

”I Am What You Call A Hooligan”: Gender in the UK Suffrage Movement 1905-1918

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<p>1900-luvun alussa Ison-Britannian naisilla ei ollut oikeutta äänestää parlamenttivaaleissa. Useita organisaatioita syntyi kampanjoimaan äänioikeuden saavuttamiseksi. Suurimmat näistä olivat laillisia kampanjointikeinoja käyttänyt <i>National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies</i> (NUWSS) sekä militantti <i>Women’s Social and Political Union</i> (WSPU). Kyseiset organisaatiot olivat usein kovan kritiikin kohteena, sillä naisten ei kuulunut osallistua poliittiseen elämään ajan sukupuoliroolien mukaan. Tämä tutkielma tarkastelee, miten NUWSS ja WSPU määrittelivät sukupuoleen liittyviä konsepteja, kuten feminiinisyyttä ja maskuliinisuutta, vuodesta 1905 rajoitetun äänioikeuden saavuttamiseen vuonna 1918. Lähteinä käytetään äänioikeusorganisaatioiden lehtiä ja pamfletteja sekä avainjäsenten elämäkertoja ja muistelmia.</p> <p>Kaiken kaikkiaan organisaatioiden välillä ei ollut suuria eroja, vaikka ne käyttivät eri taktiikoita äänioikeuskampanjoinnissa. Sekä NUWSS että WSPU kyseenalaistivat yhteiskunnan jaottelun miesten ja naisten alueisiin ennen ensimmäisen maailmansodan puhkeamista vuonna 1914. Ne myös ylläpitivät tiettyjä traditionaalisia ajatuksia naiseudesta ja miehisyydestä. Naisten piti saada osallistua politiikkaan tasa-arvoisina miesten rinnalla, mutta naiset olivat myös miehiä rauhanomaisempia, ja äitiys sekä kodinhoito olivat tärkeitä naisten tehtäviä. Eniten organisaatiot kyseenalaistivat olettamusta, että brittiläinen yhteiskunta sekä politiikkaa perustuu miesten näkökulmaan ja miehisen voiman käytölle. Ne uskoivat naisten rauhallisen luonteen ja korkeampien moraalien luovan paremman ja kehittyneemmän yhteiskunnan.</p> <p>Ensimmäisellä maailmansodalla oli konservatiivinen vaikutus NUWSS:in ja WSPU:n ajatteluun sukupuolesta. Ennen sotaa kumpikin organisaatio oli pitänyt sotimista ja väkivallan käyttöä barbaarina miehisenä paheena. Sodan puhjettua tämä ajattelut ei kadonnut, vaan siirtyi erityisesti kuvaamaan saksalaisia vihollisia. Brittiläisten miesten jaloa maskuliinisuutta keuhuttiin, kun taas naisten perinteistä hoivaajan roolia korostettiin. Sota kuitenkin myös antoi uusia mahdollisuuksia naisille esimerkiksi ammateissa. Tämänlainen tasapainottelu perinteisten ja uudistuneiden sukupuolikäsitysten välillä selittää, miksi organisaatioiden argumentit saattoivat vaihdella ja olla ristiriidassa keskenään.</p>		
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1. Introduction

1.1 Background: The Suffrage Movement and Gender

“What is womanly? Away in the country, especially in the narrow lites of small provincial towns, one finds no argument weighing so heavily against the movement for woman’s enfranchisement, and more particularly against the “militant” methods, as the assertion that they are “unwomanly”; and by “unwomanly” one soon finds that the objectors mean “unladylike,” for they immediately go on to apply such adjectives as “screaming,” “hysterical,” “unreasonable” – attributes which we know very well are, in this particular school of thought, regarded as essentially and almost exclusive feminine. The Suffragists are, therefore, accused almost in the same breath, both of deserting and of accentuating the characteristics of their sex.”¹

This extract of the article *What is womanly?* by an English playwright Laurence Housman demonstrates one of the major obstacles faced by the British suffragists in their efforts to achieve parliamentary suffrage for women in the twentieth century. On one hand, the femininity of the campaigners was strongly questioned by the antisuffragists because the middle-class ideal emphasised that the public life, especially politics, was a men’s sphere while women took care of the private sphere of household and children. Hence, the suffragists were unwomanly for working in the public for women’s right to participate in public affairs. On the other hand, as Housman points out, especially the militant suffragists, also known as suffragettes, were described as a hysterical “shrieking sisterhood” because of their aggressive tactics which included interrupting political meetings and attacks on private property. Such descriptions relied on stereotypical images of women as irrational and emotional beings. Suffragists were viewed as inappropriately feminine and unfeminine at the same time.

