the very way we, as viewers, engage with media. Presenting the science fiction program *Doctor Who* as the focus, this conceptual paper outlines a theoretical framework for exploring the extent to which, if at all, science fiction television works to construct a re-interpretation of place as more peaceful and compassionate among its viewers. *Doctor Who* is a BBC television program in which an alien species faces sinister and cruel nemeses during his time travels. Several iterations of the Doctor since the show's beginning in 1963 face these nemeses amidst compelling themes such as natural disaster, mental illness, and social control. Analyzing selected episodes of *Doctor Who,* this paper seeks to highlight and reiterate the influence of media in the shaping of ideologies and structures that impact human activity. I argue that episodes featuring a social commentary through a science fiction lens may influence viewers to empathically reconsider place through a geography of peace. This research sets the theoretical foundation for conducting further quantitative and qualitative studies that engage geographically with the *Doctor Who* franchise.

Introduction

For decades, geographers have turned their attention towards the study of media landscapes and the implications of these landscapes on perceptions and experiences of place, political ideologies, and popular culture (Burgess and Gold 1985; Otto 1987; Bell 1998; Lukinbeal 2005; McHugh 2005; Hoffman 2007; Bushman and Davis 2009; Jazairy 2009; Laberge 2011; Longan 2011; Miyase 2013). This paper explores specifically the interconnections between media geographies and peace geographies through a focus on *Doctor Who*, the longest-running science fiction television program in the world (Dinnick 2012). The show has enjoyed steady popularity since beginning in the early-1960s due to its compelling storylines and intricately detailed modes of science fiction, creating a cult-like following that has steadily increased since the show began (Porter 2012). However, its importance is more significant than just as a form of entertainment. Given the strong relevance of the media in shaping the spaces in which we operate our daily lives, we must begin to consider how *Doctor Who* can represent, reflect on, and project the real world forward, and how episodes of the show may implore viewers to reconsider preconceived notions on social issues.

Episodes of *Doctor Who* feature plotlines that offer a broad social commentary on issues including classism, apathy towards natural disaster victims, mental illness, and social control through forced domination by a violent power. Such episodes potentially influence the formation of an emotional connection between the viewer and the marginalized subject being portrayed, encouraging viewers to consider how they perceive similar "otherness" in their own lives. Understanding when and how notions of the "other" developed is the first step towards beginning to erode false boundaries and binaries that plague a modern-day landscape of apathy, discrimination, and violence. Science fiction scholars (Nicholls 1976; Kitchin and Kneale 2001,

2002; Rhodes et al. 2017) have long-touted the power of the genre in speaking toward real social and cultural structures, and this paper seeks to advance that work with an analysis of *Doctor Who.*

Within this analysis, I first explore empathic plotlines in episodes of *Doctor Who* and examine the literature on science fiction to explore how themes within the show 1) might reframe place and social issues in more compassionate and empathic terms; 2) illuminate the potential effects of these place-based reconsiderations; and 3) focus on the role of media in knowledge creation and how media are part of, rather than apart from, our daily movements, thoughts, and actions.

I then explain the opportunity to consider how media can engage with reinterpretations of place as more empathic and compassionate in the spaces in which we operate our social lives; that is, I essentially wish to construct a *Doctor Who* epistemology. Included in this epistemology is a discussion of the show's efficacy as a tool for empathic education.

Finally, I urge scholars to devote further academic research to studying the cultural impacts of not only *Doctor Who,* but other science fiction programs that discuss social issues through a lens of fantasy, in the hope that viewers will reconsider how they view the Othered individuals and groups in their lives. Scholars have asserted that immersion into fictional narratives may influence empathy over time (Bal and Veltkamp 2013), emboldening a theoretical framework for studying empathic plotlines in *Doctor Who*. This paper is highly conceptual, serving as a primer for conducting future qualitative and quantitative geographic research on *Doctor Who* and whether it plays a role in creating compassionate spaces both within and outside of the fandom.

Who is *Doctor Who*?

An analytical study of *Doctor Who*'s plotlines and engagement with compassion and peace first necessitates a general synopsis of the show's characters and overall premise. This synopsis will provide the context to understand the fundamental argument of this paper. The intricacies of the plotline that would satisfy seasoned viewers are omitted because they might potentially reveal substantial spoilers to those who have not watched the show. The main character of *Doctor Who* is known simply as the Doctor, a Time Lord from the planet Gallifrey who uses a TARDIS (Time and Relative Dimension/s in Space) to travel anywhere in space and time, frequently with a human, female companion. Within the show, time is considered to be non-linear and instead of dying of age/natural/physical causes in the manner that a human would, the Doctor regenerates into a new physical form in which he remains a Time Lord but appears phenotypically different from his previous form. Accordingly, the Doctor is over 900 years old. While the Doctor's regenerations up to the current season have been visually male, the newest incarnation of the Doctor will be played by a female, actress Jodie Whittaker. Due to the Doctor's gender fluidity, and for consistency, throughout the course of this paper I use the pronouns they/their/theirs to refer to the Doctor en masse, but with a specific gender pronoun if I am focusing on the particular actor playing the Doctor in a given episode.

The Doctor is primarily non-violent in their conflicts with nemeses throughout the show; while exceptions exist (the Doctor has taken the lives of others, in cases of rage, duress, and extreme necessity), their "weaponry" consisting of a Sonic Screwdriver, psychic paper, and extreme intelligence and reasoning skills are used in a manner that rarely inflicts significant harm on another being but rather manipulates them mentally and physically. The Doctor's often pacifist approach to conflict may contribute to the show's potential to disseminate messages of

peace and compassion in a context of using logic and rationality to solve conflict rather than violent force. More information and further detailed explanations can be obtained from the BBC[6]

The show is inherently classified as science-fiction due to its themes of time travel, alien species, and space-age technology, amidst plotlines that provide commentary on real social injustices through a lens of fantasy. Televisual media have the potential to propel viewers from simple observance to becoming committed participants (McLuhan 1964), heightening the potential for the consideration of empathy for characters with whom the viewer is now intimately connected. In watching an episode of *Doctor Who*, the viewer may become emotionally connected to the historical events and/or characters being portrayed. Within this research, case studies of episodes in which an injustice or othering is represented are included, followed by a discussion of the efficacy of these representations in possibly influencing viewers to consider a more compassionate conception of place. Before these case studies are presented, it is necessary to review the literature on science fiction, empathy, media epistemology, and peace geographies to provide theoretical and intellectual weight to the theories posed in the episode analyses.

Literature Review

Geographies of Science Fiction

As a researcher I am emboldened by a small, but growing, portion of the geographic discipline that engages with science fiction through a geographic lens. Geographies of science fiction are characterized by exploration of themes such as power relations within science fiction film, outer space as an alternative representation of place, the cultural politics of alien invaders, and binary "Us versus the Other" politics. These topics are outlined in the edited volume "Lost in

[6] http://www.bbc.co.uk

Space: Geographies of Science Fiction," (Kitchin and Kneale 2002) a seminal text in science fiction geographies that inspires much of the theoretical foundations of this work. Academics from all disciplines should not dismiss the significant potential in studying science fiction's ability to blur the lines between fantasy and reality, providing relevant social commentary on real-world social issues through fantastical plotlines. Academic notions of science fiction, however, have not changed dramatically over the past twenty years: Kuhn (1990) described the possibility of an "elitism which regards popular media and genres as beneath serious critical attention" (p. 1), noting a distinct lack of attention devoted to academic studies of science fiction. Moving forward several decades, George (2013) brought attention to a disregard of the potential for science-fiction films in the 1950s and 1960s to have a value beyond simple entertainment, relinquishing any opportunity to examine critically the significant social commentary that the genre offers. While scholars have devoted more intellectual focus towards science fiction in the decades since Kuhn's initial assertion, and George's recent statement, it remains important to highlight the significance of understanding science fiction's role in commenting upon reality, even as it seems to escape that reality, particularly when such commentary includes important social themes of discrimination, Othering, and violence.

The manner in which science fiction critiques lived reality through a fantastical lens can be framed through cognitive estrangement and a dialectic of enlightenment. Science fiction has been called the "literature of cognitive estrangement" (Suvin 2005, p. 24), as it often projects the human (or human-like) experience onto the past, present, and future. Cognitive estrangement is a representation through which a consumer recognizes the subject matter, but it is presented through a lens which makes it appear unfamiliar. This estranges the viewer from the social space in which the subject matter was initially recognized, creating a space for new cognitive processes

surrounding the subject (Suvin 1979). Estrangement as a descriptor, however, is not unique to science fiction, and has played a large role in the development of plays in the theatre world. In 1949, the author Bertolt Brecht defined estrangement ("Verfremdungseffekt") as: "A representation which estranges is one which allows us to recognize its subject, but at the same time makes it seem unfamiliar" (Suvin 2005, p. 25). Thus, the manner in which science fiction scholars continue to use the term estrangement aligns with historical usage of the term, and its definition holds true to any art form which implores a viewing audience to consume a plotline. The very nature of the science fiction genre is rooted in estrangement, taking a familiar representation from modern society and presenting it through a fantastical lens, causing the viewer's estrangement from their society that recognizes that familiar representation. For example, in the *Twilight Zone* episode "I am the Night/Color Me Black (1964)," a small town is suddenly overcome by darkness. The townspeople do not understand why the sun has not risen that day, and proceed with their normal operations on schedule: a public lynching of a white man who murdered a man alluded to as a Ku Klux Klan member. As the viewer slowly comes to learn throughout the episode, the town is enveloped in darkness because of the morality of the lynching itself: if a man murders another man who is committing racist atrocities against another human being, is that murder justified? Does an evil committed to erase a larger evil effectively cancel out the initial evil act? The viewer also learns that areas all over the globe are shrouded in darkness, signifying a global distribution of injustices that envelope societies in darkness. Through this representation of good vs. evil, viewers are estranged from societal positionality on what constitutes good, and conversely, what constitutes evil. Through this estrangement, viewers can allow their cognitive processes to gather new knowledge on hierarchies of good and evil, and the externalities of those societies entrenched in negative activity or discourse.

A further example of estrangement in science fiction is seen in "Colossus: The Forbin Project" (1970), an American science fiction film that demonstrates the increased autonomy of a supercomputer. The plot follows a Dr. Charles Forbin, the designer of the supercomputer called "Colossus," which is recognized to be the perfect system of defense for the United States. However, the machine steadily gains autonomy in its actions, becoming increasingly sinister in its threats towards the humans working in the facility that houses the supercomputer. The estrangement manifests most strongly towards the end of the film: in many science fiction films, particularly those involving artificial intelligence and technology, there's generally a pattern in which humans *eventually* triumph as the protagonists and overcome the challenges presented (see *Blade Runner, 1982,* and *2001: A Space Odyssey*, 1968, for examples). However, in this film, the viewer is left with the impression that the humans have lost in their battle against the supercomputers, despite Forbin's assertion that he will remain adversarial to the supercomputer's domination. The film seems to end abruptly, in that the human protagonists do not triumph against the machine. Viewers, in this case, are estranged from their normal understandings of the protagonist/antagonist binary between artificial intelligence (AI) and humans in science fiction. Given this, one can argue that to the average viewer, the film seems to end abruptly *because* viewers are so accustomed to humans being triumphant against invading technologies and forces in media productions.

A dialectic of enlightenment (Horkheimer 1972) is an understanding that humans have lost the ability to utilize brain power in intellectual terms other than means and ends; therefore, humans can only use their brains for instrumental reason. We think in terms of what ensures our survival, often without regard to external and internal costs. However, because we live in a post-industrialized society, it is imperative that humans consider the weight of their actions for

survival in the natural world. Tying this to broader characteristics of the science fiction genre, through estrangement and alienation, viewers are exposed to the realities of why instrumental reason is a problematic line of thinking for humanity, thus engaging said viewer in a dialectic of enlightenment in which alternative modes of self-reproduction are considered. This is key when considering the prolific ability of science fiction to offer commentary on the current trajectory of humanity.

Nicholls (1976) describes the ability of science fiction to form commentary on the real world, working primarily through metaphor to describe reality: "To read it literally is not to hear its profoundest and most disturbing reverberations" (p. 8). While Nicholls is referring to written science fiction, I apply the same notion to visual forms of science fiction. Viewership of science fiction media may facilitate emotional connections between the viewer and the subject based on their description of reality through a lens of fantasy. Scholars have explored the implications of science fiction media in facilitating emotional explorations of what constitutes fantasy and reality (Lips 1990; Piana 2002; Landon 2011; Chapman 2013; Correa 2014; Tapper 2014). These explorations not only allow viewers to use science fiction as a form of escapism, but they are also helpful in facilitating emotional healing. For example, an increasing amount of behavioral counseling and therapy for children with histories of abuse use superhero costumes to provide comfort to their patients, where either/both the counselor and/or the patient dress up to resemble a superhero. Proponents argue that this form of roleplay allows victims of abuse to find comfort and security from the persona of the superheroes, atoning to the power of science fiction and fantasy in facilitating emotional comfort (Haen and Brannon 2002; Rubin and Livesay 2006).

Televisual science fiction also serves to provide emotional comfort to viewers when considering that television can provide a sense of belonging to those who have a perceived lack

of community or camaraderie within a social space (Miller 2007) even if such belonging is instilled through engagement with fictional storylines and characters. As Adams (1992) notes, television itself blurs the defined boundaries between human-made places and the digital world, providing a space in which scholars can view "television (and perhaps other media) as a gathering place for vast numbers of people...[that] experientially inhabit it and relate to other persons through it or with it…[and] geographers may be able to provide some unique insights into television" (pg. 119). In the same way that a person may, therefore, experience comfort through face-to-face connections, they may also seek and receive such comfort through televisual means. Individuals who may have no perceived connections can find common ground among their viewership of certain shows, highlighting the power of television in forming connections between large groups of people. This is particularly true within science fiction television, which provides a platform for people from a variety of races, genders, and ages to bond over a common interest in a show (Lips 1990; Piana 2002). This camaraderie is exhibited in cosplay that takes place among *Doctor Who* viewers who, at conventions, gatherings, and promotional screenings of the show, often dress up as a regeneration of the Doctor, a companion, or an alien from the series. This celebration of fandom, which may produce feelings of "othering" when individually worn outside of *Doctor Who* events, provides these cosplayers with a sense of community, belonging, and empowerment within a collective tribute to the show. Fandom and fantasy as platforms for comfort and healing have also been explored as a method for facilitating successful experiences from evidence-based psychological therapies[7] such as counseling, lending weight to the rationale of studying empathic plotlines in *Doctor Who.*

[7] http://www.superhero-therapy.com/meet-the-doctor/

Geographies of Media and Peace

The foundations of this research are rooted in broader studies of media and peace geographies, which have become significant geographic areas of research as media heavily influences popular culture, and through such influence may have repercussions on geopolitical knowledge, insider vs. outsider viewpoints, and levels of empathy within a society. More scholars are recognizing the validity of studying the implications of media on mass populations due to the long-recognized relationship between communication via media venues and the creation and reproduction of knowledge (Gozzi and Haynes 1992). Media are venues through which ideologies that influence culture may be formed and even contested.

The inherently geographical nature of the connections between the media and culture are framed by their importance in the daily operational spaces of social life they create to allow for the reproduction of knowledge to occur (Christophers 2007; Christensen 2013). Analysis and critiques of these operational spaces is a common thread in research conducted within peace geographies. Geographical studies of peace are complicated because geography "is better at studying war than peace" (Megoran 2011, p.178). However, peace geographies (and conversely, violent geographies) are inherently geographical in nature in that they seek, in part, to isolate the spatial and locational facilitators of conflict. Further, and most importantly in the context of this research, peace geographies strive to re-envision the spaces in which we operate our daily lives so that we may create new spaces of social justice (Mitchell 2003). Re-envisioning our spaces of reproduction is important. Scholars such as Inwood (2012) have asserted that landscapes of fear (Tuan 1979) often develop through decades of hegemonic and structural prejudices such as racism, income inequality and classism, which, in turn, reproduce inequality and violence.

Despite the significant intersections between peace studies and geographic research, scholars note the distinct lack of the word "peace" within the discipline (Kobayashi 2009; Koopman 2011). Koopman (2011) goes on to state that little research has been conducted thus far by geographers that even contains the word "peace," despite focusing on peace-related topics. Ross (2011) asks if the discipline is equipped to adequately research peace, questioning if geographical research has focused on war and violence at the expense of peace. McConnell et al. (2014) acknowledge, however, the importance of geography's critical frameworks of interactions among space, time, and politics in studying peace. Therefore, the intersectionality of geographic research *does,* therefore, situate the discipline in a prime role for studying issues of peace, but perhaps peace studies must be interwoven with other well-established areas of geography to gain the respect needed to propel peace geographies into a higher role within the discipline. This research contributes to the broader study of cultural geography by exploring the representation of cultural "othering" through forms of popular media, and how these ideas of exclusion and inclusion diffuse across a wide audience, using science fiction as an under-studied media channel. Although the word "peace" can represent several themes and issues, this research will focus on peace as defined through empathetic living, an idea presented by several scholars (Zembylas 2007; Pinker 2011; Sagkal, Turnuklu, and Totan 2013; Shamay-Tsoory et al. 2013).

The aforementioned scholars suggest that levels of peace (as the absence of violence) can be increased as empathy among the population increases, and, conversely, as levels of peace decrease, levels of empathy also decrease. Megoran (2011) states that a geography of peace should focus on learning from past and present situations where peace was achieved in a space of unrest so that such situations may serve as a framework for understanding areas which are suffering from conflict and violence. Peace geographies should also critically analyze both past

and present violent conflicts to isolate the social and spatial dynamics that led to such unrest, so that future situations of similar natures can be avoided. Therefore, a comprehensive peace geography not only asks the question "why did conflict occur here?" but also "why did conflict *not* occur here?" (p. 184). In answering these questions, a certain level of engagement with the human geography of an area is required—and such engagement is facilitated by understanding the dynamics of past conflict through an empathetic lens. Therefore, the teaching of peace geographies should be aimed at answering the subsequent questions through a lens of empathy. However, empathy can be difficult to develop in an environment where an apathetic culture has led to an alienation of those who do not satisfy notions of what it means to contribute to society (Dean 1960) and this alienation allows us to classify "them" as "the other," facilitating our disengagement with their lived experiences. Some scholars continue to suggest that empathy is inherently difficult to develop outright through the communication of counter-narratives, although certainly not impossible (Cook 2016). In a world where media can heavily influence the formation and continuation of ideology, I argue for its importance as a medium to provide commentary on empathy towards "the other" and affect the segregation (or continuation) of "us" and "the other" influenced in part by a lack of disengagement with those who look, live, and act different from us as individuals. The notion of "us vs. the other" influences much of this article's discussion of *Doctor Who* and its presentation of social issues through a science fiction context. Because peace geographies strive to understand dominant ideologies that create spaces of social injustice, researchers in this sub-discipline benefit from a knowledge of how the media influences public opinion and shapes dominant ideologies. Therefore, peace geographies and

media-driven geopolitical geographies should be intimately connected as geographers seek to create a more peaceful world that deconstructs problematic ideologies[8].

To further frame the importance of this research as it relates to peace geographies and media geographies, I discuss the networks that connect the meanings and implications among culture, popular culture, ideology, and media, as initially outlined by Burgess and Gold (1985), and further supported by scholars of popular geopolitics (Dodds 2008; Dittmer 2010; Purcell et al. 2010; Woon 2014). To define culture in a singularly relevant manner is challenging, but a useful definition within this research is that it represents "the material practices and customs of a group…their expressions in places and landscape and the production of signifying or symbolic systems" (Burgess and Gold 1985, p. 2). Popular culture, then, as outlined by Burgess and Gold, involves the "everyday practices, experiences and beliefs of what have been called 'the common people'—that overwhelming proportion of society that does not occupy positions of wealth and power" (p. 3). Popular culture influences cultural expression and the performative aspects of culture, which in turn influences the development of ideologies, which social groups create to make the world more intelligible to themselves whether for positive or negative intentions (Burgess and Gold 1985; Edensor 2002; Dittmer 2010; Nieguth 2015). I progress to a definition of media, which are best described as venues used by social groups who employ technology to disseminate symbolic content to a targeted audience in order to accomplish certain ideological goals and purposes (Burgess and Gold 1985, p. 4). These audiences are engaged, critical consumers of geopolitical meanings that are projected through popular media and texts (Woon 2014). These four terms (culture, popular culture, ideology, and media) and their inherent connections in contributing to the production of knowledge and highlight the intersections of

[8] The meaning of "problematic" depends on the geographic location and lived experiences of those defining which ideologies are problematic.

media, culture, and hegemonic discourse, intersections which are important in framing this research.

Empathy and Social Responsibility

Retz (2012) has studied the strong connections between empathy, historical understanding, and social responsibility. Current society holds a strong disconnection to "the other" which transcends into disengaged perceptions of temporally-distant historical events. Retz further notes that students often dismiss the actions of historical figures as illogical and see them as morally inferior to our current society, immediately influencing their own disengagement. Thus, we do not learn from their actions because said actions are dismissed as being the product of a person's moral inferiority, neglecting the possibility that certain social and/or spatial characteristics influenced their behavior. Such historical figures are cast as "the other," and morally separate from us and not worthy of understanding or empathy. I argue that such dismissal does not allow us to discover if such behavioral influences are *still* present in our society and perpetuated in the spaces of self-reproduction in which we operate our lives. The ideologies of countless historical figures have contributed to perpetuated spaces of social injustice, and ambivalence towards "empathy for the 'other'" (Zembylas 2013, p. 19). These perceptions severely threaten our society's capacity to fight injustices by allowing said spaces to perpetuate in the absence of a critical engagement with the forces influencing the actions that allowed for the presence of spaces filled by such injustices. This provides the rationale for studying empathy within peace geographies, which would strive to abandon our preconceived notions about an historical event and/or figure to ascertain why injustice could occur in a certain area, and why it did not occur in others, to facilitate an understanding of the spatial and social dynamics that influence exploitation. Science fiction is an excellent genre in which to study

empathy due to the fantastical plotlines and socio-political commentary, estranging viewers from their preconceived worldviews and influencing a new lens through which their worldview is shaped.

This understanding of historical injustices is increasingly influenced by visual experiences that highlight the power of the image in facilitating clarity in understanding the dynamics of historical figures and events, providing further rationale for studying peace and media geographies together. Revisiting Retz (2012), they posit that historical understanding is limited without mental images of the historical landscape itself, likening such superficial understanding to going to a sacred site in India and not getting a tour guide, thereby losing the "historical understandings of the site's relics from the mental images that the guides' explanations were able to provide" (p. 40). Such lack of engagement leads to disengagement from historical actors, a practical relationship to be fostered if individuals are to understand views and actions from the past. For decades, history teachers have recognized the importance of creating empathy in students towards negative historical events as a method of living vicariously through these historical figures and understanding the thought-processes that led to their actions so that these students may recognize when such ideologies again become dominant (Boddington 1980). In recognizing these harmful ideologies, I argue for the increased preparedness of students and educators in deconstructing and eliminating such ideologies. In nurturing the development of historical empathy, we may begin to construct "relational spaces" (Murdoch 2006; Jones 2009; Cresswell 2013) in which we can begin to articulate the networks in which we are all connected that exist in our operational spaces. Disengagement from historical events can influence the apathy that perpetuates spaces of social injustice. Several *Doctor Who* episodes not

only feature representations of destructive historical events and deplorable actions of historical figures, but also explore social injustices through a science-fiction lens.

