Maisie Williams is fighting for change...

She's in *Game of Thrones*, *Doctor Who* and has a million Twitter followers. At just 18, Maisie Williams is fighting for change...

Williams isn't a woman who is going to play a character that is only there to benefit a male lead.

"I hope to never have to play a character that is only there to benefit a male lead."

Williams isn't outspoken; she says things, and she believes that, far from being lazy, the young generation are very passionate, it's just that there are one million people on Twitter who are describing Williams as "outspoken", a patronising word, like calling a child "precocious". Williams isn't outspoken; she says things, and there are one million people on Twitter who are willing to listen.

Whether they're following her because they're interested in her opinions or are just fans of *Game of Thrones* is irrelevant. "Either way I've been given a voice and I want to try and do something with it. The young generation are so passionate, it's just that not very many of us are given a voice, and every time we are we're shut down by people who think we don't know anything."

She believes that, far from being lazy, the reason young people are disconnected from politics is because they're under so much pressure to keep up the momentum of their career, but sitting across from her, you can believe it. People keep describing Williams as "outspoken", a patronising word, like calling a child "precocious".

So badly," she says, "but going further into this career I realised there are a lot of really bad characters, that it's not common to come across women who aren't just the girlfriend."

It's a discussion that has extended to the set of *Doctor Who*, with Williams seeking out departing companion Jenna Coleman for advice. At the age of 29, Coleman is an old hand in the business.

"Me and Jenna were talking about it," Williams explains. "When you get a script they always include a sentence or two about the character, something like 'Jason: 36, strong, built, quick, witty' and a description of his personality."

"Then there's his girlfriend - 'Sarah: hot, blonde.' And that's it! How beautiful but is it in a cute way? That's your character!"

Williams is incredulous.

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"A vocal minority are saying about her right now. It's a horror show."

In not being silenced, Williams is every bit as brave as the characters she plays, like Harry Potter star Emma Watson before her. She has spoken about getting bullied at school, and starred in Channel 4's chilling Cyberbully in January. Yet despite knowing the risks, Williams clearly considers it her duty to keep speaking.

"No one taught me how to be a famous person! It's so scary, but it's what you have to do. I've stopped reading what people think now. It's easy for people to have an opinion online when they don't realise that there's actually Maisie Williams who's reading that and crying."

From one-dimensional roles to sexless role models, Williams believes people get angry the moment women stop conforming to type. She talks about how Miley Cyrus was pilloried for her sexy dancing, because it goes against her previous, Disney-friendly character, Hannah Montana. Cyrus, according to Williams, is simply trying to work out who she wants to be.

"I'm still trying to be a good role model. I do influence a lot of people."

But who does Williams want to be? "I'm still trying to be a good role model, because whether I like it or not I do influence a lot of people. But you only get 70 or 80 years on this world. Young people in this industry... we're doing all right! It's good to make mistakes; that's what this time is for. It's a bit different to when you accidentally text your mum instead of your boyfriend, but it's still exactly what all my friends are going through."

Watching her friends receive their exam results and go off to uni ("There is always a little lump in my throat. It's such an iconic day that they'll remember for ever, and I don't have that") has her considering her own future. Some would like that to be as the Doctor's new companion. Will she impress in her current stint on the show?

"I've never really had a plan, and it's worked out all right so far. At the moment I'm enjoying this industry and I don't want to stop any time soon. But I know I want to dance at some point, because that's what I've always wanted to do. Who knows what I'll be doing in 20 years... or five years? What if I've gone to university and I'm eating all my words?"

"I just want to be happy. That's honestly what I want to do."

Ah, youth. Remember that?

JONATHAN HOLMES

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WHO WILL BE THE NEW COMPANION?

After three years as plucky companion Clara Oswald, Jenna Coleman will leave Doctor Who later this season. So who will replace her? Here are five contenders...

1. **MAISIE WILLIAMS**
   - Given her breakout role as Arya Stark in Game of Thrones, Williams is one of Doctor Who's most hyped guest stars. But could her appearance lead to a full-time role? It's a long shot. Williams is a big name - one whose career is just beginning. And Doctor Who is a huge time commitment when Hollywood is calling.

2. **ZAWE ASHTON**
   - If Channel 4's sitcom Fresh Meat is anything to go by, Ashton is the future of British drama - a talent who improves everything she's in. That includes Doctor Who, which she appeared in last year as Journey Blue, a soldier who begged the Doctor to take her with him. Could he have a change of heart or might she be better suited to a role as the Doctor instead?

3. **MICHELLE KEEGAN**
   - From the Cobbles to the Daleks, the former Coronation Street actress is this year's bookies' favourite to replace Jenna Coleman (Game of Thrones' Rose Leslie was last year's). That makes sense. Coleman is an ex-soap star, too, having begun her TV career in Emmerdale. But with Keegan committed to the revival of BBC1 drama Our Girl, she might need a Tardis herself to find the time.

4. **INGRID OLIVER**
   - Alongside Faye Marsay, who was in the last Christmas special, Oliver is another fan favourite. Her character, Osgood, was blasted into dust - which, in Doctor Who, means we'll be seeing her again this series, reprising her role as a Unit scientist (and super-fan of the Doctor). Funny, clever, brave - she'd make a brilliant companion. If she doesn't turn out to be a Zygon, that is.

5. **GEORGINA CAMPBELL**
   - Who? Exactly. Did you know who Karen Gillan was before Doctor Who? What about Jenna Coleman, or Kylie Minogue? (OK, scratch that last one.) The point is that Campbell, who won a Bafta this year for BBC3's Murdered by My Boyfriend, is exactly the sort of up-and-coming talent that Doctor Who likes to nurture.

Stephen Kelly

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