The two main organisations which campaigned for women’s suffrage, *Women’s Social and Political Union* (WSPU) and *National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies* (NUWSS), had to respond to such depictions. The campaign for parliamentary suffrage had begun already in the 1860s when John Stuart Mill’s bill about female enfranchisement was rejected in the

¹ Housman, Laurence, “What is Womanly?”, *Votes for Women*, 31 December 1908, 229.

Parliament. This prompted the creation of suffrage societies all around the country. Despite the women's best efforts, their campaigning and petitions failed to achieve female enfranchisement. The suffrage movement re-emerged in the first decades of the twentieth century. The WSPU was founded by the Pankhurst family in 1903 and became notorious for their militant methods which became increasingly radical before the First World War as the promises made to women were betrayed. The organisation was led by Emmeline Pankhurst (1858-1928), a widow of a Manchester barrister Richard Pankhurst, who had been interested in politics and equal rights since her youth due to her family's influence. She had also worked as a Poor Law Guardian which reinforced her beliefs about the necessity of women's influence in politics. Two of her children were also active members of the WSPU. Christabel (1880-1958) and Sylvia Pankhurst (1882-1960) shared their family's passion for equal rights. Christabel Pankhurst studied law but could not practice the profession due to her gender. She especially focused on the militant suffrage campaign and women's rights while Sylvia Pankhurst, who had studied art, divided her time between female suffrage and socialism.

The NUWSS was formed in 1897 as a central organisation for the suffrage societies all around the country and was led by their president Millicent Fawcett (1847-1929). Fawcett, the child of a politically active father, was influenced to take part in political discussion from a very young age. She began to focus on female enfranchisement in the 'first wave' of suffrage agitation in the 1860s and was chosen to be the National Union's president due to her long commitment to the cause. The NUWSS distinguished itself from the WSPU by emphasising that its policy was law-abiding and educational. The suffrage campaigners founded newspapers and held marches to publicise their cause. The British government still refused to enfranchise women. Several bills failed even though WSPU suspended militancy to help the Conciliation Bill to pass in 1910 which aimed to please both suffrage campaigners and the antisuffragists opposing them.

Both suffragists and suffragettes were vulnerable to criticism concerning their femininity, and they had to decide how to describe their behaviour and femininity. Negative descriptions of the femininity of their members could harm their campaign for votes which created a pressure to adhere to the dominant gender roles for women. However, as feminist organisations, both unions were questioning the dominant portrayal of women and redefining the acceptable roles for women and men in the British society.

1.2 Research Questions and Motivation of Research

In this thesis, I examine what type of gender roles the two suffrage organisations envisioned for women and men, explicitly and implicitly. I analyse the period between October 1905, when the WSPU interrupted a meeting of the Liberal Party as their first significant act of militancy, to February 1918 when the Representation of the People Act received its royal assent, giving limited franchise to women over the age thirty. The WSPU and NUWSS were selected because they were the main militant and non-militant organisations for suffrage of women which allows me to compare and contrast their views and give a more rounded view on the gender issues in the campaign.

The main research questions are the following: how did the WSPU and NUWSS describe gender and gender roles between 1905 and 1918? To what extent did they accept the prevailing ideas about masculinity and femininity and to what extent did the associations question them? How did they view the ideal woman and ideal man or were there such models? Along with these questions, I investigate how gender was connected to the British society and civilisation. Since I also examine the First World War years, I study how opposition and support for the war was related to gender issues. Hence, this thesis is in the field of gender history.

In relation to the usage of terms, I define 'gender' and 'gender roles' as the socially and culturally constructed characteristics which are associated with women and men and have been used to define their roles in the family and society. Femininity thus refers to characteristics related to women while masculinity describes traits associated with men. The suffrage campaigners themselves only used the term 'sex', since gender as a term and concept was not yet invented. Sex war is used to note a struggle between men and women. Furthermore, I call the WSPU members as suffragettes and militant suffragists, and the NUWSS members suffragists and constitutional suffragists.

The topic is worth studying because of three reasons. Firstly, femininity and masculinity were key issues in the campaign itself. Issues relating to gender, such as appropriate gender roles, were often used as reasons for and against suffrage and the participation of women in public life. It is impossible to fully understand the suffrage campaigners without understanding their ideas about gender.