Media Epistemology and Empathy

Scholars have explored the connections between the media and a facilitation (or inhibition) of peace, where media venues have manipulated the strong association between the media and the shaping of public opinion to push a specific agenda (Wolfsfeld 2004; Spencer 2005; Keeble *et al.* 2010; McLaughlin and Baker 2010). Further, scholars have conducted research to explore the facilitators of these significant connections, highlighting the cognitive and social dynamics that form the development of opinions (Hoffman *et al.* 2007; Davison 1958; Price and Roberts 1987; Van Leuven and Slater 1991; Kinder 1998; Dunwoody *et al*. 2005.), and the media forms a platform on which to shape these dynamics. This influence of the media may be further described through Crespi's (1997) model of public opinion, which includes the emergence of a collective opinion among viewers from individual opinions broadcast through forms of media. Therefore, the individual opinion of whomever is controlling a media venue is often received by a large audience and can thus influence a broader collective opinion.

Bailey (1975) defines empathy as having five interpretations: (1) another word for knowing and understanding others, (2) motor mimicry, (3) imagining oneself in the place of others, (4) evoking the other within oneself, and (5) knowledge that exceeds normal modes of cognition. For this research, I use a hybrid definition of empathy that combines these five definitions with the classification posited by Blyth (1975), who stated that empathy is the ability to understand another person's behavior based on one's own experiences and the characteristics of the other person's situation. Because some episodes of *Doctor Who* provides representations of real historical figures and how they intersect with historic events, as well as social

commentary through a science-fiction lens, these two characterizations of empathy provide the framework for this theoretical analysis. This definition of empathy is also suitable considering the power of visual experience in facilitating transitions from sympathy towards a subject. Retz (2012) posits that historical understanding is limited without mental images of the historical landscape itself, likening such superficial understanding to going to a sacred site in India and not getting a tour guide, thereby losing the "historical understandings of the site's relics from the mental images that the guides' explanations were able to provide" (p. 40). Such lack of engagement leads to disengagement from historical actors, a practical relationship to be fostered if individuals are to understand views and actions from the past (Retz 2012). For decades, history teachers have recognized the importance of creating empathy in students towards negative historical events as a method of living vicariously through these historical figures and understanding the thought-processes that led to their actions (Coltham and Fines 1971; Boddington 1980) so that these students may recognize when such ideologies again become dominant. Several *Doctor Who* episodes not only feature representations of destructive historical events and deplorable actions of historical figures, but also explore social injustices through a science-fiction lens. Using the show as an epistemology through which to comment upon and engage with deeper themes in empathy, compassion, and emotional geographies is inspired by the work of Woods (1998a, 1998b, 2002, 2007, 2009), who constructed a blues epistemology as a lens through which to study reproduced legacies of racism in the American South. Woods' decades of intellectual prowess assert the power of using cultural relics such as music, film, and television to create a broader dialogue on social and cultural constructions, and inspires this research as it aims to highlight *Doctor Who* as a lens through which to study themes in empathy, compassion, and placemaking.

Media and Emotion

Gozzi Jr. and Haynes (1992) discuss the "zones of epistemology" (217) that are created by media communication that includes interactions between participants and the media; such interactions produce knowledge filtered through the participants' own experiences. Viewers of *Doctor Who*, particularly in episodes where historical landscapes and/or events and sociopolitical themes are represented within a science fiction context, may alter their knowledge about said representations as filtered through a lens of their own perception of the historical event and/or sociopolitical issue and how they came to first accumulate the relevant knowledge. Holmes (2005) describes media as an "apparatus of ideology" (pg. 25), describing the importance of understanding the negotiations of meanings and symbolism within media, and their effects on the reproduction of knowledge. The capacity for knowledge creation through media-based epistemologies is significant. Termed "electric epistemology" by Gozzi Jr. and Haynes (1992), this form of knowledge creation has gained dominance as face-to-face communications and reading has decreased and television viewership has increased among the public, producing active consumers of media in which mediated messages are dynamically interpreted and rejected by the viewer. The potential to spread theories and ideologies through the media and influence a large audience is therefore strong, whether those theories are perceived positively or negatively (Pink and Mackley 2013). The media that can be used to spread theories and ideologies positivity but can also be used for exploitative purposes, such as with political campaigning and greenwashing, the practice of making products appear more environmentally sustainable than they actually are (Delmas and Burbano 2011; MacDonald 2008). Although playing an active role in the interpretation and co-construction of these messages, the viewer is continually consuming messages disseminated through sources of media.

Knowledge alteration through media televisual is inherently visual, speaking to the importance of visual culture in the perpetuation of our operational spaces. The interpretation of what constitutes reality is heavily influenced by images (Sontag 2002; Sandywell and Heywood 2012). A reality that is constructed through literary or oral venues can be altered or more clearly understood through visual engagement with one's own embodiment of said reality. The visual process is rarely passive and disengaged. The perceptions and interpretations stemming from visualization are, therefore, significant (Sandywell and Heywood 2012). Viewers of visual images are actively consuming the material presented before their eyes and determining their own agreement and/or disagreement with the message. Campbell (2009) argues that photography is a manner of visualization in which the images represent a visual economy of issues and events, materialized in unique representations. Collections of visual images such as television shows, then, present a form of cultural capital that can play a large role in creating and shaping empathy among viewers.

Televisual media has the power to guide ideologies on a broad global scale because of the emotional connections between the viewer and the subject of the broadcast (Gorton 2012). Because of the capacity of television to facilitate emotional connectivity between the viewer and the broadcasted image, televisual media are venues through which to voice ideologies on a grand scale to a receptive audience. This venue can be used to broadcast positive ideologies or critiques of current systems of injustice, but often the media's ability to sway public opinion is exploited to push political campaigns or harmful social agendas. Public opinion is perpetually shaped by attention to media (Price and Roberts 1987) and as media continues to play a larger role in daily social life, the opportunity to shape public opinion and spark a mass change in culture is significant. Powell (2010) and Lionells (1999) establish the importance of psychoanalysis in

understanding politics and culture, noting that "human nature is susceptible to rational inquiry…meaning that by understanding people, we are able to help them change" (Powell 2010, p. 97). Media, and particularly science fiction, can create widespread societal changes in dominant ideologies by facilitating emotional ties between the viewer and the subject. While, again, this is often exploited to push harmful agendas, *Doctor Who* presents an opportunity for the show's viewers to consider a more compassionate and empathic depiction of place.

Episode Case Studies

The following four episode synopses from *Doctor Who* present examples of the show's representation of a certain injustice or social problem that is currently plagued by apathy and disengagement. The episodes often do so through the representation of an historical event or figure. Each episode represents a pedagogical moment for the show to engage with empathy through an educational lens. Although the first broadcasts of *Doctor Who* date back to 1963, episode accessibility means that only examples from the latest revival of the show, which began in 2005, are included in this analysis. In each of these episodes, varying ideas of Otherness[9] are presented through a science-fiction context.

[9] In the context of this research, the Other (also referred to as Othering and Otherness) is defined with inspiration from Said (1978), who demonstrated that representations of the Orient and Orientalism are largely a European invention, entrenched with notions of "romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, [and] remarkable experiences" (pg. 9). Therefore, the Orient was situated as separate and different from European and American society, creating an "Us and Them" binary comprised of "ideas about what 'we' do and what 'they' cannot do or understand as 'we' do" (pg. 20). Otherness, Othering, and the Other, in this paper, is used in a parallel manner to signify a circumstance or social convention that creates a social, cultural, and/or economic binary between beings, both human and non-human.

Case Study 1: "Rise of the Cybermen" and "The Age of Steel," Series 2, Episodes 7 and 8 (Two-Part, 2006)

This two-part episode takes place in present-day London in a parallel universe. The Other is an alien enemy that threatens the humanity of planet Earth. Within this context, the Other represents an entity that directly contradicts (and challenges) what it means to be human, thereby creating otherness through their own rejection of humanity. However, the boundaries of human vs. non-human become blurred by the end of the episode, when the antagonists display human emotion in a powerful form.

Within the episodes, a psychopathic businessman named John Lumic attempts to enslave all of humanity by kidnapping humans and turning them into Cybermen, robots in which all emotions are quelled and free will is removed via an emotion inhibitor. In Lumic's deranged rationalization, kidnapped humans are being "upgraded" via their transformation from human to Cyberman in that they are being "rescued" from the pain of human emotion through forced uniformity. The Doctor, in his 10th generation, foils Lumic's plan by locating the controls for the emotion inhibitor and deactivating it for all converted Cybermen, arguing that such upgrading erodes the beauty of the human experience itself by undermining emotions and individual free will. After their emotion inhibitors are deactivated, converted Cybermen become aware of their transformation and loss of individual humanity, in which some Cybermen are shown clutching their heads in pain and confusion, and viewing their silver reflection in a mirror with shock and dismay. The Doctor can only apologize for what has happened to them, since they cannot be returned to their original human form once upgraded, forced to live an emotionless existence or die (BBC 2006). Viewers are initially led to see the Cybermen as the enemy, but eventually are estranged from this notion after the Cybermen's emotions are uninhibited and they are faced with

the horrific reality of how Lumic has destroyed the humanity of their physical and emotional form.

Here, the episode plot encourages viewers to consider the idea of individuality and free will within humanity, and potentially (re)view the Cybermen through a more compassionate, empathic lens. The relationship between humans and Cybermen expressed in the episode also reflect Othering through the humanity vs. machine dynamic in which anxieties toward artificial intelligence are highlighted. To what extent do humans become Others in the world of machines? Further, at what point do humans lose humanity as they are turned into Cybermen? *Justice League*'s Cyborg and *Star Trek*'s Data are supporting examples of science-fiction's often blurry line between human and machine, encouraging viewers to engage with different meanings of being "human," as is demonstrated in this episode. Both of the aforementioned characters exhibit phenotypic and mental characteristics that are both undeniably human and digitally/mechanically constructed, exhibiting science-fiction's ability to coerce viewers to grapple with what it means to be human.

Case Study 2: "Dark Water" and "Death in Heaven," Series 8, Episode 11 and 12 (Two-Part, 2014)

A further example of empathic themes as expressed through the context of the Cybermen is exhibited in the two-part episode "Dark Water" and "Death in Heaven," taking place in present-day London and the Nethersphere (sometimes called Heaven or the Promised Land). Here, the 12th regeneration of the Doctor and his companion Clara again face the potential destruction of human free-will and emotion amidst an invasion by the Cybermen, sparked by the conversion of dead bodies into the "upgraded" alien species. Throughout the course of the episodes, Clara's boyfriend Danny Pink is struck by a car and killed, and later his dead body is

converted into a Cyberman. As mentioned in the prior example, Cybermen are devoid of emotion and therefore not capable of displaying feelings of love, attachment, and understanding. However, as a Cyberman, Danny continues to show love for Clara and does not harm her, unlike all other Cybermen who are programmed to destroy humans. He earns the opportunity to return to Earth to live with Clara, but instead uses this opportunity to revive a child that he accidently killed while serving in the military. In this example, Danny's conversion into a Cyberman and his subsequent displays of warm emotion further challenges the viewer's previous notions about the species, who are presented as emotionless destroyers of the human race in much of the series' 50-year run. The 12th Doctor, who evokes a darker, coarser demeanor than recent regenerations, is also struck by the display of affection by Danny post-conversion, softening his harsh notions about Cybermen presumably alongside the viewer's changing perception. This episode highlights to viewers the raw, pure humanity that exists among the Cybermen, despite being programmed to remove all senses of emotion and free-will, eroding boundaries between the "upgraded" humans and "real" humans. The viewer, then, may less frequently classify the Cybermen as the "other" after episodes such as these and may feel increased empathy towards other social groups who are compartmentalized by their perceived "otherness."

Case Study 3: "The Fires of Pompeii", Series 4, Episode 2 (2008)

Unlike the previous episodes in which the writing includes empathic plotlines for an entire species of alien, in the episode "The Fires of Pompeii," empathy for average human beings suffering through a natural disaster is explored through the plot and script. Viewership of this episode may increase an individual's likelihood to feel empathy for those who are affected by natural disasters, even if the viewer has no personal, spatial, or temporal attachment to said individuals. Although the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius is often presented in a way that *does* promote

empathy (such as photographs of bodies preserved in ash), this episode serves to humanize those victims within the photographs through actor portrayal, therefore presenting a powerful opportunity to increase empathy and social responsibility towards victims of natural disasters. Within this episode, the 10th regeneration of the Doctor and his companion Donna travel to Pompeii on the day prior to the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius. Viewers meet families (albeit fictional characters) who live in Pompeii and Donna begs the Doctor to alert the individuals about the impending eruption, which would save their lives. The Doctor argues that the event is a fixed point in time, and therefore they cannot spread the knowledge about the eruption. However, minutes after the eruption, as a result of Donna's plea, the Doctor rescues the family of a man named Lobus Caecilius mere moments before their gruesome death from the eruption on the promise that he cannot save everyone, but he can at least save one family (BBC 2008). Viewers may develop a bond with this particular family, having seen them being spared from eminent disaster and subsequently viewing their happiness in life.

Current historical accounts of the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius provide little empathy because of the "objectivity" of the narrative—the devastating eruption, which took place in 79 A.D., is temporally distant and, therefore, it can be difficult to form engagement with the event itself. Thus, in learning about the eruption, students may be disengaged from the victims. Images exist which show the bones of victims killed by the eruption which certainly aids in facilitating a deeper emotional connection to the natural disaster, but arguably there still exists a lack of engagement with the victims themselves. Viewers of this episode are shown an altered perception of the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in that they are introduced to the personalities and uniqueness of those who were "killed" by the eruption, despite these representations being fictional characters. This attachment may influence a deeper engagement with the historical

narrative of Pompeii and Mt. Vesuvius than existing narratives plagued by temporal disengagement with the event, in which the eruption happened centuries ago, giving students little motivations to form emotional connections with the town and the victims. Because current media coverage of natural disasters focuses on the loss of capital (Miles and Morse 2007), little attention to the creation of empathy towards those affected by the disasters occurs, thus easily compartmentalizing these individuals as "the other." Li *et al.* (2008) highlight several dynamics which facilitate connections to natural disaster victims, including historical experience with natural disasters, race and ethnicity, and media coverage, reiterating the number of ways in which these individuals may be cast as disconnected from our own interests. This emotional separation between "us" and "the other" creates a problematic disengagement with human suffering at the hands of a natural disaster, lessening any motivations to provide emotional, physical, or financial assistance to aid in mitigation efforts. Viewers of this episode who experience empathy development may be more connected to victims of future natural disasters and more engaged with relief efforts.

Case Study 4: "Planet of the Ood," Series 4, Episode 3 (2008)

Commenting upon exploitation of non-human beings, "Planet of the Ood" is set on the planet Ood-Sphere, the home of an alien species known as the Ood, who operate in a Borg-like[10] network through their telepathic abilities. Like the previous example, this episode encourages empathy towards an individual; what differs, however, is that this episode features themes of non-human animal domination, torture, and slavery, highlighting empathy for a non-human "other." While the Ood exist in a collective-mind, the episode shows individual Ood in varying levels of torture. Themes of compassion and empathy within the episode are not Earth-centric,

[10] http://memory-alpha.wikia.com/wiki/Borg

and instead highlight interstellar travel as the locale. Any empathy sparked from the portrayal of a tortured non-human may speak towards viewers re-imagining spaces of animal domination and exploitation, seeking more compassion and peace for the welfare of nonhuman animals, and increased understandings of the horrific realities of slavery, whether human or non-human.

Within this episode, the 10th regeneration of the Doctor and his companion Donna Noble journey to the Ood-Sphere and find that the Ood race is being enslaved by the company Ood Operations. This company, comprised of non-Ood humans (outsiders to the planet), lobotomize the individual Ood, and make them subservient to humans. The company then sells the altered Ood as forced servants. The Doctor and Donna, angered and horrified by the actions of Ood Operations, are captured by the company's security force after the Doctor chastises the CEO, Klineman Halpen, for his actions. After their capture, the Ood begin a revolution and begin killing members of Ood Operations, meanwhile helping the Doctor and Donna escape. They locate Halpen, who has retreated to a room with a large brain (the collective consciousness of the Ood), with the intent of destroying it, and by proxy, committing genocide of the Ood race. The Doctor and Donna thwart his plans, and Halpen's personal Ood servant, Ood Sigma, tells them that he will deal with Halpen.

This episode mirrors real issues of non-human animal exploitation for human gain and slavery, presenting them through a science-fiction context. This context, however, does not dilute the episode's ability to influence discourse and empathy surrounding cases of animal abuse and human/non-human slavery that happen across the planet, perhaps influencing viewers to consider the same attachment and investment in the safety of "other" animals as they do for their own human/non-human loved ones. Such empathy for human *and* non-human beings is important for facilitating a peaceful society for humans as well as other beings with which we interact. This

broadens theories of empathy-influenced peace as defined strictly between human-to-human interactions (Zembylas 2007; Pinker 2011; Sagkal *et al.* 2012; Shamay-Tsoory *et al.* 2013) to include such empathy towards non-humans that play a large role in the natural and built environment.

Episode Discussion

The examples given have displayed the Other as progressing from an entire alien race, to an average nuclear family, to a single individual being, and have displayed themes of othering including "them vs. us," "us" in natural disaster aftermath, and "us" who suffer from mental illness. They encourage viewers to compassionately reconsider (or reinforce) their views not only towards the different types of themes presented in the episode plots, but also through their commentary on what it means to be the Other. Further, although the aforementioned examples are Earth-centric, several episodes of *Doctor Who* highlight empathic considerations for other worlds and alien species, therefore the Other is not limited to human characters, locations, and experiences, but also those of alien enemies. The strength of *Doctor Who* as a teaching tool for considering compassion and empathy lies in its presentation of Otherness that transcends humans on Earth to include aliens from other planets and galaxies *and* those forms of humanity seemingly not human, who both phenotypically and emotionally challenge ideas of compassion and Otherness.

These episodes represent a small fraction of the episodes in *Doctor Who* that engage with social issues through a compassionate and/or empathic lens. Themes including the death of a parent (Father's Day, 2005), the exploitation of the sick (New Earth, 2006), teen pregnancy (The Empty Child/The Doctor Dances, 2005), LGBT rights (The Snowmen; The Name of the Doctor) and war (A Good Man Goes to War, 2011) comprise only a small portion of the myriad

sociopolitical and emotional concepts that are explored in the show. Their representation within a science-fiction context does not diminish the strength of the commentaries' ability to speak towards reality; rather, because science fiction speaks to these realities through metaphor of fantasy and technology (Nicholls 1976), it is a form of media that is particularly effective in facilitating connections between the viewer and the social injustices and emotional hardships that plague humanity within the daily spaces of self-reproduction.

The episodes certainly highlight important and timely social issues through a science fiction lens; however, they also speak toward geographic notions of placefulness. The following examples describe each case study's ramifications on understandings of placefulness in both fictional and nonfictional landscapes.

The episodes featured in case study #1 demonstrate the role of increased robotic innovation in the various human-built landscapes of the world. As jobs traditionally fulfilled by humans continue to be replaced by robotic technology, the use of computers in all aspects of daily life increases (such as smartwatches, wearable innovation like Google Glass, and impossibly realistic sex dolls), and self-driving cars hold an increasing presence on the landscape, the placefulness also shifts. Human-built technology inherently plays a strong role in human-built landscapes, but what happens if (or when) robotic innovation gains autonomy and loses its foundational connections to humanity? How will this affect where humans work and live? Will patterns of human mobility shift? Science fiction prepares individuals to ask these questions and consider what such future landscapes will entail.

Case study #2 examines notions of love and how it influences the placefulness of a landscape. Geography, much like love, is everywhere. How people dress, eat, move, live, and act is geography. How people dress, eat, move, live, and act is also guided by love. The importance

of both geography and love in all realms of daily life is ignored. The episodes of case study #2 entice the viewer to reexamine their understandings of love: both in the traditional romantic sense (such as Danny and Clara's relationship prior to his conversion) and in a non-romantic sense (Danny giving up his chance to return to life by instead resurrecting a young boy he killed while in the military, showing love for the boy and his family). Science fiction often encourages viewers to consider these varied manifestations of love as playing a role in a landscape that is compassionate and socially sustainable.

The episode featured in case study #3, despite featuring a disastrous environmental event in 79 AD, remains relevant to modern-day viewers. Individuals not directly affected by extreme events such as the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius, Hurricane Katrina, tsunamis in Japan, and earthquakes in Nepal may find little reason to connect with the victims on a level deeper than sympathetic condolences, given spatial and temporal distance. However, as this episode highlights, learning about the experiences of individuals living through the events (whether fictional or non-fictional) can elicit empathy from these spatially and temporally removed individuals, which can even turn into activism for natural disaster victims and landscapes. Unpacking and highlighting all the entities making up a landscape, such as the people, the non-human animals, the buildings, etc., rather than just referring to affected landscapes as a whole, may be the key to increasing empathic responses to natural disaster regardless of geographic context. In turn, this can help shift the placefulness of landscapes affected by natural disaster (from feelings of hopelessness, disarray, and exclusion to increased feelings of hopefulness, community, and compassion).

Finally, the episode featured in case study #4 demonstrates a significant parallel to the long-lasting, damaging effects of slavery, Othering, and domination on a landscape, and how it

influences a placefulness characterized by hate, exclusion, and cruelty. As viewers witness through the episode, both navigating through and dismantling the effects of slavery and domination in a landscape requires both verbal and physical action: the Doctor speaks out against the treatment of the Ood, and also uses direct action to free enslaved Ood while also taking away the power of the enslaver. This can be applied to the socially-reproduced and long-lasting effects of colonization and slavery that exist across the world today. Dismantling such systems of oppression not only takes verbal confrontation, but also requires direct action by reallocating power to the oppressed and providing emotional/financial/physical reparations to marginalized populations. Then, and only then, can truly socially sustainable landscapes be maintained. This is an example of the real-world ramifications of the themes of equity, love, and justice in *Doctor Who*, reiterating its importance as a tool for teaching geographies of empathy and compassion.

A Call for Critical Engagement Between Geographers and Doctor Who

While the cultural and philosophical themes presented in *Doctor Who* have been explored in recent publications (Layton 2012; Porter 2012; Decker 2013; Hills 2013; Leitch 2013), academic literature situated specifically within geography that explores the cultural, political, and social implications of the show is extremely rare. This signifies an opportunity for geographers to pursue an increased engagement with the subject. Considering the wealth of geographical themes present in *Doctor Who*, scholars from a variety of geographic perspectives can use the show to explore traditional concepts in space and place as well as emerging topics within popular culture and media-influenced perceptions of landscapes.

As geographers work to increase the relevance of their research to serve and better a broader society, research situated within the themes of peace and social responsibility can imbue us with the passion to critically explore faults in the social dynamics of the world. This can allow

academic work to step out of the "ivory tower" to influence powerful societal change (Harvey 1984; Lees 1999). Several themes within *Doctor Who* speak to free will and notions of humanity, and viewership of the show and critical analysis of its implications can serve geographers well in creating discourse that deconstructs dominant apathetic ideologies. As media becomes a more prolific venue for the conveyance of ideologies, geographers should develop a strong understanding of how knowledge creation results directly and indirectly from media interaction. As geography scholars work to reshape the discipline into one that works towards creating spaces of social justice (Mitchell 2003; Megoran 2011) critical engagement with *Doctor Who* can facilitate research towards how to recreate these spaces into ones of empathy and compassion for "the other." Geographic research engages in a process of "producing, sharing, reconstituting and distributing knowledge" (Castree *et al*. 2008, p. 681), therefore placing geographers in the ideal position to challenge dominant ideologies through our research and work to create new normative conceptions about how to maintain a socially just world we want to bestow to future generations.