Secondly, many studies and historians have disparaged the women involved in the suffrage campaign, especially the militants. This narrative is still present in the more recent works on the movement. Historian Sandra Holton Stanley has investigated the different schools of thought in the suffrage historiography and identified three different groups. The constitutionalist school follows a liberal interpretation of British history in which the society is continuously progressing towards greater freedoms and highlights the role of the NUWSS in gaining the vote. The militant school believes that the suffragettes were central to the victory. Moreover, the school is divided between those who rely on Sylvia Pankhurst's writing or on her mother Emmeline Pankhurst and sister Christabel Pankhurst. The third masculinist school has an androcentric view of history and politics. Historians of this school view the suffragists and suffragettes through their own sexist opinions and describe politically active women as deviant women. They do not attempt to understand the campaign from the point of view of the women who participated in it. George Dangerfield's *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (1935) established this narrative. Dangerfield described the movement as a "neurosis" of irrational women which was the result of the failure of Edwardian men to assert their masculine control over the society. Some later male historians have followed this narrative and continued to emphasise especially the WSPU tactics as irrational and harmful to the cause.² Many of these historians describe the campaigners in the same terms as the antisuffragists which makes it important to highlight how the women defined their femininity.

Thirdly, although the historical research on the suffrage movement has expanded over the years from the initial focus on the leaders and the campaign in London to studies on the working-class suffragists and the campaigners outside London and England, the research on the gender roles of the suffrage movement has been limited and superficial. Generally, secondary literature briefly mentions that the suffrage campaigners questioned the gender roles of their era. Only a few works have focused on the topic directly. However, even that research has been restricted, and much of it is twenty or thirty years-old. Historian Susan Kingsley Kent has investigated how sex and sexual issues were discussed by the suffrage campaigners. She notes how the suffrage movement cannot be called a single-issue campaign, as some historians have argued. The movement believed that female suffrage would create reforms which would improve the status of women. Changing gender roles was a key aspect of such change, so the campaigners questioned many aspects femininity of the Victorian and Edwardian eras.³ Furthermore, scholar Lisa Tickner has studied the imagery of the campaign and the types of femininity presented in the images of the

² Stanley Holton, 2000, 13-33.

³ Kingsley Kent, 1990.

different organisations before the war.⁴ Only Nicoletta F. Gullace has discussed both femininity and masculinity in the suffrage campaign during the First World War in her study of how understanding of citizenship became less masculine during the war and activities of women began to be viewed as national service.⁵ Therefore, there is not only a need to examine the whole period of the campaign, from its most active years to the First World War, but also the views of the suffrage campaigners on men and masculinity which is another neglected topic. As historian Ben Griffin has noted, it is also important to analyse the role of men because feminism has not only been focused on women and their position in the society but also on how men's societal roles can be analysed and altered.⁶

1.3 Sources

I have two main groups of primary sources. Firstly, I utilise contemporary writings by the suffrage campaigners, for instance pamphlets, speeches and letters to the editor by the campaigners. These provide a look at the suffrage agitation and offer an opportunity to see how the participants in the movement viewed and defined gender during the campaign. Especially the suffrage journals are an important source. I refer to their articles with the name of the author if it is provided. The NUWSS published *The Common Cause* from 1909 onwards and through the war years while the WSPU's *Votes for Women* was the official organ of the Union between 1909 to 1912. After this, *Suffragette* became the main journal which was published sporadically during the war under the name *Britannia*. Both militant and constitutional suffrage campaigners emphasised the need for suffragist newspapers and argued that the mainstream press silenced women's issues and ignored the campaign for the vote. When the movement was mentioned, the mainstream press only provided a narrow view on it because several important newspapers, such as *The Times*, were antisuffragist. For instance, Helena Swanwick (1864-1939), a pacifist suffragist who was a member of the NUWSS and editor of its journal, wrote that no proper history of the suffrage campaign can be written by relying solely on the mainstream press because of the rampant censorship.⁷ The women's own newspapers gave the campaigners a chance to articulate their views. The papers were openly propagandistic (before gaining negative connotations from war, much of political agitation was called propaganda), but the task of this thesis is to investigate this propaganda. However, the

⁴ Tickner, 1987.

⁵ Gullace, 2002.

⁶ Griffin, 2012, 8.

⁷ Swanwick, 1935, 221-222; Pankhurst, C., 1959, 55.

differences and splits between and within the organisations have influenced the portrayal of the suffrage campaigners and their organisations. This was less evident during the campaign years because the movement attempted to portray a somewhat united front to the public, but the disagreements became very clear in later writings.

The second group of sources are the autobiographies and histories written about the movement by the most significant members of the NUWSS and WSPU. The suffragist and suffragettes were prolific writers in the 1920s and 1930s. In 1926, the Suffragette Fellowship was founded to preserve the legacy of the militants⁸ whose most important works are the autobiographies and histories of the Pankhurst family. Emmeline Pankhurst published her autobiography *My Own Story* in 1914. Her daughters Christabel and especially Sylvia Pankhurst wrote about their experiences in the 1930s.⁹ On the side of the NUWSS, the central work is *The Cause: A Short History of the Women's Movement in Great Britain* (1925) which was written by Ray Strachey (1887-1940) who was the secretary of Millicent Fawcett. These works offer a retrospective look at the movement, and what the writers considered to be its key issues and events. Hence, they can give a better overview of the issues relating to gender than the works written during the campaign. However, the information in the autobiographies must be handled critically because of the passage of time. They contain a set of narratives which have become a standard way to describe the events. In the case of suffrage campaigners, the militants and constitutionalists established their own narratives about the movement. For example, Strachey highlighted the importance of NUWSS in the victory and compared the militants unfavourably against the constitutional suffragists. The NUWSS was rational, civilised, democratic and controlled, while the WSPU was described as irrational, uncivilised, autocratic and reckless. On the militant side, Constance Lytton is credited with creating the militant narrative which, according to historian Laura Nym Mayhall, has persisted in other works of the suffragettes. Lytton's memoir of her prison experiences was released in 1914, titled *Prisons and Prisoners*. She ignores her life before joining the militants and emphasises her militant acts, especially arrests, imprisonments and hunger strikes. This self-sacrifice and devotion became to be seen as the true values and actions of the suffragettes.¹⁰

⁸ Nym Mayhall, 1995, 329.

⁹ Christabel Pankhurst's autobiography *Unshackled: The Story of How We Won the Vote* was not published until her death in 1958. Sylvia Pankhurst's most notable works regarding the campaign were *The Suffragette Movement* (1931) and *Emmeline Pankhurst* (1935).

¹⁰ Nym Mayhall, 1995, 322-329.

Another autobiographical issue arises from the personal relationships within the organisations. In the WSPU, the problems centred around the relationship between Sylvia Pankhurst and Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst. Christabel Pankhurst has been said to have been her mother's favourite child while the other daughters Adela and Sylvia Pankhurst became more estranged from the rest of the family and the WSPU because they did not agree with its militant and non-socialist policy. Adela Pankhurst was sent to Australia in 1914 while Sylvia Pankhurst devoted herself to the working women of London's East End. Her WSPU branch became its own separate association, the East London Federation of Suffragettes, in 1914.¹¹ Although the autobiographies of Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst are less personal and downplay the splits in the movement, Sylvia Pankhurst's influential work *The Suffragette Movement* (1931) is highly personal and even bitter towards her sister and mother. Emmeline Pankhurst is described as weak leader and neglectful mother while Christabel Pankhurst is portrayed as a cold autocrat. The descriptions of Sylvia Pankhurst have become the dominant portrayals of her family in the historiography.¹² In the National Union, the personal relationships were less intense, but there still were disagreements over policy, especially during the First World War. A large number of active campaigners resigned in 1915 because the NUWSS continued to support the war instead of advocating peace and pacifism. Both Fawcett and Strachey later downplayed this split and the significance of the pacifist members for the movement.¹³ Therefore, it is important to consider the personal and organisational relationships and how they changed over time when assessing the depiction of the suffrage campaigners.

¹¹ Purvis, 2002, 194, 246-249.

¹² Purvis and Wright, 2005, 417-420.

¹³ Vellacott, 1987, 82.

2. Pre-War Years 1905-1914

2.1 Political Participation: Militancy or Constitutionalism

The goal of the suffrage campaigners was to get the vote “as it is or may be granted to men”.¹⁴ However, it was a controversial demand because public life and politics were considered to be outside of women’s sphere. The idea of the spheres was an influential ideology in the British society already in the Victorian times. The central concept was that femininity and masculinity were fundamentally different, thus making women and men suitable for separate tasks in the society. Men were characterised by logic, independence and aggression which made them suitable for public life where these traits were needed. Women, in contrast, were passive, emotional, dependent and gentle which were ideal characteristics for domestic settings.¹⁵ Home was viewed as a safe haven from the cruelties of the outside world, and women were its guardians.¹⁶ Thus, men were expected to participate in the public life, in work, politics and business, while women maintained the home and raised children.