Geographers have noted the importance of "opening up" the discipline and making it more accessible to a wide audience outside of academia to facilitate positive change via social movements and activism (Harvey 1984; Lees 1999; Mitchell 2008). Because *Doctor Who* is a widely-viewed program internationally, increased research involving the show can present the opportunity to increase interest in the geographic discipline among an audience outside of academia. Further, an increase in geographical studies of *Doctor Who* contributes towards the reshaping of the discipline into one that serves a more peaceful society by encouraging the reconstruction of the spaces and places in which society operates, in a manner that places empathy at the foundation. Academic literature on the cultural implications of *Doctor Who* is

rare, despite the significant impact that viewership of the show can have on the destruction of socially-reproduced spaces of apathy. This statement is supported by the existence of social movements such as the Harry Potter Alliance[11], which allows members of the group to participate in social justice through a lens of their *Harry Potter* fandom. Since 2005, the Harry Potter Alliance has participated in causes related to global literacy, net neutrality, and human rights. While there are currently no similar *Doctor Who* social justice activism groups, the existence of this group signifies the possibility for social change with fandom as an impetus.

Doctor Who is a show of significant cultural importance. As science fiction, it provides a venue to facilitate varying levels of escapism while also offering positive implications towards creating a more empathetic society. As *Doctor Who* grows in popularity, younger audiences are becoming exposed to the culture in which the show has created, including references to the Doctor in *Sesame Street* and online courses for children devoted to *Doctor Who* studies (e.g. the "Numeric Con episode of *Sesame Street* from September 2014, and the Wibbly-Wobbly, Timey-Wimey, Project-Based Learning Course from STEAM-Powered Classroom[12], respectively). Cons (1932) isolates geography as a foremost subject for training younger generations in the act of world citizenship and internationalism (also see Megoran 2011). Therefore, in asserting why geographic scholars must consider increased engagement with the show, it is important to note that *Doctor Who* is being used to engage intellectually with youth and can also be an important tool for teaching geographic concepts. Scholars have explored an increasing inadequacy (or complete lack thereof) of geographic education in primary and secondary schools (Boehm *et al.* 1994; Hinde 2014), presenting an opportunity to bring dynamic geographic education back into a K-12 classroom environment. Volleberg *et al.* (2001) and Stevenson *et al.* (2014) note the power

[11] http://www.thehpalliance.org/what_we_do
[12] http://steampoweredclassroom.com/the-wibbly-wobbly-timey-wimey-project-based-learning-course/

in educating youth on important societal issues due to the dynamic formation of their worldviews—thus, their knowledge forms without the influence of dominant ideologies *unless* these dominant ideologies are exposed to them. Because *Doctor Who* engages with important social themes through a compassionate and empathic lens, the implications of exposure to the show at a young age may be significant.

Conclusion

This paper does not attempt to suggest that *Doctor Who* can single-handedly fix a society that is plagued by apathy. Problems of social injustice in modern society result from perpetually reproduced spaces of capitalism, violence, and domination that cannot be completely addressed by a call to increase viewership and geographic engagement with *Doctor Who*. However, this paper serves as a theoretical framework for increased intellectual research using the show as a case study. As the show continues to hold a strong role in popular cultures across the world, it is important to highlight its plotlines which compassionately and empathically engage with the Other in a variety of social settings. Viewers are encouraged to consider how they perceive social injustices, and any shifts in worldly viewpoints can contribute towards reconstructing broader societal ideologies that exist in hegemonic knowledge about the world (Kolb 1984; Dewey 1997). While there exists a plethora of episodes that provide this nature of social commentary, the selected episodes examined here demonstrate the potential for science fiction media to blur the lines between fantasy and reality by actively engaging with real social themes.

This paper is conceptually driven. I do not claim to provide evidence that *Doctor Who* alters the viewpoints of viewers. The research can, however, serve as an intellectual primer for future studies using a field-based methodology to test these claims. Empathy, as an emotional phenomenon, is difficult to quantify and certainly cannot be proven or disproven in an academic

paper. However, it remains important to capture moments through which empathy *may* develop, and selected episodes of *Doctor Who* could be used to sensitize the viewer to empathic issues. In the case of "The Fires of Pompeii", any viewers experiencing empathy with Caecilius and his family, as well as connections with unnamed characters who are killed by the eruption, may be less likely to disengage with those affected by natural disasters through defining them as the Other, if such empathy can be transferred beyond the viewing setting. In "Rise of the Cybermen/The Age of Steel" and "Dark Water/Death in Heaven," empathetic activism sparked by the episode can be used to frame a fight for social justice through the celebration of the power of human emotion and free will. In "The Beast Below", viewers may develop increased empathy and social responsibility towards animal rights and preventing animal exploitation. These represent a small portion of the episodes of *Doctor Who* which help bridge a connection between the viewer and an historical event thereby eroding disengagement and compartmentalization of "the other."

The potential for *Doctor Who* to play a role in sparking societal change via considerations of empathy is an optimism that is supported by theories about the relationship between the individual and society as posited by Marx: "Man, much as he may therefore be a particular individual…is just as much the totality—the ideal totality—the subjective existence of thought and experienced society present for itself" (Marx 1961 [1844], p. 105). In citing this, one can make a converse assertion that an individual's lived experience can have a strong reflection on the societal spaces in which they operate. *Doctor Who* presents an opportunity to encourage viewers to reconsider their lived experiences and ideologies through a more compassionate lens. Sahlins (1976) argues that a knowledge of the world is attainable through action taken within it, particularly when this action involves a shift in the modes of production. Therefore, a

transformation in current modes of production in which empathy is intimately tied to humanity's self-reproduction can influence a hegemonically empathic society.

Kropotkin (1885) and Israel (2012) argue that geography should inform and engage international politics and help provide understanding to global issues. If geography is recreated into a discipline that provides a framework for peace rather than violence, following Kropotkin and Israel's assertions, the implications of a discipline which researches peace on global policy and injustices could be immense. *Doctor Who* provides a venue for peace-related research in the geographic discipline. It cannot be speculated that all viewers of *Doctor Who* will be actively engaged in a particular episode to facilitate empathy creation, despite the noteworthy potential for television to shape ideologies and public opinion (Gorton 2012). Television is more than that which simply appears on a screen (Parks 2005), and viewers of *Doctor Who* as well as any science-fiction media often find emotional escape or comfort in being shielded from the horrific realities in which their daily lives may be situated. This is a testament to the power of media in providing a source of emotional engagement for those who feel dejected and/or are experiencing injustices or exploitation in their lives. The popular show not only presents an opportunity to provide this emotional comfort and implore viewers to consider empathic responses to social issues, but it also signifies an academic stepping stone upon which research situated within peace and media geographies can work to rejuvenate spaces of exploitation and apathy into ones that promote compassion and social justice. Themes of peace in geographic work should pay attention to how empathy can be created and encouraged, and science fiction, including *Doctor Who*, is one of those tools for empathic education.

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CHAPTER II: ASSESSING *DOCTOR WHO'S* INFLUENCE ON EMPATHY TOWARDS MENTAL ILLNESS AND LANDSCAPE AWARENESS THROUGH FOCUS GROUP METHODOLOGY

Abstract

Focus group methodology has been extensively used by researchers in communications, media studies, and media geographies to gauge how viewers interact with and learn from a television show. When studying concepts of empathy, landscape interpretation, and science fiction fandom, focus groups are particularly effective in testing not only individual reactions to a show but also collective responses to themes and plot points. For this study, focus groups were held in which viewers possessing various levels of *Doctor Who* fandom watched an episode, followed by a collective discussion between the moderator and participants on themes of landscape, empathy, and emotional geographies within the plot. The results of the focus groups shed light on not only how viewers respond to themes of empathy and landscape in a show, but also how the presence (or absence) of fandom influences the viewing experience. Geographically, this work speaks to media's potential to project certain messages across audiences with varying levels of engagement. This is particularly significant as media increasingly engage with ideologies, mobilities, and opinions across the world.

Introduction

Geography and digital media are strongly linked in their ability to influence, alter, and maintain ideas of place. Television is a particular medium of importance in this discussion, as it serves to alter not only personal, but also collective, geographies. Adams (1992) and Morse (1998) describes television as having the capability to provide culturally unifying experiences, and can even serve as a substitute for several aspects of human interaction. Interconnections between television and geography are increasingly strengthened by growing scholarly engagement with geographies of enthusiasm and performative geographies. Geographies of enthusiasm explore spatial ramifications of enthusiasm (an emotion often characterized by passionate moods, intense emotions, and dedication). Geographers have explored enthusiasm as it relates to topics in re-enactment, music, collectors, and scientific description (Geoghegan 2013). These types of geographies are usually specific to a single theme, such as music geographies, fandom geographies, and vegan geographies, to name but a few examples. Enthusiasm tends to influence the mobility and spatial orientation of individuals, and is therefore a topic worthy of geographic study. Individuals who are passionate about a certain cultural artefact are more likely to orient their daily movements towards social environments that involve that artefact. Critical cultural geographers have turned their eyes towards the effect of enthusiastic geographies on the landscape, representing an important emotional turn in the discipline that can be difficult to measure quantitatively, given its strong focus on emotions and their influence on human mobility. Performative geographies, on the other hand, consider the concept of performance as it relates to urban geographies and situational places—those interactions "between strangers in cities of the contemporary world society" (Dirksmeier et al. 2014, pg. 299). Social environments must be considered when analyzing the significance of

performance, calling upon the work of Lefebvre (1991), who stated that each human produces and occupies space, and *is* therefore space. How is the human body interacting with space around it? This is being actively explored by scholars such as Loretta Lees and Nigel Thrift, who contemplate such questions in their research on performative geographies—under a unifying notion that small-scale performance translates into global occurrences due to the interconnectivity of people, place, and cities. New critical cultural geographies are careful to consider the myriad layers that influence culture, particularly in an increasingly-interconnected world. This performative turn views all forms of geography as having a performance aspect, that are grouped into five main categories: cartography as speech act performances, place creation as performance, public and private space as performance, environmental determinism as performance, and the performative research of individual geographers (Sullivan 2011). This research engages with the performative nature of media consumption--and the place creation and manipulation that may result from said consumption. Each viewer choosing to watch a television show is creating and occupying a viewing space. Their placefulness of that space can be manipulated by the nature of the media being consumed. This transformation is, in and of itself, performative.

Considering the power of both enthusiasm and performance in relation to geography and human spatial mobilities, television fandom has inherent influence over where a person goes, with whom they interact, and what geographical spaces they choose to occupy. Fandom itself is a concept that has many definitions. In this context, fandom is defined with guidance from Hills (2002), who states:

> "Everyone knows what a 'fan' is. It's somebody who is obsessed with a particular star, celebrity, film, TV programme, band; somebody who can produce reams of information on their object of fandom, and can quote their favoured lines or lyrics, chapter and verse. Fans are often highly articulate. Fans interpret media

> texts in a variety of interested and perhaps unexpected ways. And fans participate in communal activities--they are not 'socially atomised' or isolated viewers/readers" (pg. viii).

While acknowledging the many often contested and conflicting definitions of fandom, Hills suggests that fandom is simply a deeper, stronger continuation of his definition of a fan. Fandom is a truly multifaceted and cultural phenomenon, and one of significant geographical relevance when considering the role that fandom plays in influencing movements and mobility. Scholars have explored the potential for fandom to influence another important emotional process: empathy resulting from increased social relations (Yano 1997). However, these assertions are generally theoretical or ethnographic, and have not been tested in a controlled setting or beyond the individual human experience. This research will endeavor to fill a gap in literature regarding fandom and empathy by using a focus group methodology to record empathic responses (or a lack thereof) to an episode of *Doctor Who*. More broadly, an attempt to capture how a viewer's place within a larger social geography of fandom shape interpretations of a show. Focus group participants are also delineated by level of self-proclaimed fandom for the show. I will assess whether the level of fandom influences potential empathic responses to plotlines and character dialogue.

Fandom itself, and the empathy existing within and because of fandom, is an opportunity to learn not only about the lived experiences of others but also to learn about oneself. Eyles (1985) notes that "Empathy provides the experiential grounding of humanism-as-attitude. Further, while it refers to the need to discover and understand the salient features of local social life, it is closely related to self-reflection" (pg. 36). A self-reflection as influenced through fandom alters not only one's own personal geographies (a person's everyday mobilities) but also the *placefulness* of their everyday surroundings. This research is concerned with empathic self-

reflection, as measured through levels of self-identified *Doctor Who* fandom. Scholars have categorized science fiction fandom as a social group which facilitates camaraderie and friendship, and influences mobilities and cross-cultural circulation:

> "Fans get together at events ranging from local gatherings and conventions through to the huge world SF [science fiction] conventions, where thousands of fans from all over the world gather for events, panels, and discussions. However, fannish interaction is not restricted to face-to-face contact. Although SF fandom was in existence well before the advent of the internet, the internet has become its major communication channel. Thus, daily interaction with other members can occur from the comfort of home, even if those members live on another continent. Such online communities bring a whole new meaning and application to the word community" (Obst, Zinkiewicz, and Smith 2002, pg. 93).

Obviously, these communications exist in other fandoms, but what makes science fiction fandom so prolific is the combination of the aforementioned connections and the escapism associated with the genre. During these conventions, online chat rooms, and panels, science fiction fans feel not only camaraderie through shared fandom, but also participate in discourse involving the often empathic and geopolitically-poignant plotlines of many science fiction television shows and films. But do such interactions carry forward into the viewer's daily lives? Are empathic revelations instead fleeting and superficial? It is necessary to consider the history and development of *Doctor Who* to assess whether plotlines produce sustained empathy among viewers.

Doctor Who and Empathy

It is reasonable to suggest that the creators of, as well as the writers for, *Doctor Who* are attempting to influence empathy and/or cultivate empathic viewers through the plotlines of the episodes, particularly when considering the genesis of the program. *Doctor Who* began as a proposal for a children's television show in 1963 by creators Sydney Newman and Donald

Wilson. Initially, episodes of *Doctor Who* focused on educating youth about historical time periods (Muir 1999). Newman described the premise of the show as follows:

> "I dreamed up this old man of 760 years of age who fled from a distant planet in a time-space machine. Being so old, he is somewhat senile and doesn't know how to operate his machine…The rest of the series dealt with these Earthlings trying to get back to Earth, the old man trying to get back to where he came from and no one knowing how to operate the machine" (Muir 1999, p. 10).

It can be argued that programs aimed at educating children are, inherently, going to use empathic techniques, particularly when teaching children about history and science, two subject areas that are richly entrenched in the plotlines of *Doctor Who*. To *truly* teach a child history, one must teach a child not only historical dates and events, but also to have empathy for historical figures. Why did a historical person commit the acts that they are recorded to have committed? What political factors influenced their actions? How did geographic location influence their actions? An empathic teaching of history educates children on how to abandon preconceived notions about an historical event and/or figure to ascertain why injustice did occur in a certain area, and why it did not occur in others, to facilitate an understanding of the spatial and social dynamics that influence exploitation. Science fiction, and *Doctor Who*, may be an appropriate medium in which to study empathy, as the fantastical plotlines and themes often estrange the viewer from their preconceived understandings of historical events, figures, and socio-cultural dynamics, creating a new lens through which the subject material can be interpreted. This research will test whether the very foundations on which *Doctor Who* is based renders the series a vessel of empathic content that is transferred to viewers. Empathic techniques present in *Doctor Who* vary based on the episode, but tend to revolve around a central theme of a celebration of the power of "the individual," and more specifically a love for the concept of an individual being. Many episodes of *Doctor Who* express the importance of empowering an

individual to benefit the broader population itself. The following transcript best displays the Doctor's love for the "individual", within an episode featuring the Cybermen villains called "The Age of Steel" (2006) in which the Doctor and John Lumic, a psychopathic businessman and the creator of the Cybermen, argue the morality of Lumic's actions:

LUMIC: I will bring peace to the world. Everlasting peace. And unity and uniformity.
DOCTOR: And imagination? What about that? The one thing that led you here, imagination, you're killing it dead!
LUMIC: What is your name?
DOCTOR: I'm the Doctor.
LUMIC: A redundant title. Doctors need not exist. Cybermen never sicken.
DOCTOR: Yeah, but that's it. That's exactly the point! Oh, Lumic, you're a clever man. I'd call you a genius, except I'm in the room. But everything you've invented, you did to fight your sickness. And that's brilliant. That is so human. But once you get rid of sickness and mortality, then what's there to strive for, eh? The Cybermen won't advance. You'll just stop. You'll stay like this forever. A metal Earth with metal men and metal thoughts, lacking the one thing that makes this planet so alive. People. Ordinary, stupid, brilliant people.
LUMIC: You are proud of your emotions.
DOCTOR: Oh, yes.
LUMIC: Then tell me, Doctor. Have you known grief, and rage, and pain?
DOCTOR: Yes. Yes I have.
LUMIC: And they hurt?
DOCTOR: Oh, yes.
LUMIC: I could set you free. Would you not want that? A life without pain?
DOCTOR: You might as well kill me.
LUMIC: Then I take that option.
DOCTOR: It's not yours to take. You're a Cyber Controller. You don't control me or anything with blood in its heart.
LUMIC: You have no means of stopping me. I have an army. A species of my own.
DOCTOR: You just don't get it, do you? An army's nothing. Because those ordinary people, they're the key. The most ordinary person could change the world.

While Lumic makes a reasonable point that removing humanity from humankind *would* eradicate suffering, rage, and grief, the Doctor expresses their often-stated opinion about the power of humanity, and all of the emotions, positive and negative, associated with individual beings. The Doctor's love for the individual manifest in several ways within different episodes.

Consider, first, "Planet of the Ood," an episode revolving around the enslavement and physical disfigurement of a race of alien known as the Ood. The Ood live in a collective, hive-like existence (similar to the Borg of Star Trek[13]), and hold their brain in their hand outside of their body, as a way to communicate with other Ood. In this episode, humans enslave the Ood, and replace (i.e. rip out) their brains with a voice box to allow the Ood to communicate with humans, turning them into a slave race. The Doctor fights for the liberation of the Ood, while visibly (to viewers) maintaining a mindset that in helping individual Ood, he is simultaneously facilitating the welfare of the entire race.

Now, consider the episode" The Snowmen," (Season 7, Episode 6) where impoverished individuals are bribed with food and money to an undisclosed location. Upon arrival at this location, they are placed into a large pit and fed to alien Snowmen creatures. This exploitation of individuals in lower socioeconomic status for the benefit of an illuminati-like being is particularly heart-wrenching within this scene and a potential influencer of empathy. In other episodes, praise and advocacy for "the individual" extends to non-human animals. The episode titled "The Beast Below" (Series 5, Episode 2) allows the viewer to look at themes of animal exploitation through estrangement. This episode takes place in a distant future aboard the Starship UK, a vessel meant to transport the United Kingdom away from Earth to avoid the aftermath of the death of the sun. Within this episode, the 11th regeneration of the Doctor and his companion Amy travel aboard the Starship UK and quickly notice odd behavior from all other inhabitants on the ship, as well as the disappearance of children to what is termed "the beast below." To find the missing children, the Doctor and Amy embark on deeper exploration of the lower compartment of the ship, where they eventually discover that the entire ship is atop a Star

[13] http://memory-alpha.wikia.com/wiki/Borg

Whale (an alien species of whale) that provides the forward trajectory for the vessel. To guide the whale, the pain center of its brain is exposed and it receives jolts of electricity that propel it forward. The whale is, therefore, literally being tortured to continue the progress of the Starship UK. To save the whale, the Doctor decides to alter the programming of the control device to leave the Star Whale brain-dead to no longer feel the pain of the electricity. However, Amy intercepts him and instead disables the controlling device itself, rendering the whale free to leave the ship. The whale, however, decides to stay of its own free will and continues to guide the ship, no longer in pain. Most viewers are familiar with animal abuse, whether they have witnessed it first hand or have been indirectly exposed to these realities through media, news, and speech. This episode mirrors real issues of animal exploitation for human gain and presents it through a science-fiction context. Such enslavement of the Star Whale is not unlike the enslavement of horses, their strength used for human gain. Nor is it fundamentally different from the enslavement of dairy cows, forcibly impregnated and their offspring stolen and killed. Although this representation is through a science fiction lens, it does not dilute the episode's ability to create discourse and empathy surrounding cases of animal abuse that happen across the planet, perhaps influencing viewers to feel the same attachment and investment in the safety of "other" animals as they do for their own pets. The viewer can easily understand this deeper message through a thematic analysis of the episode, but what is very important to note is that the viewer, assuming they are familiar with animal cruelty, can recognize that animal exploitation is taking place but feels unfamiliar based on the science-fiction lens.

The pedagogical philosophy behind these efforts in the series to promote empathy mirror many of the philosophies used in science fiction media: commentary through metaphor, facilitating cognitive estrangement. This is a representation through which we recognize the

subject matter, but it is presented through a lens which makes it unfamiliar. This estranges the viewer from the social space in which the subject matter was initially recognized, creating a space for new cognitive processes surrounding the subject (Suvin 1979). Tying this to science fiction, this genre of media takes a familiar representation from modern society and presents it through a fantastical lens, causing the viewer's estrangement from the society that recognizes that familiar representation. Consider, for example, commentary on communism in the film *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956). Through a metaphor of alien erasure of humanity at an individual-by-individual scale, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* expresses an empathy for the power of "the individual" in creating a broader humanity. The plot also projects an idea that utopia through social control only appealed to the transformed beings who had lost their humanity, while this same idea appeared as dystopia to those who still possessed their humanity. In *Doctor Wh*o, the general pedagogical format seems to be that the writers present a dilemma situated in the past, present, or future, through a lens of science fiction which includes artificial intelligence, technology, and time travel, and demonstrate how these technological advances aid in the exploitation of individual beings. Viewers seeing this exploitation, I argue, may gain empathy for the individual in question.

These pedagogical techniques are more apparent in some episodes more than others. Consider, for example, "The Fires of Pompeii" (Season 4, Episode 2). Within this episode, the 10^{th} regeneration of the Doctor and his companion Donna travel to Pompeii on the day prior to the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius. Viewers meet families (albeit fictional characters) who live in Pompeii and Donna begs the Doctor to alert the individuals about the impending eruption, which would save their lives. The Doctor argues that the event is a fixed point in time, and, therefore, they cannot spread the knowledge about the eruption. However, minutes after the eruption,

because of Donna's passionate pleas, the Doctor rescues the family of a man named Lobus Caecilius mere moments before the catastrophic eruption. The premise for the Doctor's decision is that although they cannot save everyone, they can at least save one family (BBC 2008). Through the dialogue within this scene, from both Donna and the Doctor, the writers instill an empathic response to the victims of the Mt. Vesuvius eruption:

DONNA: You can't just leave them!
THE DOCTOR : Don't you think I've done enough? History's back in place and everyone dies.
DONNA: You've got to go back! Doctor, I'm telling you, take this thing back! (after a pause, quietly) It's not fair.
THE DOCTOR: No, it's not.
DONNA : But your own planet... It burned.
THE DOCTOR: That's just it. Don't you see, Donna? Can't you understand? If I could go back and save them then I would, but I can't. I can never go back, I can't. I just can't, I can't.
DONNA (in tears): Just someone. Please. Not the whole town. Just save someone.

Here, the script clearly notes an active conversation imploring the Doctor to have empathy for one family in the disaster. Let us consider another episode, a two-parter titled "The Empty Child" and "The Doctor Dances" (Season 1, Episodes 9 and 10). In these episodes, the 11th regeneration of the Doctor and his companion Rose are taken by the TARDIS to London in 1941 (during the London Blitz), finding that while the city is not only being terrorized by German bombers, it is also haunted by a child in a gas mask, repeatedly asking people if they have seen his mother. The character in the spotlight is Nancy, a teenage girl who proclaims that the boy, named Jamie, is her brother, but perversely a possessed, demonized iteration of him. As Jamie walks through the streets of London asking individuals "Are you my mummy?", he converts other people into gas-mask zombie-like figures through his touch. As the episode progresses, the Doctor sees that Jamie is targeting Nancy, asking her repeatedly the same question of "Are you my mummy?" Eventually, the Doctor realizes that Jamie is not the brother

of Nancy, he is her son. Nancy elaborates on her history: ashamed to be an unwed teenage mother in the 1940s, Nancy contended that Jamie was her brother after his birth. One day, while fleeing during an air raid, Nancy and Jamie were running through a field, wearing gas masks, and Jamie was exposed to an alien chemical that fused the gas mask with his face. Nancy, still shamed by her teenage pregnancy, abandoned the child. Thus, the genetically-altered child walked through London seeking his mother. When Nancy hugs Jamie and replies, "Yes, I am your mummy," Jamie is healed:

DOCTOR: How old were you five years ago? Fifteen? Sixteen? Old enough to give birth, anyway. He's not your brother, is he? A teenage single mother in 1941. So you hid. You lied. You even lied to him.

(The bomb site gate opens and Jamie stands there.)

CHILD: Are you my mummy?

DOCTOR: He's going to keep asking, Nancy. He's never going to stop.

CHILD: Mummy?

DOCTOR: Tell him. Nancy, the future of the human race is in your hands. Trust me and tell him.

(Nancy and Jamie walk towards each other.)

CHILD: Are you my mummy? Are you my mummy? Are you my mummy?

NANCY: Yes. Yes, I am your mummy.

CHILD: Mummy?

NANCY: I'm here.

CHILD: Are you my mummy?

NANCY: I'm here.

CHILD: Are you my mummy?

NANCY: Yes.

CHILD: Are you my mummy?

DOCTOR: He doesn't understand. There's not enough of him left.

NANCY: I am your mummy. I will always be your mummy. I'm so sorry. I am so, so sorry.

(Nancy hugs Jamie and a cloud of nanogenes surround them.)

ROSE: What's happening? Doctor, it's changing her, we should--

DOCTOR: Shush! Come on, please. Come on, you clever little nanogenes. Figure it out! The mother, she's the mother. It's got to be enough information. Figure it out.

ROSE: What's happening?

DOCTOR: See? Recognising the same DNA.

(Jamie lets go and Nancy falls on the ground.)

DOCTOR: Oh, come on. Give me a day like this. Give me this one.

(The Doctor removes Jamie's gas mask.)

Within the script/plot of this episode, empathy for teenage pregnancy is not quite as explicit. While some viewers may watch this episode and immediately grasp the meaning of the shame that can be associated with teenage pregnancy, particularly in 1940s Anglo-Saxon countries, we cannot expect all viewers to do the same without direct references in the script (for example, the Doctor explicitly saying, "This happened because of the shame around teenage pregnancy."). Therefore, the transparency of these techniques to teach and influence empathy vary episode by episode, but are nevertheless within each episode—whether within the script itself or interwoven with the plot. The techniques are, however, highly conducive to success in teaching empathy: a simple Google search reveals hundreds of instances of blogs, videos, and images that tout *Doctor Who's* success in teaching compassionate behavior and understanding of "the other".

Doctor Who's potential to promote empathic understandings within its viewers becomes clear after even a cursory review of plotlines and scripts from these episodes. The show's plotlines offer social and cultural commentary through a science fiction lens, and put the power into the hands of the individual. It is hypothesized that it is easier for a viewer to empathize with an individual being before they can empathize with an entire group, attesting to *Doctor Who'*s success in this area. As the program grows in popularity among youth audiences, and is being used increasingly in educational settings, it is clear that the positive social, developmental, and cultural implications of using *Doctor Who* to facilitate a more compassionate and socially-just population cannot be ignored, but to assess the degree to which select episodes of *Doctor Who* achieve this lofty goal necessitates quantification of the show's effects on viewers. This research uses a focus group methodology to provide such quantification, recruiting members both within

and outside of the *Doctor Who* fandom to comment on themes perceived to exist within an episode of the show.

Methodology

Much of the intellectual organization and methodology for this study was inspired by the work of Adams (2000), who used a focus group methodology to assess how individuals actively consume television. His findings demonstrated the multifaceted ways in which television consumers develop and maintain an affinity for a program, and how certain programs become integrated into their lives. Due to the parallels between the rationale and findings of his study and this research, this study employs a similar methodology. Further, a focus group methodology is appropriate for analyzing empathetic responses to the show (or a lack of such response) because it allows researchers to understand individual and collective thought, speech, and understanding (Crang and Cook 2007). Three focus groups were held in the summer of 2017 in which participants of varying levels of fandom were shown an episode of *Doctor Who* called "Vincent and the Doctor" (series 5, episode 10).

Prior to the assessment of the formal focus groups, a pilot study was employed to ascertain what metrics should be used in which to split participants. This pilot focus group also helped determine the effectiveness of the proposed methodology and whether the discussion questions were suitable to the goals of the research. Ten individuals were shown "Vincent and the Doctor" and those recruited naturally fell into three categories: three individuals were fans of the show, three individuals had never seen the show, and four had seen the show and did not enjoy it nor do they call themselves fans of *Doctor Who.* The discussion yielded several interesting observations: first, all participants felt some level of emotional connection to the episode upon viewing. However, depending on the strength of their fandom towards the show,

this empathy manifested itself in different ways. Participation in the formal focus groups were, therefore, recruited to represent these three distinct population: *Doctor Who* fans, *Doctor Who* "newbies," and *Doctor Who* "skeptics."

The Participants

Three focus groups were conducted in the summer of 2017 with a total of 30 people from the Knoxville area. Participants were separated based on the following criteria:

> High Level of Fandom/Whovians: these individuals represented a group who have seen *Doctor Who* previously, and consider themselves to be strong fans of the show (colloquially called Whovians). In this paper, responses from this group will be designated with "**W**."
>
> Have Not Seen/Non-Viewers: these individuals represented a group who fell into one of the following categories: they have never heard of or seen *Doctor Who*, they have heard of the show but have never seen it, or they have seen it once but do not remember the show. Responses from this group will be designated with "**NV**" (standing for Non-Viewer).
>
> No Fandom/Dislikers/Skeptics: these individuals represented a group who have seen *Doctor Who* previously, but do not like the show and have criticisms of the program ranging from minor to significant. Responses from this group will be designated with "**D**."

Participants were split according to fandom to examine critically how one's strength of fandom contributes to their perceptions of landscapes, empathy, and overall quality of storyline within the episode. Knoxville, Tennessee was the pool from which participants were because the

researcher considered this city to represent a typical North American college town. *Doctor Who* enthusiasts and online bloggers have suggested that the show has become increasingly targeted towards young adults (millennials), despite its original genesis as a children's program[14]. Therefore, holding the focus groups in a town with a large University and thus a significant millennial population allowed the researcher to involve members of the show's target audience, while also including members of other age brackets. Focus group participants were recruited from both outside and within the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UTK) community, and participants ranged in age from 20-60. All focus group participants were recruited under IRB approval through social media posts, flyers, and in-class announcements at UTK. The **W** group was the easiest to recruit, considering Whovians' strong interest in the television program and willingness to promote research that further publicizes the social impact of *Doctor Who.* Recruitment for the **NV** group caught the interest of many early-career academics at UTK, who were curious to take part in the research for the sake of advancing academic inquiry. The **D** group was incredibly difficult to recruit, given that prospective participants were being asked to watch a show they dislike, resulting in considerable time needed to gather enough participants to compile a focus group.

Each focus group participant was provided with IRB-approved consent forms which outlined the terms of their participation. Those terms included: a five-minute pre-viewing Likert Scale exercise, viewing a 45-minute episode, a five-minute post-viewing Likert scale exercise, and a 45-minute (minimum) discussion period. The pre-viewing Likert scale prompted participants to respond to eleven questions relating to landscape, science fiction, and mental illness on a five point scale (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree), shown in **Figure 2.1**. The

[14] http://metro.co.uk/2014/09/26/doctor-who-just-who-is-the-target-audience-these-days-2-4876338/

episode, which will be described in the next section, was then shown collectively to the group. The post-viewing Likert Scale prompted participants to respond to the same eleven questions as in the pre-viewing exercise.

The focus group discussion was comprised of a series of seven open-ended questions which served as starting points for discussion, following up on answers they gave until discussion was either exhausted or patterns or consensus in the discussion was reached. The questions were as follows:

1. After watching the episode, what can you say about Provence, France?
2. Did you develop a bond with any of the characters?
3. Did you dislike any of the characters?
4. Was mental illness a prominent theme in the episode for you?
5. Do you feel that you could speak about Van Gogh's life to another person?
6. Did you feel empathy toward any of the characters? If so, who and why?
7. Do you like science fiction?

Audio from these sessions were recorded with IRB consent and then transcribed into MaxQDA software for analysis. The Likert Scale data were then visualized through Tableau data visualization software.

The Episode

A summary of the episode shown to the focus groups is necessary to provide context to the selected comments by focus group participants. "Vincent and the Doctor" features the

Questions	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree (5)
I understand mental illness					
It is possible to control a mental illness					
I understand what depression is					
I feel close to someone who has depression					
I am familiar with Vincent van Gogh					
I can recognize the artwork of Vincent van Gogh					
I am familiar with Provence, France					
I feel I have a personal bond to Vincent van Gogh					
I can describe the landscape of Provence, France					
I feel prepared to interact with someone who has depression					
I think of Provence, France when I think of Vincent van Gogh					

Figure 2.1 Likert Scale Questions (Pre- and Post-Viewing)

eleventh regeneration of the Doctor and his companion Amy Pond. The episode opens to show the Doctor and Amy at the Musée d'Orsay in Paris, France at an exhibit dedicated to Vincent van Gogh's life and creative work. As they stroll among van Gogh's artwork, the Doctor appears before the oil painting *The Church at Auvers.* While gazing at the artwork, he notices a deformity: a reptilian-like beast painted in one of the church's windows. The Doctor, an alien who is over 900 years old, immediately recognizes the deformity and calls upon Amy to join him as he travels to Provence, France in 1890, a few months before Van Gogh's suicide. Upon arriving, the Doctor and Amy begin to search for Van Gogh, and soon find him arguing with a waiter at a local restaurant. After a brief conversation with the artist, they find that he is suffering from not only his own mental illness but also battling a destructive alien creature that only he can see. The creature, which has destroyed property and killed villagers, is described by Van Gogh in detail, but is unseen by the villagers, the Doctor, and Amy. Using a piece of technological equipment that allows the Doctor to see the alien, he quickly identifies the creature as a Krafayis. The Doctor, remembering that the Krafayis was painted into *The Church at Auvers*, takes Van Gogh and Amy to the actual church site and encourages Van Gogh to paint. Soon after beginning the painting, Van Gogh spots the Krafayis in a window of the church. the Doctor and Vincent work together to subdue the alien, and in the struggle, the creature is killed. The Doctor, in speaking to the Krafayis, learns that it is traveling through the universe alone, blind, scared, and lashing out at the unknown:

DOCTOR: Vincent. Vincent, what's happening?
VINCENT: It's charging now. Get back. Get back!
(The Krafayis skewers itself on the easel and lifts Vincent into the air. Then it falls to the floor, mortally wounded.)
VINCENT: He wasn't without mercy at all. He was without sight. I didn't mean that to happen. I only meant to wound it, I never meant to --

DOCTOR: He's trying to say something.
VINCENT: What is it?
DOCTOR: I'm having trouble making it out, but I think he's saying, I'm afraid. I'm afraid. There, there. Shush, shush. It's okay, it's okay. You'll be fine. Shush.
VINCENT: He was frightened, and he lashed out. Like humans who lash out when they're frightened. Like the villagers who scream at me. Like the children who throw stones at me.
DOCTOR: Sometimes winning, winning is no fun at all.
(32:18-33:51)

Upon the death of the Krafayis, Van Gogh, Amy, and the Doctor travel in the TARDIS to the Musée d'Orsay to show Van Gogh the impact that his art and life continues to have on the world. Overcome with tears, Van Gogh expresses his excitement for beginning a new life with the newfound knowledge of the impact of his work:

VINCENT: This changes everything. I'll step out tomorrow with my easel on my back a different man. I still can't believe that one of the haystacks was in the museum. How embarrassing.
DOCTOR: It's been a great adventure and a great honour.
VINCENT: You've turned out to be the first doctor ever actually to make a difference to my life.
DOCTOR: I'm delighted. I won't ever forget you.
(41:55-42:15)

Amy, delighted at the idea that Van Gogh has been shown the impact of his life's work, begins to feel that he will not commit suicide, and that a return to the Musée d'Orsay will reveal room upon room of new paintings by the artist. However, upon returning, she sees that the amount of paintings remains the same, and that Van Gogh indeed committed suicide:

AMY: So you were right. No new paintings. We didn't make a difference at all.
DOCTOR: I wouldn't say that. The way I see it, every life is a pile of good things and bad things. Hey. The good things don't always soften the bad things, but vice versa, the bad things don't necessarily spoil the good things or make them unimportant. And we definitely added to his pile of good things.
(43:39-44:14)

This episode was chosen for the empathy towards mental illness shown in the workings of the plot. The show's writing engages viewers with the notion that the effects of Vincent van Gogh's mental illness were not able to surpass praise of his artwork, thus shedding light on the complexity and significance of these diseases. The late artist's struggle with mental illness has been documented and analyzed for decades (Arnold 1988; Correa 2014) and while this episode places his story within a science-fiction context, the writers held true to the accepted historical narrative that the artist struggled with a crippling mental illness. Scholars recognize a worldwide stigma against mental illness. The mentally ill receive little societal acceptance and understanding which compartmentalizes those struggling with the disease as "the other" and separates them from "normal" society (Karno and Edgerton 1969; Dalky 2012; Todor 2013; Yang et al. 2013). The existence of this stigma means that empathy for mental illness is often not developed until a person either directly experiences the diseases or encounters the illness through a friend or family member. Further, mental illness is rarely accepted as a serious medical condition and falsely disregarded as something that the sufferer can easily control and/or overcome. In the framing of Van Gogh's character, viewers may develop a connection to both the character and the actual historical figure, particularly when the viewer is led to believe that the artist no longer commits suicide because of his immense happiness after seeing how he is revered in modern art. Thus, when the viewer learns that the artist took his own life, they may come to understand the magnitude of mental illness through their emotional connection to the representation of the historical figure and the narrative of van Gogh himself. This might translate into empathy towards individuals who are suffering from a mental illness. The episode could help erode stigmas and judgment attached to the sufferers and spark social responsibility in caring for these individuals. Viewers experiencing an emotional connection to the artist as

portrayed in the episode may develop a stronger connection to those individuals they encounter who suffer from a similar mental illness, as influenced by viewing this episode. Geographically, this may influence the circulation of more peaceful, compassionate responses to depression throughout the global *Doctor Who* fandom. This focus group was designed to test the potential for such circulation of empathy and social responsibility to occur, given their engagement with the episode themes.

Results

The results from the study are presented in two sections: the Likert scale results and the focus group discussions. The Likert scales provide an initial, quantitative analysis of the participants and their interactions with the show and their own fandom, while the discussion comments offer a deeper ethnographic engagement with the focus groups.

Likert Scales

The following visualizations made through Tableau software show the changes from pre- to post-viewing in perception for each question across all three focus groups. **Figures 2.2 and Figure 2.3** show some important patterns that reflect upon the goals of this paper. The NV/Non-Viewers group, on average and cumulatively, showed the strongest perception change (on a 1-5 scale), while the W group showed the most significant decreases in perception. This is logical, given, the tendency for the episode to elicit emotional responses from viewers. Accordingly, members of the W group would show little change in perception because they have already been exposed to the episode. Further, members of the D group had problems with the show itself that blocked certain emotional connections to the subject matter, resulting in little perception changes.

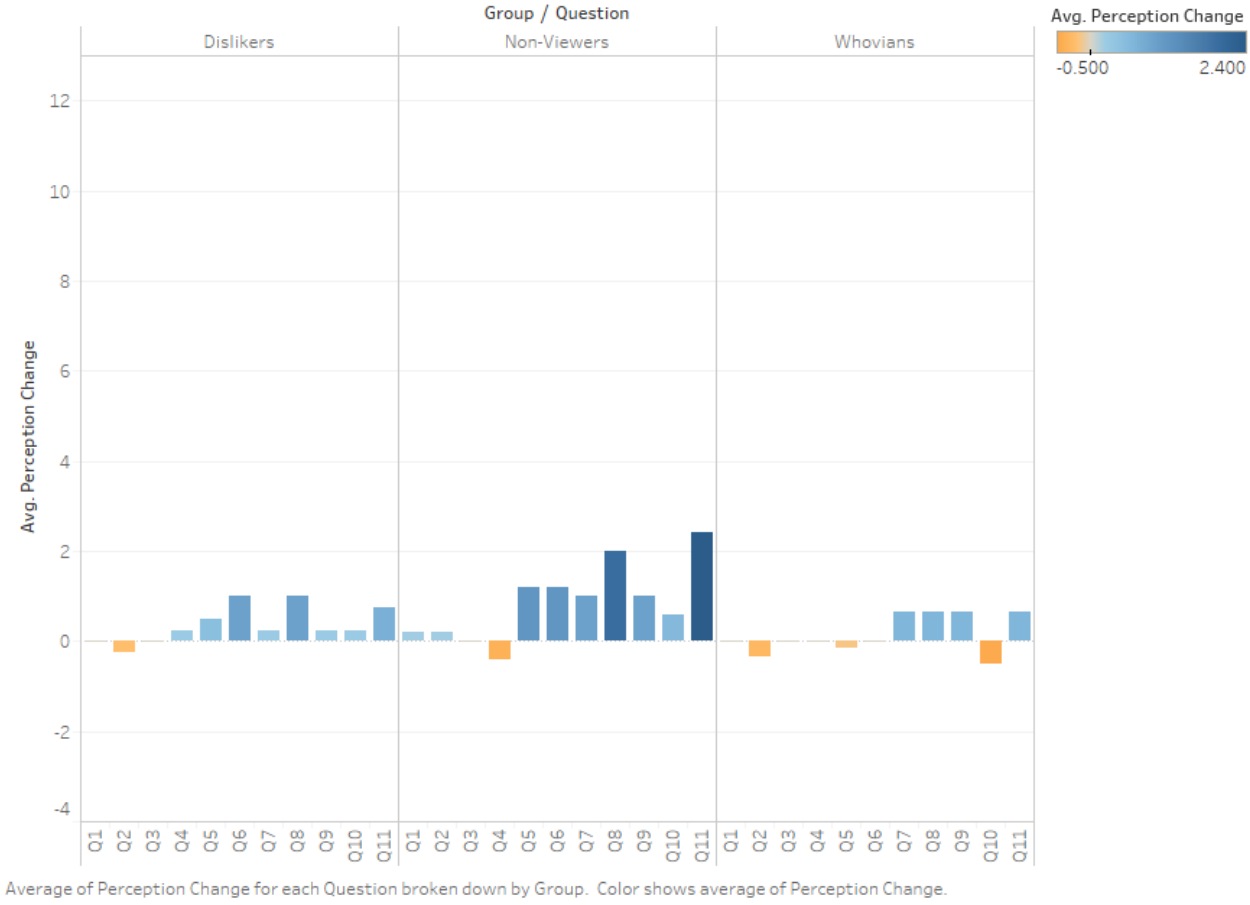

Figure 2.2 Average Group-Level Change in Perception Post-Viewing, by Question

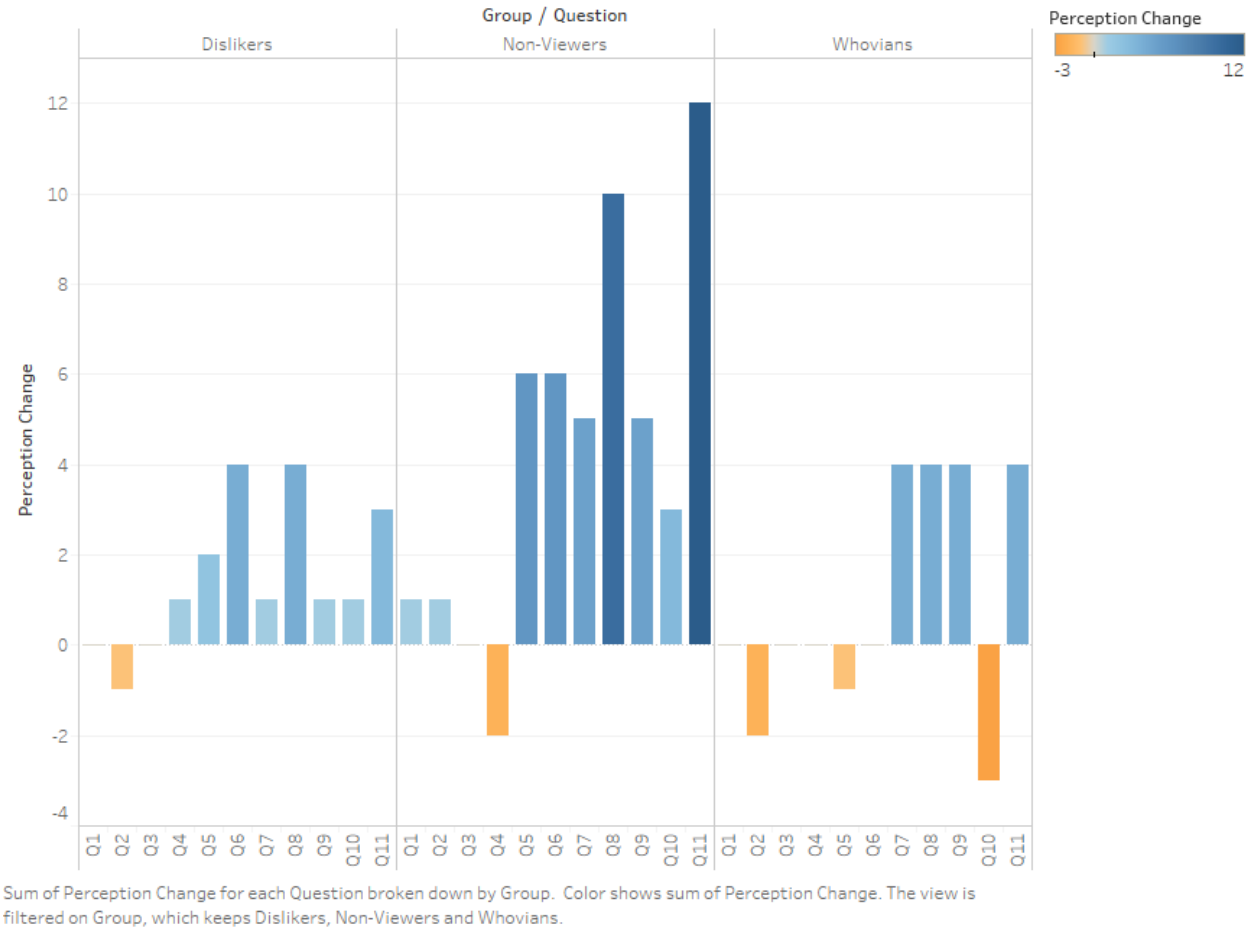

Figure 2.3 Cumulative Group-Level Change in Perception Post-Viewing by Question

However, it should be acknowledged that members of the D and NV groups slightly increased in agreement with all questions with the exceptions of Question 2 ("It is possible to control a mental illness) and Question 4 ("I feel close to someone with a mental illness"), respectively. The slight positive perception changes may be explained by the pre-viewing Likert Scales, which placed topics of empathy, mental illness, and landscape in the minds of the participants prior to watching the episode. **Figure 2.4** shows average perception changes per question (not delineated by group). While cumulative and average changes per group showed significant decreases in perceptions, when strictly considering average changes across all groups, only Question 2 and Question 4 again show a negative decrease. It is logical that Question 2 would show a decrease after viewing the episode, as the plotline heavily suggests that a mental illness cannot be controlled. Question 4, however, is a difficult trend to describe; it was originally theorized that the representation of Van Gogh in the episode would serve as a stand-in for a real-life connection to someone with a mental illness (therefore, even if a participant does not know someone in their daily life with a mental illness, the fictional Van Gogh could provide some of this firsthand experience), but the data simply do not suggest this occurrence. Implications of this lack of connection made to Van Gogh as "knowing someone with a mental illness" will be discussed further in following sections.