However, historians today have questioned the reality of such rigid division into public and private spheres. For instance, historian Simon Morgan notes that the spheres had shifting boundaries which were constantly tested.¹⁷ In addition, women and their lives did not neatly fit into the private sphere. Only a small amount of upper-class British women could afford such life style, and even they could participate in public life, for instance through philanthropy. Although they could not vote, they could indirectly influence politicians through personal relationships or organisations. In contrast, their husbands could wish to stay at the safety of their home rather than work. Moreover, the life of middle-class women fails to fully adhere to the model despite the separate spheres being portrayed as a particularly a middle-class ideal. Many middle-class women had to work hard at home to maintain their household by organising and doing housework and ensuring that the money given to them by their husbands would be enough. Furthermore, working-class women had no choice but to work outside of their homes to provide for their families.¹⁸ Hence, majority of women could not be described as passive and idle caretakers who had limited contact with the public sphere.

¹⁴ Vellacott, 1993, 35.

¹⁵ Kingsley Kent, 1990, 30.

¹⁶ Trudgill, 1976, 39.

¹⁷ Morgan, 2007, 2.

¹⁸ Vickery, 1993, 389-391.

Nonetheless, the contemporary sources demonstrate that the idea of the spheres was an influential concept which affected women's lives. Both NUWSS and WSPU members pointed out how forcing women to stay at home was stifling. Ray Strachey portrayed the nineteenth-century life of women very bleakly: it was "the prison-house of home" where women were controlled by the pretence of needing protection from the outside world.¹⁹ Emmeline Pankhurst reminisced how her father had stated, "What a pity she wasn't born a lad."²⁰ Despite Emmeline Pankhurst being a talented and intelligent child, her sex was going to hold her back in life. It was especially clear among the upper-class members. For instance, WSPU member Lady Constance Lytton, who came from an aristocratic and educated family, portrayed her life before suffrage campaigning as trivial and empty.²¹

This submission, passivity and lack of freedom were some of the things the suffragists and suffragettes wanted to change and replace with courage and strength. They wanted to make being politically and publicly active more acceptable for women. Active campaigning and participation in public life became admirable for both NUWSS and WSPU. It was especially clear in the WSPU which had the slogan "Deeds, not words". The organisation accused those who refused to act of lacking responsibility and not upholding the dignity of women.²² The rhetoric became more extreme as the Union became more radical. In 1912, Christabel Pankhurst wrote that non-militant suffragists are closer to anti-suffragists than militants because they refuse to fight for women's freedom.²³ However, Emmeline Pankhurst said that women could "be militant each in [their] own way" which allowed women the chance to choose a suitable method for them from the WSPU arsenal which ranged from heckling politicians to attacking property.²⁴ NUWSS also criticised women who did not participate in the campaign. It saw especially the wealthy women as a problem and called their inaction as "the great obstacle" to the suffrage movement.²⁵

Nevertheless, there were drifts between the organisations about this topic. The WSPU attacked the National Union several times over the years for being too orderly. Christabel Pankhurst accused the constitutionalists of being too timid, selfish and unwilling to give up their life of comfort for the cause in 1908.²⁶ Such accusations did not die after suffrage was won. In *The*

¹⁹ Strachey, 1928, 11, 25, 30.

²⁰ Pankhurst, E., (1914) 2015, 15.

²¹ Lytton, 1914, 1-2.

²² "Women's Parliament", *Manchester Guardian*, 12 February 1908, 9.

²³ Pankhurst, C., "Shall Women Fight?", *The Suffragette*, 1 November 1912, 36.

²⁴ Pankhurst, E., (1914) 2015, 243.

²⁵ "North of England Society's Annual Meeting", *Manchester Guardian*, 23 November 1907, 10.

²⁶ "Women's Parliament. Firm Suffragists and Men's Nerves", *Manchester Guardian*, 13 February 1908, 9.

Suffrage Movement, Sylvia Pankhurst called NUWSS staid and unable to appeal to the masses.²⁷ Ray Strachey had counterattacked such claims in *The Cause* by contrasting the WSPU's extremism with the National Union's orderly and peaceful methods. She argued that the NUWSS had been a more efficient campaigner.²⁸ Although the post-war debate was an attempt by the both sides to claim the victory of the vote for themselves, it demonstrates the differences in the WSPU and NUWSS arguments. The new ideal woman was politically and publicly active participant in the society. The WSPU considered that women should be active through deeds while the NUWSS appreciated more moderate methods.

However, being publicly active was a challenging task for many women. Suddenly they were expected to demand a space for women in the public sphere. Hence, many women recalled how their first experiences of public speaking and campaigning were a great struggle, even for the working-class campaigners. WSPU member Annie Kenney (1879-1953) joined the organisation because she was inspired by Christabel Pankhurst to work for the cause and stayed loyal to her throughout the years. She was the organisation's most famous working-class member and leader. Kenney had worked, and hence been in the 'public sphere' since she was ten years old. Nevertheless, when she was scheduled to address a street meeting, Kenney tried to exempt herself from public speaking.²⁹ Millicent Fawcett also remembers how afraid she was before her first public speech for suffrage and how she was accused of disgracing her sex the following day by a member of Parliament.³⁰ Such inner struggles illustrate how the campaigners had to overcome their own upbringing and societal norms before they could convert others to their cause.