Focus Group Discussions

All quotes included in the following section were taken from the three focus groups, with no individual participant quoted more than three times, as advised by Adams (2000). Each question posed to participants will highlight the most common answers received, and all answers will be delineated by the aforementioned codes used to represent each level of fandom (**W** for Whovians, **NV** for Non-Viewers, and **D** for Dislikers).

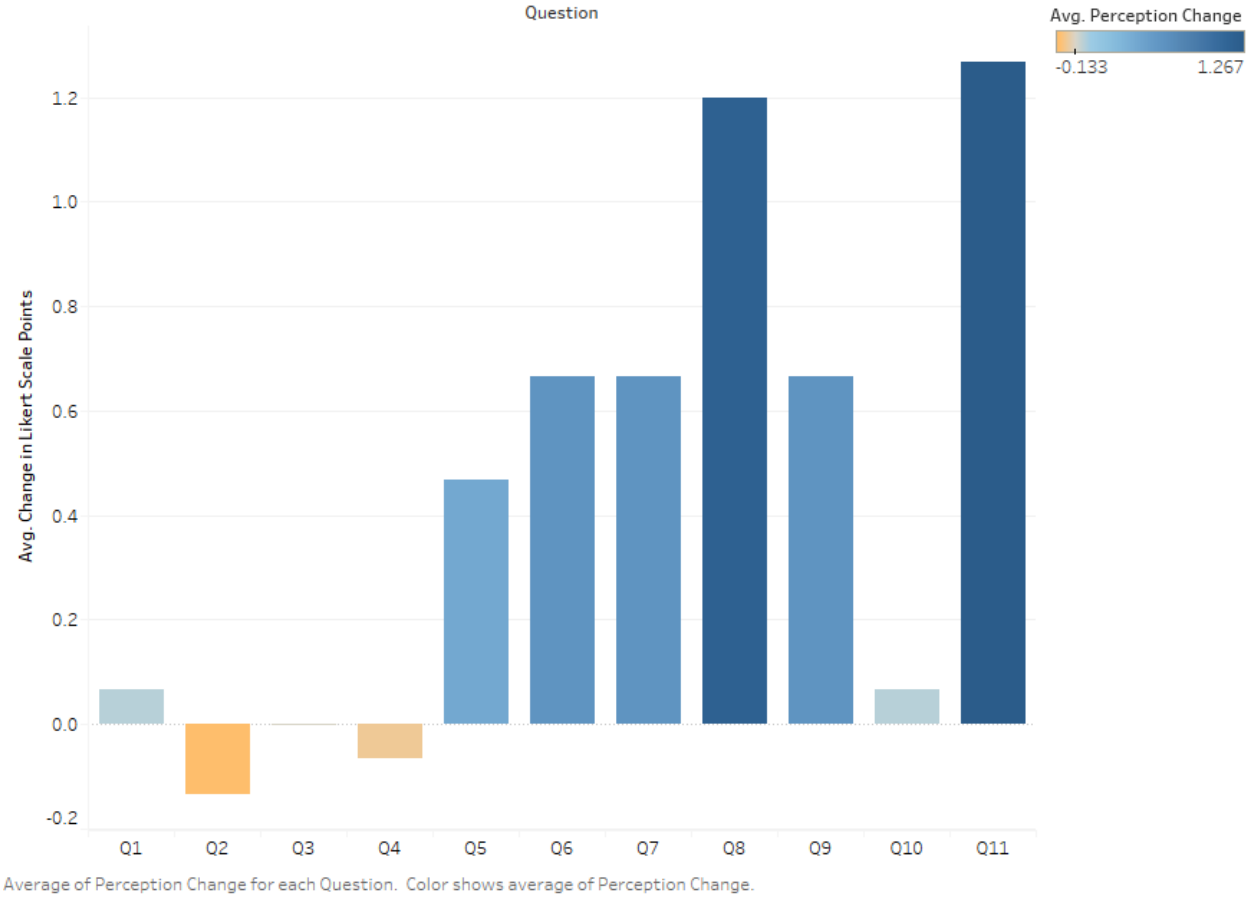

Figure 2.4 Average Perception Change by Question

After watching the episode, what can you say about Provence, France?

Viewers across all three groups showed little connection or understandings of Provence strictly as influenced by the episode, despite the Likert scales showing such a connection made. This demonstrated that while the episode was technically "set" in Provence, the landscape characteristics and placefulness of the town were not highlighted strongly in the episode, at least strongly enough to leave a geographical impression on viewers. Members from the **W** group expressed their lack of place attachment to Provence after viewing the episode, often by referencing their own experience with the show and/or the fandom:

> *"Is it filmed in Provence? I thought most of Doctor Who is filmed in South Wales."*
>
> *"To be honest even if it was filmed there, how much of it did we really see?"*
>
> *"I can only speak towards Provence in general terms; it's a European village, [there] wasn't really again enough detail there. The focus was more on the story, the characters, and literally the buildings are just a backdrop. Not necessarily focused on a geographical location."*
>
> *"This is the second time I've seen this episode, I didn't even remember it was in Provence the first time."*
>
> *"There was a clear metaphor for mental illness with the invisible monster, that was the focus of the plot. Being in Provence was purely incidental, because that's where van Gogh was from[15]."*

While members from the **NV** group also expressed little awareness of Provence, they did not specifically reference the *Doctor Who* fandom, given their lack of familiarity. However, members did connect scenes from their show with their knowledge of other geographical landscapes:

[15] It should be noted that van Gogh was actually not from France, but was actually Dutch.

"It appears drier and rockier and more rural. Especially the funeral scene, which resembles southern France. Reminds me of scenes in the Godfather."

"It reminded me of a normal, European city going through a lot of tough times; it didn't really seem like anything special like he paints it to be, it just seemed like he was the outcast of the town but a lot of people were dealing with problems."

"A lot of the chase scenes were sort of placeless. The posters, the visuals... they are really reminiscent of the 19th century ones that have been marketed and remarketed in that style [associated with] France in the 19th century."

"I've been to quite a few of places in France and they all seem similar. In the episode, it looks like the countryside of anywhere in Europe."

The **D** group, unlike the other focus groups, did not draw connections between *Doctor Who* fandom and/or other geographical landscapes. Rather, they simply expressed not feeling a connection to Provence:

"I can't really say that the episode made me have a connection of any kind to Provence. I don't recall if it was ever even mentioned that they were in Provence in the episode. I didn't feel like the episode was trying to give me a connection to Provence, and if it was, it was only because it had the connection to van Gogh."

"Not much, I didn't feel like it was that highlighted in this show, you didn't really get a sense of it."

"In my mind, I think of Provence as having lavender fields, but I didn't see that in this episode."

"The people are mean and quick to draw and hold opinions (and/or perhaps uneducated at the time of portrayal). Otherwise – where were the people most of the time?"

Did you develop a bond with any of the characters?

Virtually all participants felt a bond with van Gogh's character, regardless of fandom-level. Interestingly, some members of the **D** group used this question as an opportunity to also express their disdain for the Doctor in the episode. All participants had viewed the episode prior to the focus group (in their journey of determining that they do not like the show), so their comments

did not necessarily dwell on the episode's plot, but rather made connections between van Gogh's character and their own lives:

> *"I'd say I developed a bond for van Gogh. Some of my own experiences with depression are similar. I always knew that he had mental illness. So I felt I could relate to him, that he is assailed by something that other people aren't aware of. I like Doctor Who, and the Doctor, but I don't like this Doctor. He's, I don't know, he's not sharp or silly enough for me. So, while I feel like I have a bond with the Doctor, that was not felt in this particular episode."*

> *"I would say van Gogh, especially the scene where he's ready to go, and they find him crying in bed, and the irrationality in this situation, and his response. I've never struggled with depression or mental illness but I do have close family members that have it, and when the Doctor was like "how can I help you" and not knowing how to respond, for me, that was one of the turning points when I started to really identify with van Gogh."*

NV participants also felt a bond with van Gogh in a similar manner as in the **D** group, but their comments discussed more of the actual episode than other groups:

> *"I think the depiction of Vincent in this episode is a positive depiction of van Gogh because in most accounts you read about him are that he was argumentative, troubled, he probably would have run away from these strangers in real life. Obviously this is sci-fi, but if he had encountered them in real life he would have probably run away. Historical accounts were fairly negative of his personality, but also because mental illness wasn't understood."*

> *"I really didn't know anything about van Gogh, and so I couldn't help but bond with him because I was learning so much about his personal struggles and stuff like that."*

One participant even expressed a bond toward the Doctor, using their own experiences with mental health as a lens to interpret the episode:

> *"I connected most to Doctor Who because I felt, like I can think back to situations, especially as an adult years of having to you know, not realizing friends were dealing with depression and figure out ways to not startle them, make them more angry, more sad. I identified with him on finding methods to deal with this, and methods of understanding things."*

However, this reaction was limited to one focus group member. Participants' overwhelming anger toward the Doctor (and his companion) in this group resulted from their lack of familiarity with the show ("*...I found myself resistant of Doctor Who and Amy, because, why are you messing with history? Who do you think you are?"*), whereas negative feelings toward the Doctor in the **W** group was a result of comparison with the nature and personality of other regenerations of the Doctors. Here, it begins to come clear that differences in fandom altered where bonds (and perhaps even empathy) were and were not felt throughout the episode:

> *"I bonded strongest with van gogh, part of it is because I didn't know the context of the episode, I found myself resistant of Doctor Who and Amy, because, why are you messing with history? Who do you think you are? I bonded with van Gogh because I was not understanding. The guy in the museum, Dr. Black, being a teacher and wanting people to appreciate art and the story, he was just very genuine about his appreciation of who made it. For him, the dream is to be able to convey that to other people."*
>
> *"Yes, I felt bonded with Vincent, very much. I felt his pain, and I also felt the pain of the Krafayis when they started to understand him."*
>
> *"I felt it with each character; it was a different bond with each. Amy had a positive attitude, and Vincent, of course, was very likeable. The Krafayis for sure, I felt sorry for it. I had that compassion for being misunderstood."*
>
> *"van Gogh, because I can relate to what he deals with regarding his depression and other issues, and feeling like people don't understand you because of it, but he fights anyway. The alien/dino thing – because he was scared and couldn't find a way out."*

Did you dislike any of the characters?

It was at this point in the focus groups that most participants, regardless of fandom, asserted a strong dislike of the Doctor. Their reasonings for such distaste did, however, seem to follow patterns delineated by fandom. For example, members of the **W** group referenced other

regenerations of the Doctor nostalgically as they described their aversion to Matt Smith's portrayal of the Doctor:

> *"I dislike the Doctor. I've seen, out of order, some of his episodes but he's just not as empathetic with the alien. In other episodes, he goes to extraordinary lengths to really make contact with them and save them, and in this one he tries to talk to it, and when it dies he is dismissive. Throughout the episode he seemed less sharp. I liked some of the older doctors."*
>
> *"He seems more shallow to me. I was a big fan of David Tennant's doctor. He's sort of more aloof [Matt Smith]. Not a fan of the superstitious/religious villagers too. I'm not a fan of Amy Pond. She's gorgeous and all that but in this episode she doesn't seem like a very important character. She's just kind of there."*

While **W** focus group members compared Matt Smith's Doctor to previous incarnations of the character, **NV** participants, as with the previous question, disapproved of the Doctor's actions mainly resulting from their unfamiliarity with the show, often asking clarification questions while providing responses:

> *"I was very resistant to the Doctor, why are you coming to save someone? Let his life be what it was, you shouldn't go back and change that, and that changed towards the end. I don't know if the Doctor changed and realized that he needs to give Vincent what he needs, and that gets towards what we all have, I want to know that my life made a positive difference to others. I don't know of the Doctor changed or not. In the beginning I was thinking "Dude, chill on the savior complex."*
>
> *"Was that pretty typical of how Matt Smith played the doctor? Just that kind of arrogance?"*
>
> *"He also seemed to treat the suicide as no big deal, you know, he's just going to kill himself in a year. He did do something in the end."*
>
> *"I had a little trouble with the Doctor. He just didn't come across as, you know, Amy was sweet, but he came across as stern, pompous almost. But maybe that's because of his character on the ground."*

Again, most of the **D** group's responses were short and succinct, understandable given their distaste for the show, perhaps reflecting little connection made to the episode themes themselves (*"I didn't dislike anyone."*). Overall, they negatively perceived the Doctor, citing their knowledge of or struggles with mental illnesses:

> *"Well, the Doctor's personality bugged me. He's dismissive of Vincent's mental illness."*
>
> *"The Doctor. I don't know why – he drove me crazy. So pretentious, snotty, and a know it all – kind of like the know-it-all kid that was placed in an adult body. I feel like he was giving up on van Gogh and acting like mental illness is nothing (despite his words) at times, which is something I feel like people do to me – give up on me and act like it doesn't matter because they don't see suffering. Perhaps I'm projecting. Also, the people who treated van Gogh like crap and accuse him of terrible things, simply because he had a mental illness."*

One response, however, came from a participant who appeared to feel the most strongly about their dislike of the show, and had a vested interest in expressing their dislike within the focus groups. Their response to this question was, accordingly, deeper and more developed than those of other **D** participants:

> *"I didn't care that much for even this regeneration of the Doctor, and I know this is one of the more liked ones. And yes, I understand that some of that is the character, but someone who goes around saving humans should be capable of acting a bit more human. You would expect that someone who regularly goes through time would have a better concept of how to subtly nudge someone towards doing what they need them to get to so they can restore time, but the Doctor treats trying to get van Gogh to the church so badly that it should be more an impediment to the story than it is."*

Was mental illness a prominent theme in the episode for you?

This question garnered similar responses from all groups; most participants felt a strong theme of mental illness in the plot, with no significant differences across all three focus groups. Some participants responded with short, declarative responses:

"I think it was pretty clear that it was a big theme in the whole episode, even from the moment that they go into the gallery and talk about Vincent." (**W)**

"It was pretty central. It was a famous historic figure with mental illness." (**W**)

"The monster itself was a metaphor for depression, an invisible destructive force." (**W**)

"I would say throughout the middle and end especially. Of course, in the beginning of the episode, it was mostly landscape, and then you realize you go back in time and it makes the connection of why they are there. It's not introduced until the middle and end, but overall it was spotty." (**NV**)

"There was one part where he was crying on the bed, and it was very apparent." (**NV**)

"I thought about it the whole time, I think because I knew a bit about van Gogh. Also because the Likert scale put my mind there." (**NV**)

While other participants had rich, detailed responses to mental illness in the episode:

"Yeah, they don't give a science fiction reason for why this thing [the Krafayis] is invisible. Because it's not really important to the story. The metaphor is there for me because the Doctor needed equipment to spot the thing, to figure out what's going on, so the machine was a metaphor for awareness, and i think it's quite obvious that for me. At the end, the monster is saying "I am very afraid," and that's the nature of a lot of these mental illnesses. They are based in fear, anxiety, maybe irrational. It is a lot like a terrifying monster running through your head ripping things up." (**W)**

"This ties into the metaphor too: At the end when the Doctor goes to the painting and the monster is not in there, the Doctor probably thinks he helped him and he's cured. Maybe in his own head because he's gotten rid of something tangible that he can't see but van Gogh can." (**W**)

"[I] completely get how that [the ending scene] didn't change his life. The Doctor's comments at the end, about how it was one good thing added to the pile resonated a lot. I've been diagnosed with depression and anxiety, and that was only after a particularly bad stretch of depression that must have been what van Gogh was at near the end. So I can understand how knowing that his life would be so remembered wasn't enough to beat it. And that Amy couldn't grasp that it should have been enough. I can tell just from that little moment that there's no backstory to depression in Amy's character, but there is in the Doctor; he didn't really expect to see any changes in van Gogh's art. He must have known it

> *wouldn't have made a difference in changing his suicide because otherwise he wouldn't have done it. He understood it wasn't enough, but it would help him while he was alive."* (**D**)

However, a minority of participants did not connect to the theme of mental illness as strongly as others:

> *"I didn't think about it much unless they made it obvious, maybe because I was excited to not think critically about something and just watch tv. I don't think it was the center of the whole episode for me."* (**NV**)

> *"It was really hard for me to connect sometimes because they would switch the scene so much, so I have a problem understanding. I was just watching and not thinking. Now with the discussion, I can think about it."* (**NV**)

> *"It was prominent but just because of the questionnaire we filled out--I was looking for any metaphors for mental illness in the episode."* (**D**)

> *"Yes, but I wonder if it would have been if I didn't know the subject/themes of your research (inferred from the Likert questions)? I don't tend to think that deeply about tv shows and often take them at face value."* (**D**)

At this point in the focus groups, particularly in the **D** group, questions of research design arose in the discussion, highlighting a noted limitation of the research in using descriptive Likert scales prior to viewing the episode, in particular leading the viewer as to what to expect in the episode.

Do you feel that you could speak about Van Gogh's life to another person?

Overall, participants across all three groups showed little confidence in knowledge gained about van Gogh's life as strictly gained from the episode, with little variation across fandom lines. For those who felt they could speak about his life in an educated manner, they drew upon personal experiences (not connected to the episode) learning about the artist, particularly within the **NV** and **D** groups:

> *"Not authoritatively. I don't know any facts about his life."* (**W**)

"It depends on who, specifically, if I were talking to say my grandparents, it would be very basic, yeah he was an artist from the Netherlands who lived in France, and had good paintings. They are not very interested in it. If I was talking to somebody who did, I might go more into symbolism of the paintings." (**NV**)

"Yeah I think his life or at least most of his life leading up to the last 6 months of his life are not really common knowledge, that is when he painted most of his famous paintings. Most literature that exists is focused on the period where he created it, rather than his life leading up to it. I don't know how he got to the Netherlands to France, I don't know his childhood; it's not really what you're taught in school." (**NV**)

"I know just enough to be slightly dangerous, I would be hesitant because I don't know enough, but still I was thinking that I know a couple of poems about his life, and there's a song called Starry Starry Night, and in my mind I was wondering how I can do a lesson for my students and I was comfortable using this episode in conjunction with teaching." (**NV**)

"I don't know about authoritatively but I could definitely talk about my interpretation of his art and how he felt energies." (**D**)

"More than maybe the average person. I saw some of his art in Amsterdam." (**D**)

"Perhaps, but more based on the five art history classes I've taken rather than this fictional portrayal." (**D**)

One member of the **D** group even expressed their own opinion of van Gogh while answering the question, suggesting engagement with the episode *and* the artist despite their dislike of the show itself:

"I could speak about how it relates to this episode regarding depression above, but not in general. I'm not a very artistic person, even though I try sometimes. I've actually gone to an art museum in DC in the last year to try to see if I could appreciate it more, but for the most part I really didn't. I don't particularly understand what makes his art so famous, but that's hardly unique to him. I think I could try to explain the ending to this episode, to someone like Amy that just didn't understand how it wasn't enough to show him how much he mattered in the future, but other than that I couldn't in anything more than the absolute basics."

Did you feel empathy for any of the characters?

Answers to this question mirrored those of the previous question "Did you feel a bond with any of the characters?" in that van Gogh was a relatable character. However, for all three focus groups, the responses provided for this question were the most developed, personalized, and emotional answers of the entire session, and touched upon almost all characters in the episode, not just van Gogh. Members of the **W** group focused on both the mechanics of the episode (the script, the acting) and their own personal experiences in their responses, expressing empathy for many of the characters:

> *"The actor* [playing van Gogh] *was excellent, when I really empathized is when he had the episode in the bed, and then was okay almost immediately. That whole, how he portrayed that. Especially in science fiction, visual portrayals, if the acting is not good, it doesn't matter how good the [script is]."*
>
> *"I have depression, so I could absolutely empathize with van Gogh as he laid crying in the bed, and then in the next minute he was up and moving around like nothing had happened. I've been there, and I know that feeling well. I think that moment teaches you that we have very little control over our depression and it can be a rollercoaster of emotions."*
>
> *"I definitely empathized with Amy, even though she's not my favorite companion. In this episode, I have know people suffering from depression and I want to help them, and at the end of the day it's not your responsibility, and you have to cope with the fact that you won't always make things better, things are just going to happen. I think Amy struggled to understand that, and she didn't want to just leave him there in that way."*
>
> *"In a way I can empathize with the villagers and people who treat van Gogh poorly, in a way it's how a vast majority of our current society treats people with mental illness. We ignore them, and push the problems on other things, like coping with alcohol, drugs; they might become homeless. I find myself guilty of that to this day, it's hard to help somebody with that issue so you might become defensive, ignored, reserved. I can empathize with them because in our position it's easy to say that they are bad people, how can they treat him so poorly. Everyone has that predisposed thinking, maybe they are just attention seeking, etc. Which is obviously not true, but lots of people have that. Like misogyny, it is*

so deeply ingrained in people, that it is hard for people to get out of that. Mental illness is similar, it's hard for people and they think it's something to control, just be happy, that sort of thing."

Members of the **NV** group followed suit with a wide spectrum of empathy toward most of the characters in the episode, also touching upon mechanics of the episode as well as their own experiences with mental illness:

"van Gogh and the monster. I definitely felt it [empathy], especially when they went to the museum to show him that he did have an effect, so I was empathetic with that. We don't know our impact on the future, and we think everything we do will be forgotten. Imagine if the Doctor came into our lives and took us 100 years in the future to show us, actually, you did have an impact. What a gift that might be! The actor did an excellent job showing the effect it had on him."

"I felt that way and I was surprised (it made me cry) when the Krafayis died and at the end when I realized what was actually doing to Vincent and what the Doctor was actually accomplishing. I definitely felt empathy, the Krafayis was misunderstood and afraid, and even the Doctor in knowing that feeling of wanting to give someone what they need, giving a little bit more good to that. I felt nothing for Amy, she was just kind of clueless to me and floating around, there's not very much there. A 2D character for me."

"I had empathy for van Gogh because with my knowledge of him, I understand a little bit more and I definitely empathize with him a little bit more."

"I think [someone] mentioned about Vincent's life, first of all we're calling him Vincent in this conversation. I don't know where sympathy ends and empathy ends, except for embodying a character, I think to go back to a science fiction question, for a historical figure like van Gogh you need to use sci-fi to give the opportunity to humanize a person a bit because my impressions of van Gogh were from people who didn't know him very well and didn't know about mental illness and just wrote him off as crazy. Sci-fi has provided an avenue to unwrap a character to humanize him and unwrap these layers of him as a character. It's a fictional depiction but the science part provides an excuse to introduce this crazy conflict into his life. I dunno if there's movies about him but they'd have to invent something in the story to make it Hollywood, it would be difficult to just take what his life was really like and try to make that into a movie. Sci-fi gives you the opportunity to see what would happen in a situation that lets you get to know a

historical figure better. Obviously imagine how he would act or what would happen if you could see his impact."

The **D** group also felt empathy toward many of the characters, and the answers so strongly mirror those of the other two groups that it was indiscernible that they were dislikers of the show:

"With van Gogh most of anyone, for sharing a history of depression. I'm not sure van Gogh would be relatable to someone without depression, and his mood swings were so severe in places that it may not be believable to some people. If I hadn't had my mood crater and skyrocket in hours sometimes I wouldn't believe it, and that still took far longer to happen than it did for van Gogh. But the limitations of TV do happen. So yes with van Gogh definitely."