Women's participation in public discussions was objectionable in the British society in the early twentieth century for two reasons. Firstly, in the Victorian times, there were only two images of women: the wife and mother at home or the prostitute on the streets. The housewife was considered almost unsexual while sex workers were portrayed as oversexualised and immoral women.³¹ Although all public women were not seen as prostitutes, being in the public could throw suspicions on the character of a woman. Proper ladies stayed at home and took care of their children and household. The appearance of suffragists and suffragettes on the streets, many of which were upper- and middle-class women, was confusing to the society and challenged the idea that a 'public woman' was automatically a prostitute or a "fallen woman". However, women had to pay a price

²⁷ Pankhurst, S., 1935a, 485.

²⁸ Strachey, 1928, 334.

²⁹ Kenney, 1924, 30.

³⁰ Fawcett, 1925, 87-88.

³¹ Kingsley Kent, 1990, 60-62.

for breaking the social conventions. Evelyn Sharp, an author and member of both societies, wrote in her collection of short stories a fictional account of what suffrage campaigners faced whilst walking in the streets. Although they could receive support, several members of the public were rude and questioned their femininity.³² WSPU member Mary Richardson recalled that when she was selling the Union's newspaper, men came to say vulgar things to her.³³ Suffragettes, due to their more extreme methods, were also subjected to violence. When they interrupted political meetings or attempted to enter the Parliament, they were often violently thrown out. The most famous example is the so-called Black Friday on November 18, 1910. The suffragettes were attempting to enter to the House of Parliaments to protest the defeat of a recent bill which would have enfranchised women. The police officers which stopped women were brutal; they physically and sexually assaulted several suffragettes.³⁴ The sexual harassment and assaults demonstrate how publicly active women were linked to prostitution or loose sexual behaviour in the mind of the general public and could therefore be treated inappropriately.

Secondly, although the public sphere was not entirely dominated by men, it was considered a masculine area where men's views were dominant. The WSPU and NUWSS challenged such thinking and demanded that women should have an equal presence and voice in the public matters. This was reflected in their demand that women should have the vote on the same terms as men and in attempts to address politicians directly in meetings.³⁵ Sometimes it took even a more literal form. Women could only observe the parliament proceedings in the House of Commons in the separate Ladies' Gallery through a grille. In 1908, members of another militant suffrage society, Women's Freedom League, chained themselves to the grille, demanding votes for women and the grille's removal. In order to free the women and stop them from disturbing the proceedings in the House of Commons, the grille had to be temporarily removed.³⁶ Although this was not organised by the WSPU, the organisation praised it and some of its members chained themselves to statues in the Parliament lobby in April 1909.³⁷ The questioning of the male dominance and entering what was seen as a men's sphere was threatening to many men who wished to keep the status quo. For instance, actor and WSPU supporter Johnston Forbes Robertson stated that he can understand why men were antisuffragist; they were afraid of "giving up their thrones."³⁸

³² Sharp, 1910, 223-228.

³³ Vicinus, 1985, 263.

³⁴ Purvis, 2002, 150.

³⁵ Vicinus, 1985, 263-264.

³⁶ Pankhurst, S., 1911, 329-330.

³⁷ "Women's Suffrage. Disturbance at Westminster", *The Times*, 28 April 1909, 7.

³⁸ "Mr. Forbes Robertson at Queen's Hall", *Votes for Women*, 4 February 1909, 310.

Therefore, the attacks against suffrage campaigners can also be understood as an attempt to deny women the entrance into the 'male' sphere.

Due to the obstacles suffrage campaigners faced in their attempts to participate in political life, they had to justify their suffering and find meaning in it. Although the NUWSS also applauded the sacrifices committed to advance the cause, the rhetoric of WSPU relied much more on the idea. After one of her imprisonments in 1909, Emmeline Pankhurst stated that "... whatever we may have to face in the months that lie before us, we know this, that no sacrifice we may be called upon to make will be worthy enough of the reward which we are going to win for all the women who are to come afterwards."³⁹ Over time, the arguments became more extreme. In 1913 speech, Pankhurst said that although all life is sacred to the WSPU, they are willing to sacrifice themselves to the cause if necessary. The government had to choose, Emmeline Pankhurst proclaimed, "between giving us freedom or giving us death."⁴⁰