"*I could absolutely feel empathy towards the Krafayis and Vincent. Empathy towards the Doctor, not necessarily. I liked his sense of humor but that was it."*

"van Gogh – he's fighting demons others can't see (and are scared of), which is something I find myself doing as well. He's struggling and it is extremely hard to go through a mental illness on your own with no one for support. It broke me when he saw his own accomplishments being enjoyed and celebrated and that he thought he was terrible and a horrible artist/person his whole life and he was completely wrong and the people around him during his time were so wrong. Amy – when she felt as though she didn't make a difference in van Gogh's life because it didn't turn out differently. The dinosaur/alien thing – poor guy, I just want to hug him."

Do you like science fiction?

The final question garnered a wide range of expected responses, given that fandom-level was a qualification for inclusion in each of the respective groups. The **W** group unanimously expressed their love for science fiction, while the **NV** group displayed multifaceted responses. Some participants delineated subsets of the genre that they enjoyed:

"Um, yes and no. I don't really like super science fiction. I've always loved realistic fiction, um, so, anytime in this episode where it was based off realistic things, I liked it a lot more. But the complete sci-fi, I'm not the biggest fan. I appreciate it, but not my thing. Star Trek, no."

"I like Game of Thrones, even the white walkers are not the favorite part of the story. I like the more realistic parts of science fiction."

"I think, yeah, I like how, I am pretty polymorphous with media that I like, science fiction is so broad, there's sci-fi movies in all genres, it's like using acoustic music as a classification of music, there's so many different kinds. There's sci-fi comedy, sci-fi romance, drama, horror, and I think Star Wars and Star Trek are so pervasive and universal at this point, and tackle universal themes. Sci-fi has a stigma, it's one of the universalizing things where it takes a realistic human problem and mix it up. And it also reflects a lot of our secret desires we have to be able to teleport, go back and time, that would be pretty awesome. Minus the obvious consequences. I feel like sci-fi is a really good way to explore these emotions and desires that humans have for what humans would like to accomplish. But it's also permanently a constant epistemology where you are always faced with limitations, it's a constant part of the plot. It's hanging over the whole episode—what if the Doctor and Amy do something to make van Gogh burn all his paintings?"

While other **NV** participants felt that the episode may have sparked a budding interest in science fiction in their lives:

"It's interesting because with this episode it creates these spaces, especially with depression, that aren't always acknowledge or talked about, maybe difficult spaces or controversial spaces, space for understanding of something that's not always created in real life. It [science fiction] can confuse people. Creates spaces that may or may not be realistic. I need to check it out more!"

"I'd say that no, I don't like science fiction but I've come in the last few years to wonder if it's because I wasn't exposed to it. It's a blind spot in my teaching curriculum. I've got scientifically-minded students and I'm trying to teach them, and I don't have a single science-fiction story! I've never enjoyed tv shows that were sci-fi based, except for Black Mirror, and that's opened me up to seeing different types of sci-fi. I have trouble getting past the rules that are not realistic of how the world works, like "ugh, that's not how it works!" so I get stuck in realism but I have enjoyed it more recently. Back in high school I didn't read any."

Members of the dislikers group appeared to either love science fiction but hate *Doctor Who,* or hate the entire science fiction genre itself. A self-proclaimed lover of science fiction in the **D** group described their passion:

> *"I am a huge sci-fi fan. I could basically teach a class on Star Trek and Star Wars, well parts of Star Wars, the old extended universe is enormous and got ridiculous after awhile when I gave up on it. The book I'm reading right now is by Alastair Reynolds. But I've never been a Doctor Who fan because it tends to be more towards the campy end of sci-fi that I've never cared much for. The only episodes of Star Trek I've never watched are in The Original Series, because that show is just too campy for me to enjoy and I love Star Trek to death. The only tattoo I've ever actually thought about getting was a combadge, because it's the only thing I've ever found that I could tattoo on myself and know I'd still enjoy it years later. So that should hopefully establish my credentials. And even this episode had some of this campyness to me, like that steam-punk rear view mirror the Doctor had. That's just something that's intrinsic to Doctor Who, which is why that I don't imagine I'll ever really become a fan of it even though I am such a huge sci-fi fan."*

Other responses were either apathetic or negative in their tone, highlighting not only a lack of *Doctor Who* fandom but a general disdain for the genre:

> *"Historically, I'm not drawn to it, but I do love quantum physics, so I'm thinking I should give Doctor Who another shot."*
>
> *"I wasn't sure what a lot of the technology was in the episode, and that bothered me."*

The aforementioned comments from the three groups provide ethnographic context to the quantitative results of the Likert scales. The following section will discuss the implications of such results as they relate to the goals of the paper, and highlight practical areas of further research and deepened analysis.

Discussion of Findings

The discussions during the **W** (Whovians), **NV** (Non-Viewers), and **D** (Dislikers) focus groups produced interesting findings concerning how an individual engages with the themes of *Doctor Who* through a lens of their own level of fandom. Three main areas of observation were made following the data analysis: (1) Viewers with lower levels of fandom were more likely to observe landscape details, (2) viewers with higher levels of fandom engaged more deeply with themes of the episode and turned the focus group experience into a communal consumption space in which participants discussed their own fandom with each other, and (3) viewers with no prior *Doctor Who* exposure were more likely to mentally link van Gogh and depression after viewing the episode. Observations one and three are likely linked in that viewers with little exposure to the show may observe more detail in characteristics of the episode not revolving around the Doctor; whereas, a Whovian may be predisposed to devote more attention to the Doctor and his actions, given their strong fandom that is deeply linked with the Doctor himself. However, this is not to say that the **W** group did not engage with the themes of mental illness in the episode: members of this viewing group spent considerable time on each question, quizzing each other on their fandom and challenging (or seconding) statements made by each other. The atmosphere, although comprised of individual viewers, was a communal space of intellectual discussion and reflection. As expressed in Figures 1 and 2, however, the **NV** group showed the most overall *change* in their perception of Van Gogh and depression. This may be attributed to the emotional impact of seeing the episode for the first time, whereas for participants in the **W** group, the focus group was one of many times viewing the episode (this was information expressed by participants during the discussion). The **D** group did not exhibit such engagement (as highlighted by the relatively short answers to most of the questions). There was little to no

discussion among participants, and saturation for each question was reached in minutes. Participants in this group also showed little change in the Likert scales pre- and post- viewing. Across all three groups, participants were weary of the Doctor and their attitude towards Van Gogh's mental illness, suggesting that regardless of fandom, viewers may still harbor resentful feelings towards the actions of a character.

In terms of understanding and consuming landscape elements in the show, the **NV** group exhibited a greater understanding of Provence, France after watching the episode--although it must be noted that this understanding was minimal. Dedicated fans of the show would be following the plotline more closely than someone who has never seen it (therefore, many of the references are unclear), and connecting certain references with prior episodes and seasons. Those who had never seen *Doctor Who* or this particular episode would be more aware of all visual elements that place the landscapes in its proper historical context. Following this logic, members of the **W** group were more critical of the show's representation of Provence and its ability to teach viewers about the landscape. This may be attributed to where their fandom places them mentally while consuming the show: a Whovian would not necessarily be tied to observing the landscape, and instead may be asking questions such as "how does this episode fit into the larger story arc?" and "I wonder how this will affect future episodes in this series?"

The general flow of the focus groups was also affected by the level of fandom: the **NV** and **D** groups answered each question with little cross-dialogue among participants. The **W** group, however, answered each question but then engaged in multiple discussions about past Doctors, conspiracy theories about Van Gogh's life, technological innovation, their own mental illnesses, and empathy as a broader concept. It was clear, from the facilitator point of view, that these particular Whovians truly approached several aspects in their lives through a lens of their

fandom towards the show. The level of fandom did not necessarily predict positive feelings toward the Doctor, however; across all three groups, most participants expressed their disdain for Matt Smith's Doctor, suggesting that fandom itself is not all-accepting adulation, and that *Doctor Who* fandom is specifically tied to a concept and a legacy, instead of just a particular portrayal of a Doctor.

As demonstrated through the focus groups, the **W** group exhibited the most self-reflection in the post-viewing discussion, lending weight to the hypothesis that fandom, and in this case *Doctor Who* fandom, may influence individuals to consider empathy on a deeper scale as they engage with their daily lives and personal geographies. As Eyles (1985) reminds us, "Empathy provides the experiential grounding of humanism-as-attitude. Further, while it refers to the need to discover and understand the salient features of local social life, it is closely related to self-reflection" (pg. 36). While longitudinal studies and more in-depth interviewing would be required to ascertain if long-term empathic development results from *Doctor Who* fandom, the increased self-reflection among the Whovians concerning this episode is certainly an interesting research finding.

Cumulatively, across all three focus groups, Likert statements 8 ("I feel I have a personal bond to Vincent van Gogh" and 11 ("I think of Provence, France when I think of Vincent van Gogh") showed the greatest positive perceived change, suggesting that while the representation of Provence, France within the episode is minimal and perhaps even superficial (lacking significant detail and placefulness), viewers felt they were more likely to connect the placename of Provence with van Gogh upon watching the episode. Further, viewing the fictional representation of van Gogh increased the viewer's personal perceived bond to the late artist. It remains to be seen, however, if such connections are fleeting or if they remain strong for a

considerable time period after the viewing experience. Across all three groups, Likert statement 2 showed a negative change in agreement; therefore, after viewing the episode, it was cumulatively felt that it was less possible to control a mental illness. Likert statement 4 ("I feel close to someone with a mental illness") also showed a negative change in agreement on average across all groups, disproving any notions that Van Gogh's fictional representation could serve as a substitute for real-life, off-screen connections to someone with a mental illness, suggesting possible limits to the connection between a viewer and the broadcasted subject.

This research showcases the importance of understanding fandom as a lens through which a person sees landscapes, social themes, and ideologies not only within the medium, but in their broader personal geographies. More broadly, this research also highlights why fandom is a highly appropriate lens through which to study emotional geographies, as it may guide, and in some cases even influence, perceptions, behaviors, and mobilities of the fans themselves. While viewers showcasing no *Doctor Who* fandom and even anti-fandom (the **NV** and **D** groups, respectively) demonstrated emotional reactions to the episode and changes in landscape perception and mental illness awareness, it was clear that the Whovians more deeply engaged with the plot, turning each focus group question into a broader commentary on their own lives.

Using the Likert scale and focus group methodology, participants exhibited notable changes in landscape perception and mental illness awareness and empathy. Future iterations of this research, however, would ideally capture whether such changes are fleeting, or longer-lasting. The Likert scales were completed immediately after viewing, and thus the plotline themes were fresh in their minds. Longitudinal engagement with focus group participants may change the nature of the conclusions made in this paper. Further research would also address the geographic limitations of this study. While the research design was carefully planned and

executed for the particular research question, there were locational constraints which necessitated that the focus groups be held in Knoxville, Tennessee. Accordingly, all participants were living in the Knoxville area (it must be noted, however, that not all participants were originally from Knoxville). While this city represents the demographic characteristics of an average North American college town, there are multiple cultural, religious, and economic influences that may be captured in future focus groups in different geographic locations.

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CHAPTER III: "DOCTOR WHO PREDICTED BREXIT": FAN GEOGRAPHIES AND ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN GEOPOLITICS OF BREXIT, DONALD TRUMP, AND *DOCTOR WHO* ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Abstract

Social media can provide users with a means for sharing opinions, celebrations, and important news, and, for some, is a venue through which to express a fandom. In the wake of notable geopolitical events, users often flock to social media to express their associated emotions. The recent Brexit decision and Donald Trump's election led to a wide variety of social media activity, ranging from visceral anger to unadulterated jubilation. However, users who identify as a member of a particular fandom may choose to express their emotions towards a geopolitical event through a lens of their fan enthusiasm, for varying reasons. This research highlights *Doctor Who*-influenced geopolitical engagement on the social media site Facebook, using case studies of Brexit and Donald Trump's 2016 election and 2017 inauguration. From nuanced comparisons between Trump and portly alien invaders known as the Slitheen, to deeply detailed posts highlighting how themes in *Doctor Who* predicted Brexit, some users see the show as a coping mechanism for de-stressing from emotionally taxing geopolitical events and expressing their anguish through a lens of a selected plotline. These actions shape a new geopolitical landscape in which fans grapple with their political surroundings as influenced by their own fandom.

Introduction

The most diehard fans of science-fiction media are colloquially stereotyped to be nerds who live in basements, have a homely appearance, and lack social graces (see "The Simpsons" character Comic Book Guy[16]). These notions are also often passed along to enthusiasts of any activity associated with "geekdom," such as individuals with an affinity for *Dungeons & Dragons*[17] and tabletop role-playing fantasy games being colloquially seen as "socially inept, psychologically unstable, or occultist" (Williams et al. 2006, pg. 1). However, science fiction fandom is expressed through a variety of channels across a wide range of personalities, meanings, and enthusiasms. This can be said for most types of fandom across the world: while stereotypes exist regarding the members of certain fandoms, the real expression of such enthusiasm towards a subject is diverse, complicated, and unique. For some, fandom is escapism from distressing personal, social, and emotional circumstances, providing immediate camaraderie in a situation where such companionship may not exist outside the confines of the fandom. For others, fandom simply adds a further layer of enrichment in their lives, not necessarily serving as emotional escapism but rather fulfilling an additional role of entertainment in their lives. Therefore, fandom can be both a required alignment for mental health, or simply a personal hobby, or even a combination of the two. Expression of fandom takes many forms, but is highly prevalent on social media, where fans can engage with their affinity, either directly with the figure (whether it be a celebrity, a video game, or an author, for example) or through other members of the fandom. In an age where social media continues to grow in relevance to the lives of internet-users, it becomes important to understand the intersections between social media and

[16] http://simpsons.wikia.com/wiki/Comic_Book_Guy
[17] http://dnd.wizards.com/

fandom, and how both forces influence each other in shaping online and offline cultural landscapes.

Increasingly on social media, fans often discuss events in geopolitics, popular culture, and their personal lives through a lens of their fandom. In the last year, two major geopolitical events have stood out on social media in the Western world: Brexit (the popular term for the eventual mandated withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union) and the election/inauguration of Donald Trump as U.S. President. On sites such as Twitter and Facebook, *Doctor Who* fans grapple with their emotions towards the events through references to the show. These references are both nuanced and deeply detailed. The geopolitical landscape associated with these events is altered by these *Doctor Who* references, altering the digital *placefulness* of the event itself. Therefore, *Doctor Who* becomes a vocabulary for talking about and understanding the world. This is an action of fan geographies: the phenomenon of creating, shaping, and changing *place* through a lens of fandom. This is not to be confused with geographies of fandom, which tend to engage with the patterns, distributions, and markers of fandom on the visual landscape, not necessarily the *creation* of place via fandom as a fan geographer would explore. Fandom scholars believe that constructions of fantastical worlds are dialectically related to a fan's social realities (Williams et al 2006), and such a conceptual framework inspires the research outlined in this paper.

This paper will explore the fan geographies of *Doctor Who* as they intersect with Brexit and Donald Trump. Undertaking an in-depth inquiry of Facebook posts, categories of fandom commentary will be highlighted, and a discussion on how they alter the digital geopolitical landscape of these events will take place. The paper begins with a literature review of the intellectual works which inform this research: the intersections of social media and fandom;

popular geopolitics; digital phenomenology; fan geographies; and brief histories of the Brexit decision and Donald Trump's rise to the presidency of the United States. Next, the methodology used to collect data on relevant Facebook posts is described. Finally, the results of the methodological survey of categories of *Doctor Who* social media fan engagement with these geopolitical events are introduced, concluding with a discussion of how the posts have altered the digital geopolitical landscape associated with these two events[18].

Literature Review

Social Media and Fandom

Social media provide an individual with digital means of expressing opinion, adoration, and esteem regarding themselves, others, and entities such as sports teams, movies, and video games. Some scholars suggest that social media have become a more trusted platform for sharing and consuming information than some face-to-face contact (Bertino 2015; Carminati 2014; Loader 2012; Nevzat 2016; Sánchez Laws 2015). Many internet users take to social media to express their opinions on world events, celebrities, media, and various other facets of popular culture. Social media have even become venues through which to consume film and television content, a phenomenon which was previously reserved for cable, movies, and online streaming services such as Netflix and Hulu. It is becoming increasingly common for viewers (particularly millennials) to choose to consume interactive content found on platforms such as YouTube and Twitch over traditional cable television. Producers that make content available through these platforms often allow their subscribers/followers to suggest topics for new content, allowing their fans to play a role in the overall style of the channels themselves. Subscribers heavily

[18] Of course, most fans realized that their contribution to the digital landscapes of these events will likely not change the nature of the events themselves

influence the popularity of the content providers in which they follow, allowing them to craft a media landscape that satisfies their desires and needs for entertainment. As the channels grow, the subscribers become part of a functional community, one that maintains a specific culture, hierarchy, and a set of social relations.

Social media is not, however, reserved only for the consumers of popular culture, but also for the producers of these cultural relics, including figures such as celebrities, filmmakers, and sports athletes, who often use social media for personal and brand marketing. In the same manner through which celebrities, sports figures, and other social/cultural/political actors take to social media to promote their image, their fans, in turn, conversely engage with the created image of the entity, and at times, alter the reputation of the entity. Social media allow members of the public to communicate strong feelings about something, in a manner that may reach many people in a short amount of time (Tindall and Hutchins 2016). In the case of merchandise, brands, and public image, users of social media quickly have the power to alter how something is perceived, and can communicate both positive and negative meanings. As Krishna and Kim (2016) note, however, online communication behavior varies across users:

> "...people show different levels of activeness in their communication behavior. Specifically, hardcore groups of people, or extreme publics, exhibit high levels of either supportive or hostile behavior about an organization, which may either be a strategic opportunity or threat to the organization...extreme publics are more likely to express their opinions about a problem or an issue than others, regardless of their minority position" (pg. 23).

Particularly when concerning neo-nationalist geopolitical occurrences such as Brexit and the Donald Trump presidency, the rhetoric of extreme publics tend to dominate Western social media (and arguably even portions of global social media). Considering the polarizing nature of neo-nationalism, extreme publics take on an increasingly important meaning in today's political climate, particularly as it becomes easier to find like-minded people. Many examples exist of

violent radicalization that takes place through social media[19] because of the ease of creating echo-chambers on one's social media pages, in which the opinions that differ from those of the users can be easily filtered. At this point, it is important to note that fandom is not inherently an indicator of positivity, empathy, or compassion. Individuals can belong to a fandom of terroristic thought, or a fandom of white supremacy. While social media can enhance otherwise peaceful fandoms such as those of *Star Trek*, *Doctor Who*, and Beyoncé,[20] it can also instill a sense of belonging and camaraderie in groups such as ISIS and the Ku Klux Klan. It is through these social relations that the mutual connection between social media and fandom becomes clear: social media work to create and strengthen fandom, while fandom works to shape social media themselves. In the case of this research, *Doctor Who* fandom shapes the social media landscape associated with Brexit and Donald Trump, and social media works to reiterate and maintain this fandom by providing users with the forum to engage with troubling geopolitical events through the comfort of their fandom.

Popular Geopolitics

Popular culture is inherently geopolitical. Understanding geopolitics as the study of politics within spatial context, popular geopolitics can be defined as the "process by which geopolitical ideas are produced and reproduced through popular culture" (Haverluk et al. 2014, 20). Haverluk et al. go on to explain that while geopolitical knowledge largely stems from academics, foreign policy committees, and military "think tanks," popular culture also serves to expand and challenge the hegemonic geopolitical views of a wider audience. Scholars have even

[19] https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/qbxnz5/we-asked-an-expert-how-social-media-can-help-radicalize-terrorists
[20] It must be noted that no fandom is free from injustice. Each fandom will of course have members who discriminate towards others and/or act in a manner that is not peaceful or compassionate. However, there is a marked difference between these fandoms and the fandoms surrounding extremist groups such as ISIS and the KKK.

posited that popular geopolitics be studied through a lens of audience studies in order to capture "audience reception towards media representations of geopolitical affairs" (Woon 2014, 660).

Popular geopolitics is a culmination of the many ideas, tangible items, and experiences that constitute the everyday geographies of an individual, studied through a lens of popular culture. Dittmer (2010) offers a useful definition of popular geopolitics as a branch of political geography in which the daily-lived experiences of geopolitics are the subject matters of interest, citing mainstream propaganda as one of the many examples of the connections between geopolitics and the media. This propaganda manifests itself as "news stories that are purportedly 'slanted' against another government, or a film in which the villain is a particular nationality, or just a song that inspires martial feelings at a critical moment in diplomatic relations" (Dittmer 2010, 14). It must be noted, however, that some scholars contest geopolitics, particularly popular geopolitics, as being true reflections of the everyday experience (Pain and Smith 2008). Political and media-driven forces can produce certain fears and expectations. Popular geopolitics influence who we, as consumers of media, fear and respect, what areas of the world we associate with violence, peace, fear, and safety, and whether we accept or reject societal norms. Simply put, "everyday accounts tend to suggest it is the same old longstanding local fears which are most prominent in people's lives, rather than fears about terrorism or new killer viruses: the new 'global' fears simply do not figure that highly in everyday lives…" (5). Therefore, popular geopolitics are mirrored reflections of what a society *considers* important in their everyday personal geographies, not necessarily the items, people, and landscapes that may actually hold importance. Thus, scale becomes important: to understand geopolitical tensions in certain geographical areas, microscale geo-politics of the everyday must be considered through the broader context of worldwide geopolitics.

Studies in popular geopolitics are concerned with how each *individual* viewer perceives popular culture as it relates to perceptions of local, regional, and global conflict. This is not to say that the global political actors are *not* important in critical popular geopolitical studies, but understanding individual responses to popular media are just as important as the motivations of the global actors (Rhodes II et al. 2017). These individual responses often guide human mobilities. In the context of this research, human mobilities can be understood as online movements through the social media landscape. In this paper, discussions of popular geopolitics will focus on the consumption side of media, where fans co-construct the meaning of popular cultures and the significance of media in daily geographies. It is through this co-construction that the linkage between fandom and geopolitics becomes clear, and serves as a foundational inspiration for this research.

Digital Phenomenology

Philosophically, this research deeply engages with phenomenology and the myriad ways in which individuals interact with the material realities surrounding them--the daily geographies in which they come into contact, and the consciousness and experiences these everyday landscapes entail. Minister (2016) highlights how phenomenology draws attention to a global society where the subjectivity of others is often ignored, dehumanizing lived experiences and allowing individuals to become objects which can be exploited, their daily realities downplayed or ignored. In an increasingly volatile global geopolitical environment where marginalized groups continue to feel erasure, phenomenology reiterates its importance as a methodological framework by exposing one's own acknowledged (or unnoticed) insensitivities to the struggles of others. Phenomenology deeply remains "a meditation on knowledge, a knowledge of knowledge (Lyotard 1991, p. 31), and strives to isolate foundations of the scientific knowledge

that comprises society, the "immediate data of knowledge" (p. 32). As a philosophical study, phenomenology can be traced back to Edmund Husserl in the early 20th century, beginning with his work *Logical Investigations* (1901), which explores "experienced reality exactly as it presents itself to consciousness,[21]" and over the next decade developed his phenomenological philosophy, and disseminated his ideas to students at the University of Freiburg, creating a legacy of scholarly phenomenological endeavor. His intellectual lineage includes scholars Martin Heidegger, Edith Stein, Emmanuel Levinas, Jean-Francois Lyotard, and Michel Henry, to name but a few.