The intensity of the WSPU regarding sacrifice and suffering can be attributed to their methods and how the government responded to them. The Union had a greater need to uphold the morale when their members were imprisoned for their protests and treated brutally. Especially the policy of hunger-striking required a strong commitment to the cause. It began in 1909 when Wallace Dunlop refused food to achieve First-Division status for the suffrage prisoners. First-Division prisoners were political prisoners who had more freedom and rights in the prison system. The government was unwilling to grant this status to women, so they chose to release Dunlop instead. Soon the tactic became widely used to gain freedom,⁴¹ and force-feeding was started to counter the method. It was a brutal procedure in which a tube forced into the stomach through the throat or the nostril and food was poured down. The prisoners had to be held down by several wardresses.⁴² Already weakened by their hunger-strikers, the women's health deteriorated even more. The Prisoners Act of 1913 further complicated the explosive situation. Under the so-called 'Cat and Mouse Act', the hunger-strikers were no longer force-fed, but they were released to recuperate and send back to prison once they were well enough. It created a cycle where the women did not have enough time to properly gain their strength before they were captured and hunger-striking again. By then, suffragettes had already died for the cause. It has been suspected that the

³⁹ "Mrs. Pankhurst and the Suffrage Agitation", *Manchester Guardian*, 15 January 1909, 8.

⁴⁰ Pankhurst, E., 13 November 1913.

⁴¹ Pankhurst, S., 1911, 391-392.

⁴² Purvis, 2002, 134.

hunger-strikes and force-feeding had a part in several deaths, for instance Emmeline Pankhurst's sister Mary.⁴³

The major difference between the WSPU and NUWSS regarding political participation was about militancy. The central question was whether it was acceptable to use militant methods or to only rely on constitutional and peaceful tactics. Militancy was a complex concept which changed over time and had several meanings. Today militancy is understood as violence although initially it meant unconventional and active methods to advocate for the vote. In October 1905, Christabel Pankhurst and Annie Kenney attended a Liberal meeting in Manchester. The Liberal Party was expected to win the Parliamentary elections of 1906, and the WSPU wanted to draw attention to women's suffrage by asking about the party's stance on the topic. The women's questions went unanswered, and they were dragged out for disturbing the meeting. Christabel Pankhurst wanted to protest their treatment and create even a greater spectacle by being arrested. She spit at one of the policemen holding her, thus committing an assault against the police. Both of them refused bail and spent the night in jail. Such event caught the attention of the press, and the suffrage cause received much attention.⁴⁴

The WSPU militancy initially consisted of questioning and heckling politicians at their meetings and campaigning against them in elections. The suffragettes also held demonstrations and attempted to enter the House of Commons to confront the Members of Parliament. These attempts often resulted in violent scuffles with the police who protected the Parliament grounds. The subsequent arrests drew even more attention to the organisation. Nevertheless, the WSPU began to view these tactics as inefficient and wished to protect themselves from the violence they suffered at the hands of the police. The suffragettes started to attack property, for example by organising large-scale raids on windows of government buildings and shops. When the campaign did not seem to progress, and several compromise bills failed, the WSPU members began to use arson and bombs as ways to force the government to enfranchise women.⁴⁵ Furthermore, a bodyguard trained in jiu-jitsu was set up to protect Emmeline Pankhurst against rearrests.⁴⁶ Still, the organisation never attempted to take a life and emphasised the sacredness of human life.⁴⁷

The suffragettes justified their militancy by claiming that the methods were being forced upon them. Constitutional tactics were emphasised to be inefficient whereas men's militant

⁴³ Bartley, 2012, 159.

⁴⁴ Pankhurst, C., 1959, 50-52.

⁴⁵ Pugh, 2000, 188-203.

⁴⁶ Ruz and Parkinson, 2015.

⁴⁷ Pankhurst, S., 1935b, 90.

campaigns to obtain political rights had been successful. Emmeline Pankhurst often highlighted the nineteenth-century suffrage campaign of women in which she had also participated. It had been completely constitutional, but petitions and meetings had not advanced the cause.⁴⁸ At the same time, men had been militant to gain political rights and caused riots and deaths which was not only successful but also socially acceptable and even applauded by the politicians. When the WSPU leaders were in court for trying to agitate people to “rush the House of Commons”, Christabel highlighted this double standard. All Reform Bills, which passed in the nineteenth century and extended the parliamentary franchise to more men, were facilitated by riots and militancy. Houses were burned, riots and destruction took place. The WSPU argued that they were completely justified in using militancy because it was the only way to make the government comply.⁴⁹ Furthermore, the Union also highlighted how women used violence only as a self-defence. Helen Ogston used a dogwhip to defend herself against stewards who attempted to remove her from a meeting and she wrote in her defence: “I have the strongest natural repugnance to violence, but I felt it my duty this instance to make a protest against the sort of treatment to which no woman ought to submit.”⁵⁰