Rehorick and Bentz (2008) succinctly and powerfully summarize phenomenology as a practice: "Phenomenology is many things to many people" (p. xi). Rather than having a specific, singular definition, the boundaries of this philosophical framework are fluid and adaptive, and the fundamental theories of phenomenology are often appropriated for the subject at hand. In the realm of visual phenomenology (of which digital phenomenology would be included), scholars endeavor to understand the position in which visual representation occupies a nexus of the image and the associated subject matter (Crowther 2009, p. 9).

Considering a phenomenology of the digital world requires understanding how users form knowledge through a digital interface, and how such knowledge influences their perception of offline realities. In an article published by *The Atlantic* titled "The Case Against Reality" (2016), Donald Hoffman, a professor of cognitive science, explains how individuals come to perceive reality, particularly as mediated by technology, using the metaphor of the computer desktop interface:

[21] Taken directly from Husserl's Credo entry found here: http://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/ebconcise/husserl_edmund/0

> "Suppose there's a blue rectangular icon on the lower right corner of your computer's desktop — does that mean that the file itself is blue and rectangular and lives in the lower right corner of your computer? Of course not. But those are the only things that can be asserted about anything on the desktop — it has color, position, and shape. Those are the only categories available to you, and yet none of them are true about the file itself or anything in the computer...You could not form a true description of the innards of the computer if your entire view of reality was confined to the desktop...That blue rectangular icon guides my behavior, and it hides a complex reality that I don't need to know... And that's pretty much all of reality, whatever reality might be…I'm claiming that experiences are the real coin of the realm. The experiences of everyday life—my real feeling of a headache, my real taste of chocolate—that really is the ultimate nature of reality."[22]

While Hoffman's statement is metaphorical, it nevertheless highlights the complexities of knowledge creation and how notions of reality come to be perceived. While reality itself is complex (i.e. what really lies behind the blue rectangular icon), and not necessarily representative of what the individual *actually* sees (the color, position, and shape of the icon), true realities are the lived experiences of the individual. These lived experiences form a personal truth—a lens through which daily geographies are framed, analyzed, and acted upon. An overarching goal of this paper is to understand how fans of *Doctor Who* use images, themes, and lore from the plot to engage with geopolitical landscapes associated with Donald Trump and Brexit. In these cases, the true realities of these geopolitical events may not be understood by the fans. Their engagement with the events, and the way they connect them to themes from the show does, however, constitute their own geopolitical realities. Using fundamentals of visual phenomenology presents an excellent opportunity to analyze how the visual experience of consuming *Doctor Who* can imbue a viewer with the framework to process their emotions regarding political events, and thus create their own geopolitical realities. This creates discourse

[22] https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2016/04/the-illusion-of-reality/479559/

about the complex relations that exist between geopolitics and fandom, relations which have not been extensively explored in geographic study.[23]

Fan Geographies

Fan geographies, a little-explored sub-discipline of cultural geography, refer to the study of fandom's influence on how individuals perceive and interact with their daily landscapes. People who are considered advanced fans of some cultural phenomena may see the world's myriad landscapes through a lens of that fandom. For many individuals, particularly those who have felt alienated from a portion of, or even all of, the society in which they belong, following a certain fandom can be a source of comfort and camaraderie. Fandom involvement can provide a sense of safety to bullied persons, offering a community in which individuals can comfortably engage in their own hobbies and interests. Fan geographies attempt to study how such involvement works to create and recreate place and mobilities. They differ from a geography of fandom in that studies of the latter are typically concerned with patterns and distributions of fandom artifacts, while fan geographies, instead, explore the phenomenon of fandom as placemaking in itself. Fandom, including affinity towards certain music, video games, and films, can be a deeply meaningful way for humans to align themselves with other individuals for camaraderie and support (Taylor 2006; Waggoner 2009; Williams, Hendricks, and Winkler 2006). Such alignment can become ingrained within their daily geographies: with whom they interact, where they travel, what they purchase, and where they live. Such engagement lends itself to placemaking: real-life geopolitical landscapes become entrenched in the characteristics of a fandom, altering both the meaning of the fandom and the real-life events themselves,

[23] Of course, the work of Jason Dittmer, who often engages in connections between geopolitics, fandom, and popular culture, is a strong contribution to this area. However, specific geographic study of fans viewing geopolitical events through a lens of their own fandom is limited.

altering the spaces in which these events exist. The nature of the fandom (peaceful, violent, compassionate, empathic, apathetic) narrates the placefulness of these spaces. Members of a fandom may highlight more peaceful aspects of the fan community when engaging with a political event, while other members may choose to connect negative aspects of the fandom with the event.

The power of fandom is significant, and the producers of mediums which create fandom (such as television shows and video games) take note of what their audience prefers, understanding how an established fandom can work toward the success of the medium itself.[24] Ireland (2010) reiterates fandom's significance to media producers: "the presence of the audience as a critical, experience-laden element has an effect on the way stories are told on screen…the cast and crew have to make room for them, and make them feel at home, lest they feel unwanted and turn away" (pg. 11-12). Fans create agency through their own alignment with a fan cultural identification, creating new landscapes and social networks, through activities such as fan fiction: "[fans] appropriate popular texts and re-read them in a fashion that serves different interests, as spectators who transform the experience of watching television into a rich and complex participatory culture" (Berger 2010[25]). Tying fan geographies to *Doctor Who*, hundreds of social media users have chosen to comment on Brexit and the election of Donald Trump through a lens of their Whovian fandom, often citing references to plotlines, characters, and symbols associated with the show. Whether a passing mention or a deep analysis of interconnections between the show and these political events, *Doctor Who* fans show varying

[24] However, this was not the case for the science fiction television show *Firefly*, which boasted a very dedicated fandom, but was cancelled after one season. Despite this, we cannot ignore the power of having a strong audience following in ensuring program longevity (see *Seinfeld* and *Star Trek*, for example).
[25] Quoting Henry Jenkins (1992), *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, London: Routledge, pg. 23.

levels of engagement between their fandom and their perceptions of surrounding political landscapes. This engagement weaves new online (and perhaps even offline) landscapes surrounding Brexit and Donald Trump, landscapes which are entrenched with the values of the *Doctor Who* fandom that the user has chosen to highlight. This transformation is a performance of fan geographies, and inspires the purpose, methodology, and meaning of this research.

The Rise of Brexit and Donald Trump

The Brexit decision and the rise of Donald Trump are considered two events that signify a rise in global neo-nationalism[26] and for millions of world citizens provoked (and continue to provoke) strong, often polarizing emotions. Arguably, it is on social media that this polarization is most apparent: tribalized echo-chambers are relatively easy to construct on one's social media site, as differing and/or angering opinions can be silenced by a simple "unfollow" or "unfriend." Some scholars suggest that such tribal rhetoric has enabled Brexit and Donald Trump's presidency to unfold,[27] altering not only the political climates surrounding these events but also the very social and cultural networks in which people exist, dividing close friends, families, and partners based on their perception of these events. Understanding the rationale of this research in discovering how *Doctor Who* fans speak about and make sense of Brexit and Donald Trump's presidency through the lens of the science fiction show necessitates a brief history of these two events, describing how the very nature of their existences are embedded in emotionally-charged narratives.

[26]https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/articles/2017-03-15/a-look-at-global-neo-nationalism-after-brexit-and-donald-trumps-election

[27]https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/johns-hopkins-trained-psychiatrist-says-brexit-and-donald-trumps-campaign-rhetoric-are-endangering-world-peace-by-encouraging-tribal-thinking-300297228.html

Signifying "British exit from the European Union (EU)", Brexit refers to a nationwide referendum in June 2016 in which 51.9 percent of UK citizens voted for the country to leave the EU[28]. Commentators have called the Brexit vote "a choice between an imaginary past of which too many in this country cannot let go and a future about which all of us are inescapably uncertain[29]". Pro-Brexit voters see EU membership as economically and socially costly to the UK, and forces the country to give up much of its sovereignty. Brexiters also lamented the ease of immigration enabled by EU membership, and many feel that Brexit will allow the country to regain control of its borders.[30] Conversely, citizens of the UK who voted "Remain" see Brexit as racist, backwards, and detrimental to the country, having economic, cultural, and social repercussions. Considering the highly partisan nature of British media[31], tribalism has plagued the country into anti- and pro-Brexit echo chambers, leaving a trail of hostility, negativity, and distrust. While a full British exit from the EU could take until 2019 at the latest,[32] emotions regarding Brexit are raw, polarized, and prominent in both online and offline geopolitical landscapes.

Donald Trump's journey to the role of 45th president of the United States has been, and remains, a contentious, polarizing, emotional, and violent phenomenon. Beginning as an unlikely candidate for the Republican Party nominee for the 2016 election, Trump quickly gained a dedicated (almost cult-like) following across the country, and soon decimated the presidential hopes of other Republican runners. Running on a platform that many critics called racist,

[28] http://www.history.com/news/the-history-behind-brexit
[29]https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jun/20/the-guardian-view-on-the-eu-referendum-keep-connected-and-inclusive-not-angry-and-isolated
[30] http://www.theweek.co.uk/brexit-0
[31] http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/brexit/2017/05/16/acrimonious-and-divisive-the-role-the-media-played-in-brexit/
[32] http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-32810887

xenophobic, and backwards,[33] Trump's anti-immigration, anti-LGBT, and pro-police brutality rhetoric appealed to (and continues to appease his most dedicated followers) many conservative voters across the country. He won a widely unexpected victory over Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton by virtue of his voters' distribution and the nature of the Electoral College, and during his first year of presidency has continued to polarize the country with problematic rhetoric toward white supremacy, race, and xenophobia.[34] Much like Brexit, many anti-Trump citizens feel that Trump, his policies, and his followers are trying to hold on to a social and cultural ideal of the past. His strongest supporters feel that he is helping to take back the country they once (believed) to exist. Dialogue between the pro- and anti-Trump spectrum is often hateful, tense, and volatile, and, like Brexit, is also apparent in both offline and online communities.

Donald Trump's presidency and Brexit both shed light on a country-wide polarization of political and personal values, cultural acceptance, and neo-nationalism[35]. For both the United Kingdom and the United States, vitriolic rhetoric has created offline and online spaces of political tribalism, leaving millions of people struggling with finding methods to protest, cope with, or celebrate their reactions to these geopolitical events. Given the strong emotions that often surround fandom, it becomes highly appropriate to explore if, and how, fans navigate these difficult geopolitical situations through the comfort and camaraderie of a science fiction fandom.

Methodology

The research design of this study was inspired by Stavros et al. (2014), who catalogued posts made by sport fans onto their respective team's social media pages, and categorized the

[33] http://www.cnn.com/2017/03/01/opinions/trump-speech-doesnt-erase-his-past-mcternan-opinion/index.html
[34] http://www.cnn.com/2017/09/14/politics/trump-antifa-charlottesville-tim-scott/index.html
[35] It is nevertheless important to acknowledge that the events are also different in many ways. As highlighted here: https://www.cnbc.com/2016/06/15/trump-and-the-brexit-how-theyre-similar--and-different.html, topics in global economics, such as free trade, and governmental power demonstrate differences between the two events.

posts based on fan motivation types. The fan motivation categories from Stavros et al. were adapted to this research, given the similarities between the passion seen in sports fandom and *Doctor Who* fandom. **Figure 3.1** shows these categories and their subcategories, and examples of each. Some categories were carried over from the referenced study, such as tribalism and encouragement, as they were deemed to be common traits across most types of fandom. Other traits, such as alternative realities and character judgment, were developed specifically for this research. After developing and delineating categories in which to organize social media posts, it was necessary to choose search terms which capture iconic characteristics of the *Doctor Who* fandom.

Most merchandise, symbolic images, and mainstream references to *Doctor Who* include an image or illusion to one or more of the following: Cybermen, Daleks, the TARDIS, and/or the Weeping Angels. In many cases, a visual representation of these symbols harkens to *Doctor Who* without even a mention of the show's name. The Cybermen, antagonists who have been present on the series since 1966, and the Daleks, villains since 1963, remain iconic characters on the show. The TARDIS, which stands for "Time and Relative Dimension in Space," is the Doctor's time travel vessel, and is a standalone representation of the plot of the show. The Weeping Angels, first introduced in the episode "Blink" in 2007, remain a terrifying and unsettling villain in the show[36], most strongly associated with the new generation of *Doctor Who* antagonists in a post-2005 revamp of the show. Holistically, even the newest or most superficial of *Doctor Who* fans recognize and/or use these characters and plot points to reference the show, and therefore heavily inspired the development of search terms which were used to mine data regarding references to Brexit and/or Donald Trump through a lens of the show. Accordingly, the

[36] https://tv.avclub.com/do-doctor-who-s-weeping-angels-still-terrify-1798240967

Category	Definition	Examples
Passion —Tribalism —Encouragement —Praise	Comments showing a marked positive or negative emotional response to Brexit and/or Donald Trump, reflecting love, tribalism, encouragement, and/or praise, intertwined with a *Doctor Who* reference.	"Daleks for Brexit!!!" "Vote Dalek! In this video, we focus on our policy on Brexit!"
Hope —Ambition —Expectation —Anticipation	Posts which reflect hope, speculation, and/or expectation about the future of Brexit and Donald Trump, either relating to how such events will affect *Doctor Who*, or using a reference to the show to express hope.	"Brexit could lead to return of the plague, Adolf Hitler, Daleks and Godzilla." "Doctor Who is becoming more progressive in contrast to a looming brexit..."
Esteem —Venting —Expertise —Sharing	Comments that share personal perspectives, experiences, and frustrations regarding Brexit and/or Donald Trump, using a *Doctor Who* reference as a lens.	"Could Donald Trump actually be having a positive effect on the illegal immigration issue? I'm reminded of The Doctor's end speech in Genesis of the Daleks where he says that out of all the destruction the Daleks cause, there must come some good." "Would be interesting to see the Venn diagram overlap between 'people who say Doctor Who is ruined' and 'People who can only achieve orgasm if they shout 'Brexit means Brexit!'"
Camaraderie —Defense —Belonging —Problem-Solving	Posts harkening to a collective fandom; using references to the fandom to propose solutions to repercussions from Brexit and/or Donald Trump; defending either/or geopolitical events through a lens of the show	"Some people would use a tardis to go back in time to see the dinosaurs. Not me tho, I'd go back to June 8th." "What we need is a political Tardis that can take us back to 22 June last year.."
Comparison —Plotlines —Alternative Realities —Character Judgement —Analogies	Comments comparing figures associated with Brexit such as Theresa May and Boris Johnson, and Donald Trump, with aliens in *Doctor Who*, and/or using these geopolitical events to create new imaginative plotlines in the show, and/or taking portions of *Doctor Who* canon to imagine a different reality surrounding these events.	"Donald Trump on watching an episode of Doctor Who: 'Theres been a lot of violence and evil from Davros and the Daleks... Theres been a lot of evil and violence on all sides...on all sides. Extremist Timelords and Tardises pushing their left wing agenda... humans refusing to submit to their Dalek overlords...Terrible extremism...'" "I just came to the realisation that the Daleks are just the Donald Trumps of Doctor Who."

Figure 3.1 Facebook Fan Motivation Categories and Definitions

following ten search terms were developed for usage in the social media search: (1) Cybermen Donald Trump, (2) Cybermen Brexit, (3) Daleks Donald Trump, (4) Daleks Brexit, (5) TARDIS Donald Trump, (6) TARDIS Brexit, (7) Weeping Angels Donald Trump, (8) Weeping Angels Brexit, (9) Doctor Who Donald Trump, and (10) Doctor Who Brexit. Upon development of the search terms, it was necessary to choose a social media platform in which to undertake the data mining.

While *Doctor Who* fans engage with geopolitics on multiple platforms, the level of engagement and detail needed to analyze *how* fans see and interpret Brexit and Donald Trump through their fandom was only found through Facebook. The level of engagement possible through Facebook, currently, exceeds that of other social media platforms:

> "Facebook invites its users to select an emoji icon (emoticon) to indicate how they are feeling as they update their 'status'…status messages include pictures, links to other people's posts, news reports, and just about anything that can be communicated via the web…it serves as a personalized gossip column and arguably a means of communicating feelings and information among networks of friends" (Coyne 2016, pg. 1).

Of course, platforms other than Facebook allow deep levels of engagement, but ultimately are limited by character limits (such as the current 240-character limit in Twitter) and lack of URL functionality (such as on Instagram, where workable links are unable to be placed in posts). Further, exploratory research using Instagram and Twitter revealed that posts connecting *Doctor Who* with Brexit and/or Donald Trump either lacked enough detail for meaningful analysis, or only employed hashtags using the terms, providing no text in which to analyze. Initial searches on Facebook using the aforementioned search terms developed revealed richer, more detailed engagement and, therefore, was the site chosen to conduct the data analysis for the research in its entirety. Each search term was entered into the search field on Facebook, and all publicly available posts containing the words were catalogued into a database. To ensure data quality,

each post was visually analyzed for relevance to *Doctor Who*, Brexit, and/or Donald Trump, and discarded if there were no applicable references. No identifying information were retained with the data, and the data were visualized in Tableau software.

Results

The goal of this research was to determine if, and how, fans of *Doctor Who* use social media to discuss Brexit and/or Donald Trump through a lens of their fandom. The results obtained effectively begin to answer this question. The initial data mining using the search terms yielded a total of 704 posts. After visually analyzing each post for relevance and quality, 197 posts were determined to not be referencing the show and/or Brexit and/or Donald Trump and were removed from the analysis. This left a total of 507 posts across all the search terms which were catalogued and divided into categories of meaning. Each search term returned at least one post connecting elements of *Doctor Who* and Brexit/Donald Trump. The date range for posts was December 2015-October 2017. The search term which yielded the most posts was Doctor Who Brexit, with a total of 121 posts. Conversely, the search term which yielded the least posts was Weeping Angels Brexit, with 1 post. **Figure 3.2** shows the distribution of the 507 posts across all search terms. **Figure 3.3** highlights the patterns and distributions found in the data; only umbrella categories and subcategories from the aforementioned Figure 3.1 which returned data are included in the visualization. In total, the highest percentage of posts fell into two categories: Comparison → Character Judgment (Daleks Brexit with 39 and Daleks Donald Trump with 36) and Comparison → Alternative Realities (TARDIS Donald Trump with 34 and Daleks Donald Trump with 27). Other categories with high numbers of posts were Comparison → Plotlines (Doctor Who Brexit with 24), Esteem → Venting (Doctor Who Brexit with 27), and Camaraderie → Problem Solving (TARDIS Donald Trump with 22).

Search Term	
Cybermen Brexit	12
Cybermen Donald Trump	26
Daleks Brexit	72
Daleks Donald Trump	103
Doctor Who Brexit	121
Doctor Who Donald Trump	46
TARDIS Brexit	34
TARDIS Donald Trump	86
Weeping Angels Brexit	1
Weeping Angels Donald T..	6

Sum of Number of Records broken down by Search Term.

Figure 3.2 Number of Posts per Search Term

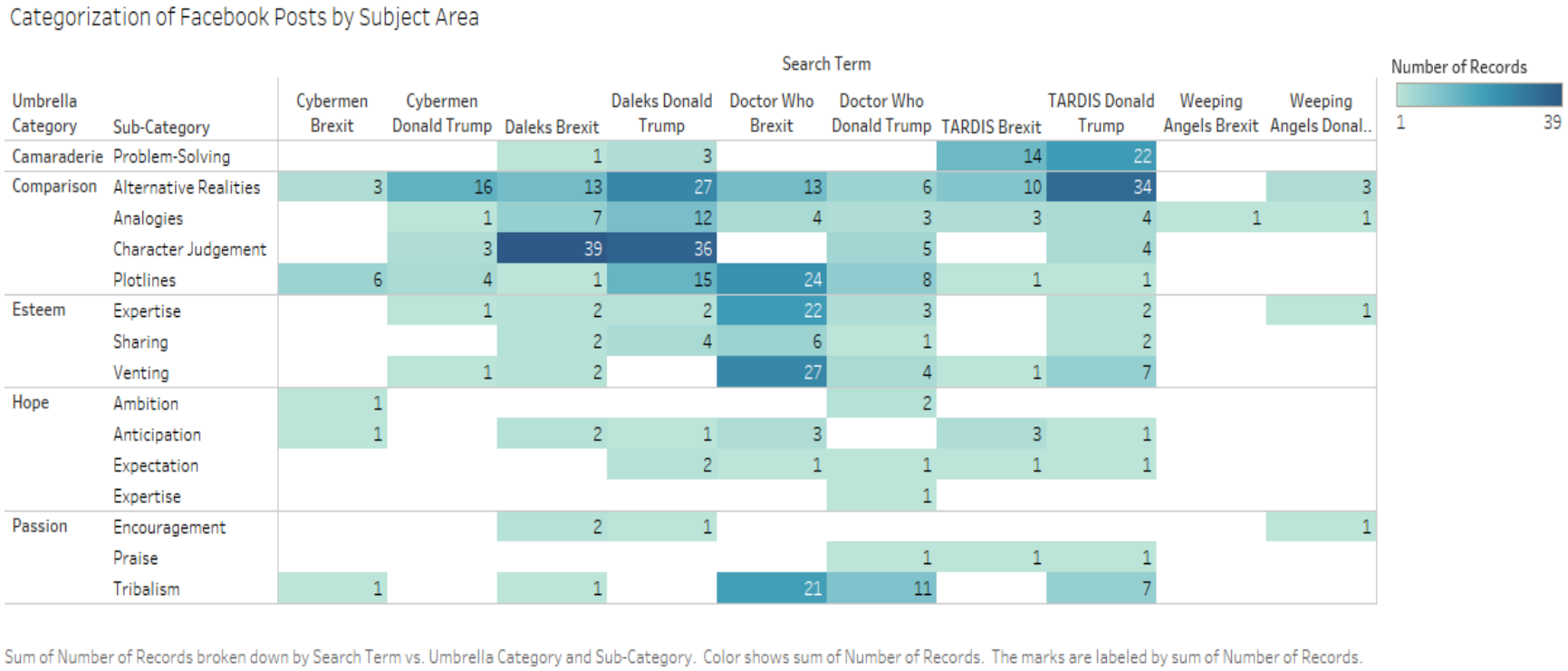

Figure 3.3 Categorization of Facebook Posts by Subject Area

Discussion

The results of the analysis provided insight into the interactions between current geopolitical events and fandom, using online engagement between *Doctor Who* fandom and Brexit, and *Doctor Who* fandom and Donald Trump as case studies. These insights lend weight to the emergence of fan geographies as a previously unexplored venture in the geographic discipline. As *Doctor Who* fans grapple with the results of Brexit and Donald Trump's election on the cultural landscape, they compare many aspects of the two events to *Doctor Who*. They thus attempt to create an altered online geopolitical landscape associated with these two events. This is a performance of fan geographies: using fandom to bring order to and influence interpretations of real geopolitical, cultural, and social geographies.

A high proportion of users compared the character of Donald Trump and Brexit figures (such as Theresa May and Boris Johnson) to the character of Daleks, villains which are devoid of all emotions but hate. Wolfe and Wika (2010) note that oftentimes the scariest science fiction villains are those that most resemble humans; while the Daleks do not visually resemble humans, such comparisons on social media may support this fear of humans who are villains and/or monsters in disguise, those which seem familiar to the eye. Further, many users constructed alternative realities in which the TARDIS was used to stop the rise of Brexit and Donald Trump, merging the purpose of the TARDIS in *Doctor Who* to fit the modern geopolitical realities surrounding the user. Many individuals used references to technology from the show to seek problem-solving strategies to remedy these geopolitical circumstances, continuing a legacy in which science fiction technologies are often adapted for creating human happiness (see Stanislaw Lem's series *The Cyberiad*[37]*).* Others applied Brexit logic to the *Doctor Who* universe,

[37] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Cyberiad

speculating how the Doctor's travels would be inhibited by the harsher immigration policies that are associated with Brexit ("The Doctor cannot go back to Gallifrey because he is stuck at customs!"). It is clear, even from these initial Facebook posts, that these *Doctor Who* fans have constructed new geopolitical landscapes in which the show, Brexit, and Donald Trump are intricately connected. The data demonstrate a narrative of fan geographies, as hundreds of fans created geopolitical discourse that guides not only their own understandings of the political geographies in which they live, but also allows them to alter the placefulness of these events themselves by blurring the lines between fantasy and reality.

Perhaps one of the most striking observations of the research is that none of the posts collected were pro-Brexit or pro-Donald Trump. The data, as collected, represent an echo-chamber of anti-Brexit and anti-Donald Trump rhetoric. This is not to say, however, that positive sentiment toward these two topics does not exist in the *Doctor Who* fandom.[38] Several factors may account for this pattern in the data: first, many episodic themes in the show are antithetical to the moral and ethical foundations of Brexit and Donald Trump. While the show's distant past episodes have several problematic instances of othering and racism,[39] newer episodes since the 2005 reboot have consistently been more progressive, compassionate towards the Other, and empathic. Economic motivations aside, many aspects of Brexit and Trump's presidency are rooted in xenophobia and Othering, which are two concepts that are not heavily reflected in *Doctor Who*. Second, it can be theorized that posts which are pro-Brexit and/or pro-Donald Trump were not publicly available at the time of data collection. Third, demographics of *Doctor Who* viewership show that a strong proportion of fans are highly educated,[40] which, loosely,

[38] https://www.vice.com/en_au/article/vvxm5m/people-who-love-dr-who-should-love-their-fellow-man-right
[39] http://www.denofgeek.com/tv/doctor-who/27814/doctor-whos-top-50-controversies
[40] https://graphicpolicy.com/2013/09/16/facebook-fandom-spotlight-doctor-who-fans-50-women/

could explain increased liberality among fans particularly concerning Donald Trump and Brexit[41] Finally, a bold hypothesis can be posited that recent episodes of *Doctor Who,* as well as media statements by the writers and actors, alienated their pro-Brexit and pro-Trump fanbase. Many actors from the show made their disdain clear after the Brexit vote,[42] and episodes from the latest season have included jabs at Donald Trump, such as "The Doctor Falls" (Season 10, Episode 12) in which the Doctor states, "*Like sewage, smartphones, and Donald Trump, some things are just inevitable."* This reiterates the importance of understanding that fandom is dynamic, and geopolitical happenings and political landscapes can affect the level of comfort and camaraderie that one feels within their fandom. In this case, fans may have felt betrayed by the show's political stance and chose to lessen, or end, their involvement with the fandom.

Phenomenologically, the data advance an understanding of how knowledge of geopolitical events are created and influenced within fandom, using *Doctor Who* as a case study. Particularly within posts which were categorized as Comparison → Alternative Realities, Comparison → Plotlines, and Comparison → Character Judgment, fans used their own knowledge of the geopolitical event *and* the show to draw comparisons, theorize solutions, and provide explanations for their surrounding political landscapes. In these cases, *Doctor Who* gave users the tools to attempt an understanding of Brexit and Donald Trump, both reinforcing their personal realities and knowledges of not only these events, but also the *Doctor Who* fandom itself. Through these blurry borders between fantasy and reality lie insight into how important of a role fandom plays within knowledge creation and perceptions of reality. Waskul (2006), through a lens of tabletop role-playing games, discusses these eroded boundaries:

[41] https://www.npr.org/2016/04/30/475794063/why-are-highly-educated-americans-getting-more-liberal
[42]http://www.techtimes.com/articles/166906/20160624/doctor-who-actors-and-writers-not-happy-about-brexit-result. htm

> "…the presumably distinct categories of fantasy/persona, imagination/player, and reality/person can be shown as a subtle continuum of finely graded experience. More precisely, all selves and social reality can be understood as emergent from the interstices of these interrelated provinces of meaning…human beings do not experience reality directly; reality is fashioned and mediated by symbols, language, social structure, and situated variables of social interaction. Consequently, realms of fantasy, imagination, and reality are notoriously porous; experience, knowledge, and understanding routinely slips from one to another" (pg. 33-34).

The realities of Brexit and Donald Trump are constructed by the individual, and such realities are mediated through the lived experiences of said individual. When fandom plays a large role in an individual's daily geographies, it is more than reasonable to suggest that their perceived realities will be heavily influenced by, and expressed through, a lens of the fandom. As shown in this research, *Doctor Who* fans, whether making a one-off reference to Donald Trump being similar to a Dalek or constructing a detailed alternate reality where the TARDIS is used to prevent Brexit from occurring, their perceptions of these geopolitical events is altered by their involvement in the *Doctor Who* fandom.

Conclusions, Limitations, and Future Research

Even a cursory glance through social media outlets such as Facebook, Twitter, and Reddit highlight an interesting phenomenon: users are forming, shaping, and disseminating their geopolitical ideologies often through lenses of their own media affinities[43]. Fandom can provide a source of emotional comfort, escapism, and/or a lens to which to express excitement or disdain. This paper highlighted social media posts on Facebook which blended references to Brexit and Donald Trump with themes from *Doctor Who.* In the case of Brexit and Donald Trump's election and inauguration, many fans used social media (and their own fandom) to express their negative

[43] https://air.uniud.it/retrieve/handle/11390/1099741/112585/SInergie-Proceeding-UDINE-2016-III%20part.pdf

emotions towards these geopolitical events. While some references were fleeting and brief, such as a comparison between Donald Trump and an alien overlord, others were detailed, deep discussions that signified a strong knowledge of both the geopolitical event and the show itself. These fans have no doubt shaped the placefulness of the online geopolitical landscape associated with these events. However, it must be acknowledged that this research does not capture whether such references exist only in the user's online spaces, or if such connections between fantasy and reality also characterize their offline engagement with such events. This highlights an opportunity for further research which would not only look at other social media sites (Instagram, Twitter, Reddit) but also characterize how fandom of the show also affects offline geopolitical engagement.

It must also be noted that this research design was limited to publicly-available posts; within the stricter privacy-settings of *Doctor Who* fans who use social media may exist more detailed, emotional, and nuanced analyses of Brexit and Donald Trump. The posts included in this research were either those that users felt comfortable in sharing in an uninhibited manner to the online community, or were made public in error. In either case, future research designs should include reaching out to online fans (through specific *Doctor Who* fan pages) and seeking voluntary participation to understand how individuals use the show to grapple with geopolitical occurrences. In this case, users may be more likely to share their personal social media posts. Future iterations of this research should also be expanded to assess engagement with other geopolitical events and figures (such as ISIS, Vladimir Putin, and Kenya's recent presidential election) both in the *Doctor Who* fandom and in other science-fiction and non-science-fiction fandoms, exploring how people are using different media affinities to engage with their geopolitical surroundings. This could be accomplished through a similar methodology in which

publicly-available data on social media outlets is mined to provide a deep analysis of what the current online geopolitical landscape of selected countries looks like, and how geopolitical messages are transferred across platforms.

Despite only using public posts from a single social media platform, this research has detailed a powerful phenomenon in which fandom intricately intersects with geopolitical understandings and awareness, and sets the stage for increased academic attention towards the power of fan geographies, a lens through which geographers can understand how mobilities, place, culture, and knowledge are influenced by fandom.

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CONCLUSION

This dissertation has provided a foundational glimpse into the emotional-cultural geographies of the *Doctor Who* franchise and its associated fandom. The first chapter addressed the first research question proposed ("To what extent do the plotlines and themes in *Doctor Who* encourage viewers to consider place as more peaceful and compassionate? What do these places look like?") by outlining an epistemology for exploring themes of empathy and placemaking through the plotlines of the show, and highlighting several episodes in which these themes are expressed through the writing and dialogue. Although such an epistemology has yet to be tested in a classroom environment, the chapter is a crucial framework for such an experiment. Media can play a significant role in guiding human emotions, actions, and ideologies, which in turn affect not only how they think, but also their mobility. Applying cosmopolitanism to this idea, then, highlights how understanding how an individual constructs their personal geographies contributes to the formation of larger groups and social networks operating under a certain philosophy. The second chapter presented a study in which focus group methodology was used to discover how *Doctor Who* fandom affects a viewer's engagement with the show, showing a specific episode of the show to three separate groups exhibiting different levels of fandom. This methodology allowed me to provide insight into the second overarching goal of the research ("What role does empathy play in the fandom created among the *Doctor Who* franchise?"). Members of the non-viewers (NV) group overall showed the most increase in empathy after watching the episode, which made sense given a first-time viewing of an episode with what is widely-considered an emotional plotline. Those who considered themselves Whovians (the W group) expressed their strong personal connections to the show, and its representations of mental illness, in the focus groups, providing the most rich and thoughtful discussions of all three groups. Members of the Dislikers (D) group did show marginal levels of increased empathy after

viewing the episode, but expressed during the discussion that many frustrating aspects of the show kept them from truly connecting with the material. Of course, it remains to be seen whether any empathy, landscape awareness, or any other emotions felt after viewing the episode is fleeting or long-lasting, but nevertheless provides interesting insight on intersections between fandom and empathy. Finally, the third chapter explored interconnections between fandom and geopolitical understandings, categorizing Facebook posts which connected *Doctor Who* references with the decision on allowing the United Kingdom to leave the European Union (i.e. Brexit) and the events leading up to the election and inauguration of Donald Trump as the 45th president of the United States. This chapter allowed me to address the third and final overarching research goal ("How do *Doctor Who* fans use social media to engage with geopolitical figures and occurrences through a lens of their fandom?"). Hundreds of fans took to social media in the months following the Brexit vote and Donald Trump's election/inauguration to grapple with their confusion, frustration, and anxiety concerning the events. Most individuals compared the character traits of Theresa May and Donald Trump to Daleks, creatures considered to be the most evil of the *Doctor Who* universe, and used references to the time-travel capabilities of the TARDIS to express a desire to stop the rise of Brexit and Trump. The chapter is, overall, a strong testament to the power of fandom in allowing an individual to creatively make sense of their geopolitical surroundings. Each chapter is a stand-alone representation of *Doctor Who*'s relevance as a venue through which to explore emotional geographies; Holistically, the three chapters narrate an emotional geography of the show, from theoretical framework, to individual and group-level media consumption, to broader dialogue on fandom and geopolitics. In total, the dissertation sheds intellectual light on the three overarching goals of the research and has exerted

the importance of engaging with science fiction as a lens through which to study cultural and emotional geographies.

It is certain that *Doctor Who* will continue to shift in its overall style and intent, as (of the time of this dissertation's completion) we will soon see the Doctor played by a female actress. While an exciting time for fans of the show who have grown tired of a white male Doctor, such a change has highlighted areas of tension within the fandom, suggesting a fractured, rather than united, Whovian population. Hundreds of (mostly male) Whovians took to social media to protest a female Doctor, with reasons ranging from: tradition ("The Doctor has always been a male!"); comfort zone dissolution ("I don't know how I could get used to seeing a woman play this role") to more blatant displays of sexism and conservatism ("This is PC culture bullshit. A woman is not cut out to be the Doctor, and should be left as the companion. I'm never watching this show again!"). With this caveat, it is of extreme importance to note that this dissertation reflects only portions of the fandom, as made accessible through literary analysis, focus groups, and social media research. Also, it is necessary to again refer to Hofstede's (1984) cultural dimensions for understanding national culture, and recognize that interpretations of the show's casting choices may be explained, at least in part, by a person's nationality. While the United States and the United Kingdom fare similarly across all the cultural dimensions (Power Distance, Individualism, Masculinity, Uncertainty Avoidance, Long Term Orientation, and Indulgence), fans from countries who more strongly value masculinity (such as Japan, Italy, and Mexico) may have a more difficult time coming to terms with a female Doctor. Many fans have strongly denounced sexist remarks aimed towards Jodie Whittaker's Doctor, but recognizing the influence of socially-reproduced values of masculinity (and, in contrast, femininity) for some international viewers may allow for more constructive conversations within the fandom. Being a multifaceted

show open to multiple interpretations, *Doctor Who* has the capacity to appeal to many audiences in different countries with different cultural organization and social structures, thus speaking to its growing global popularity. Such a collection of cultures, genders, nationalities, and worldviews inevitably leads to rifts within the fandom, but bridging difficult conversations about the fandom through a lens of empathy is a powerful tool.

The remainder of this concluding chapter will discuss *Doctor Who*'s role in geography, highlight the broader impacts of the research on the geographic discipline, provide final commentary on the intellectual merit of the research, and describe further avenues of study that have been uncovered by the work put forth in this dissertation.

Doctor Who's **Role in Geography**

Geographers of all sub-disciplinary foci would be well-advised to welcome studies of science fiction into the inner-circle of accepted geographic study. Dated notions of what topics constitute geography serve to downplay the significant intellectual disciplinary contributions that a geographic analysis of science fiction, and in this case *Doctor Who*, can bring to the academic table. This dissertation reiterates the geographic significance of not only science fiction, but also the geographies of television and fandom as influencers of place and imagination. It advances connections between literature in science fiction, fandom, phenomenology, popular geopolitics, and geography that have not previously been made in geographic scholarly endeavor, putting forth the importance that fandom and the alternative realities of science fiction play in shaping the personal geographies, geopolitical understandings, and empathic engagement of science fiction viewers. Further, the dissertation has explicitly provided evidence of the differences between fandom and empathic engagement with *Doctor Who*, and highlighted the deep connections between fandom and popular geopolitics as displayed on social media. Such

connections are far from theoretical: hundreds of fans have visibly drawn parallels between *Doctor Who*, Brexit, and Donald Trump through Facebook posts, adding another layer of interpretation to the online landscapes associated with those geopolitical events. In these cases, both fandom *and* geopolitics affected the movements of fans. Both fandom of *Doctor Who*, and awareness of Brexit and Donald Trump, emboldened fans to physically post online about their feelings concerning the events, commenting on the intimacy between fandom and mobility. This sets an agenda for science fiction-based research in geography: this genre implores viewers to consider their daily landscapes, understanding what historical forces led to their current placefulness, and how, if unchanged, current social hegemonies will construct future landscapes. As geographers (particularly human geographers) stand at an advantageous position to construct a future of less exploitative landscapes, science fiction can help us envision how those landscapes look, and which social structures should be challenged and deconstructed in order to facilitate a conducive environment for those landscapes.

Doctor Who is an inherently geographical show: the Doctor travels across time and space, encountering new and familiar landscapes, witnessing myriad aspects of the physical environment, and interacting with a diverse population. While this dissertation has concentrated on the human-cultural geography themes of the show, geographers from other areas of the study within the discipline could gain from similar media and science fiction based studies. For example, if a geographer wished to study themes of climate change and environmental degradation in *Doctor Who*, several episodes offer visual, dialogic, and thematic ways in which to analyze their physical phenomena (see "Gridlock," Season 3, Episode 3 and "In the Forest of the Night," Season 8, Episode 10). While I have devoted this dissertation to themes of empathy,

geopolitics, and fandom within the show, geographers would be wise to continue to employ a *Doctor Who* epistemology within the discipline.

Intellectual Merit

I do not intend in this dissertation to absolve *Doctor Who* from its transgressions in social awareness (transgressions that are apparent at the very least from a primarily Western perspective). For example, several episodes from classic *Doctor Who* have themes which display racialized stereotypes, discriminating against and othering groups of people (such as the sixth serial of the 14th season, titled "The Talons of Weng-Chiang," which has often been cited as showing racist attitudes towards Chinese characters)[44]. Further, members of the *Doctor Who* fandom have questioned the hypocrisy of the Doctor's consumption of animal products while he concurrently preaches compassion for living beings (explored by authors Stewart and Cole in a recent article in *The Conversation*[45]). Finally, while *Doctor Who* critically engages with several forms of social injustice, the show itself speaks little towards race and has featured a mostly-white cast since its inception (over 85% white characters since the show's rebirth in 2005[46]). To suggest that the show can completely eradicate any discriminatory characteristics amongst its viewers would be grossly inaccurate and misleading. However, despite these important and valid criticisms, it would be unwise to completely dismiss the show's promise as a platform for allowing fans to engage with their geopolitical surroundings, and perhaps even influence empathy towards certain topics. While remaining aware of these criticisms, it is also important to acknowledge many of the show's episodes and storylines which engage deeply with historical

[44] This is explored heavily in the book *Doctor Who and Race*, edited by Orthia (2013).
[45] https://theconversation.com/doctor-who-takes-an-ethical-stance-towards-alien-life-so-why-isnt-he-vegan-75786
[46] http://jonfwilkins.com/2014/11/the-weird-racism-of-doctor-who/

and current social, cultural, and economic struggles, providing a venue for introducing transformative and healing discourse surrounding these topics.

The theoretical and methodological contributions of this dissertation are significant: collectively, the three chapters have used literature in psychology, sociology, communications, and media studies to bolster the research, resulting in an interdisciplinary scholarly contribution in cultural geography. The focus group and social media data mining techniques provide quantitative measure to bolster the theoretical framework outlined in the first chapter, which is often rare for research within cultural geography. It is my hope that this research will inspire other primarily qualitative cultural geographers to consider the merit in using traditionally quantitative methods of Likert Scale analysis and data mining to enhance the findings and applicability of their research.

A Science Fiction-Geography Epistemology

While *Doctor Who* is the focus of this dissertation, the broader message conveyed by these papers is the importance of understanding how visual and social media, fandom, and geopolitics can influence ideology, mobility, and personal geographies. Science fiction and geography are inherently linked; both explore past, current, and theoretical future landscapes. Science fiction boasts an excellent ability to portray the trajectory in which humanity may be headed if the legacies of environmental degradation, injustices of human rights, and warfare continue. Many science fiction works are rooted in ideas that humanity has effectively "worn out" their welcome on planet Earth, and their colonization of other planets and moons will likely have less-than-desirable consequences:

> "We might think of science fiction as a literature in love with the future. For it is alone in possessing this dimension, alone in seeking to imagine, as things to come, realms that, in

> a maximum way, seem to respond to our sense of wonder. And yet, if we heed some of SF's most famous texts, and increasing numbers of its commentators, the very opposite is true. Seen in this light, SF's future imaginations are dominated instead by terror. And this terror is tauntology, closure: for if SF lets us see the future, it is to enable us to experience dread, thus to be warned away from an activity which, if pursued, leads us inexorably from bad to worse" (Slusser 1987, pg. 3).

Science fiction attempts to guide humanity toward a better, more sustainable future; or, in a more nihilistic fashion, prepare humanity for their inevitable future, brought on by the modes of production[47] used to currently sustain human life. In many ways, geographic study showcases many of these same characteristics. Geographic theory and research explores humanity's long, and in many ways problematic, relationship with the planet. Human geographers critically engage with cultural landscapes, social structures, and political economies of the world, while physical geographers study the environmental and ecological impacts of overpopulation, climate change, and environmental destruction. Conducting research in which science fiction and geography are linked (a science fiction epistemology) can provide the academic community with rich commentary on the cultural, social, economic, and physical landscapes with which humans have interacted, and the landscapes that will likely exist in the future of humanity.

Future Research

The papers I have presented in this dissertation merely provide the foundation for a comprehensive survey of the geographies of the *Doctor Who* franchise. There exist several possibilities for not only further human geography analysis of the show, but also opportunities

[47] This would be characterized by the environmental destruction caused by animal agriculture and meat consumption, drilling, and extractive industries, to name a few.

for physical and applied geographers to engage with the writing, plotlines, and landscapes of the show. Several episodes and story arcs also highlight areas for interdisciplinary research. For example, the show offers numerous representations of human and physical landscapes, which for viewers can often supplement or replace their own memories and experiences associated with these landscapes. Episodes featuring representations, whether factual or fabricated, of real human and physical landscapes often serve to alter the viewer's perceptions, memories, and place-attachments associated with these landscapes. Because the Doctor often battles amidst the backdrop of real historical landscapes and events, including the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius at Pompeii, the disappearance of Agatha Christie in the late 1920s, and a Hooverville during the Great Depression, it provides material for historians, anthropologists, communications scholars with which to engage. It is my hope that this dissertation will inspire scholars to turn an eye towards *Doctor Who* as a vessel for geographic, historic, and scientific analysis.

A further topic of research stemming from the foundational analyses in this dissertation is a comparison of how *Doctor Who* fandom varies depending on one's affinity (or lack of affinity) for certain Doctors. In the focus groups, several participants mentioned their dislike of Matt Smith's portrayal of the Doctor, harkening to other Doctors (and even companions) that they felt simply "did a better job of" being the Doctor. For a scholar fascinated by *Doctor Who* fandom, this of course leads to a new research question to explore: are fan responses to representations of empathy, popular geopolitics, and landscapes in the show affected by which Doctor is appearing in the episode? Anecdotal experiences with other members in *Doctor Who* fandom has shown that fans tend to either love a Doctor, or loathe a Doctor, eliciting strong emotions on either side of the spectrum. In continuing to study the many nuances of fandom, it would be useful to undertake a study of Doctor-specific fan reactions to geographic themes in the show.

This dissertation, intellectually and professionally, has prepared me to continue to pursue research in fandom, cultural geography, and media. Completing this dissertation has allowed me to isolate three broad areas of future research interest: (1) fandom as camaraderie and behavioral influence, (2) media-influenced shaping of geopolitical understandings and opinions, and (3) live-streaming, YouTube, and fan-interactive media. For my first and second research objectives, I would like to embark on a continuation of my dissertation research in which I explore the effects of fandom on human behavior. I intend to create discourse which sheds light on the following questions: How do messages of safety circulate within fandom? How do messages of hate or intolerance circulate within fandom, particularly towards individuals and groups, across geographical and geopolitical boundaries. This dissertation has prepared me for isolating a fandom, and undertaking mixed-methods research that uncovers themes of empathy, critical geopolitics, and camaraderie within the social network of fans. During my career, I would like to advance an understanding of fan geographies, and this research has served as the first geographic scholarly work to introduce this new area of study. Certainly, such a survey such as that which has been undertaken in this dissertation could (and should) be applied to other science fiction programs, such as *Torchwood*, *Star Trek*, and *Red Dwarf*, to name a few, given the genre's ability to make prophetic and relevant social commentary.

Finally, it must be acknowledged that an analysis of *Doctor Who* as a medium through which to explore empathy, geopolitics, and fandom is a product of privilege and access. While the results of the literary analysis, focus groups described in the second chapter, and social media analysis lend evidence to the theory that the show may invoke viewers to consider empathy and compassion as they relate to *place*, as well as provide fans a platform through which to engage

with geopolitics, it would be insensitive and presumptive to suggest that the show could have widespread impact on creating a more compassionate, geopolitically-engaged society.

Works Cited

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VITA

Hannah C. Gunderman was raised in a vagabond family and moved several times throughout her childhood and early adulthood. However, she considers her hometown to be in the Northwoods of Presque Isle, Maine, where she grew up under the heavy cultural influence of eastern Canada. She moved to Pinedale, Wyoming in 2004 and attended Pinedale High School, an hour south of Grand Teton National Park and Yellowstone National Park. It was here in Wyoming that she developed a love for not only the outdoors, but also a thriving curiosity for understanding cultural processes and interaction.

She attended the University of Wyoming in the fall of 2008 and initially enrolled in a Wildlife and Fisheries Biology and Management program, until she realized her interest in geography. She promptly switched to the geography major in 2009 and graduated with a B.S. in Geography/Natural Resource Management in 2011. She continued to pursue study at UW and received an M.A. in Geography/Natural Resource Management in 2014, with a focus on the Grateful Dead's memorialization on the physical landscape of the U.S through business names.

Hannah began the PhD program in Geography at UT-Knoxville in the fall of 2014 under the study of Dr. Derek Alderman. She plans to pursue a career in the areas of qualitative research, ethnography, mapping of human behavior, and fandom/gaming.