To WSPU, the suffrage campaign was war. It was called “women’s revolution”⁵¹ and the imagery of war and battles was commonly used. Suffragettes were soldiers engaged in a “Holy War for Freedom”⁵² and were constructed as an army. Released prisoners received medals for their actions after release. A prominent member of Union, Flora Drummond, received nickname of ‘The General’, and Emmeline Pankhurst stated that the suffragettes were a volunteer army following their leadership’s orders.⁵³ Suffragettes could also enjoy their ‘war’ and battles. Emmeline Pankhurst stated that by stifling women, the men had also denied them the “joy of battle”.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, it was important to appear as calm and controlled. Antisuffragists and the press claimed the suffragettes to be hysterical women which is why the members of the WSPU always emphasised themselves to be self-restrained, determined and calm.⁵⁵ Such descriptions were an attempt to highlight the suffragette tactics as purposeful and planned, controlled by logic and not emotion.

⁴⁸ Pankhurst, C., 1959, 110-111.

⁴⁹ Pethick Lawrence, F., 1908, 67-68.

⁵⁰ “Correspondence”, *Manchester Guardian*, 8 December 1908, 14.

⁵¹ Pankhurst, E., (1914) 2015, 187.

⁵² Pethick Lawrence, E., “Lady Constance Lytton”, *Votes for Women*, 28 January 1910, 280.

⁵³ Pankhurst, E., (1914) 2015, 61.

⁵⁴ Pankhurst, E., “Why We Are Militant”, 21 October 1913, 162.

⁵⁵ “The Militant Suffragists”, *Manchester Guardian*, 4 October 1909, 4.

The union constructed a new image of womanhood, a militant woman who was brave, selfless and determined to win the vote. These ideals were best captured in their admiration of Joan of Arc. Joan of Arc was actually a young French woman who led successful campaigns against the English in the Hundred Years' War in the fifteenth century before being captured and burned alive. She claimed that she was following visions which God had given her. Christabel Pankhurst called her 'the patron saint of the suffragettes'.⁵⁶ Joan was a common rhetoric device and a character in the suffragette marches. The suffragettes, like Joan, were justified in their fight against the government and were being punished for their rightful actions. She also demonstrated that female militancy was not unusual.

Militancy was a major change in the image of women. Suddenly the 'weak' and 'submissive' sex was attacking the government. The women doing so were not from the working class but proper upper- and middle-class ladies who emphasised that they were acting rationally and rejected any suggestion of female hysteria. Furthermore, the militant suffrage campaign was a mass movement and not done by a few eccentric individuals. Although the extreme forms of militancy did not become acceptable, they still demonstrated that women were capable of more than housework and childcare. They could be confrontational, aggressive and demand to be heard. The WSPU valued these characteristics and argued that they were more feminine than those women who did nothing to improve the status of women.⁵⁷ Submission and passiveness were no longer feminine qualities to the WSPU. Action and deeds were the mark of "true" femininity.

However, the extent of militant characteristics should not be exaggerated. The WSPU was caught between praising militancy and appearing feminine. The organisation was careful to represent itself as traditionally feminine. Antisuffragists argued that suffrage campaigners were masculine women and ridiculed them in cartoons by drawing the women as masculine and ugly as possible.⁵⁸ The WSPU struck back by ordering its campaigners to emphasise their femininity. Christabel Pankhurst stated in her autobiography: "To parry any charge of 'unwomanliness', extreme views, and so forth, conformity to convention in all but militancy was the rule."⁵⁹ Nowhere was this clearer than in clothing. *Votes for Women* noted the negative representations of suffragettes in the press and gave instructions on how to dress in public and where appropriate clothing could be bought.⁶⁰ Moreover, militancy was always considered a temporary and sometimes unpleasant

⁵⁶ Pankhurst, S., 1935a, 468.

⁵⁷ Pankhurst C., "The Militant Campaign", *Vote for Women*, April 1908, 101.

⁵⁸ Tickner, 1989, 211.

⁵⁹ Pankhurst, C., 1959, 126.

⁶⁰ "The Suffragette and the Dress Problem", *Votes for Women*, 30 July 1908, 348.

measure. Although sacrifice was admired, suffragettes also highlighted how unpleasant it was to tarnish one's reputation and break social conventions. WSPU member Mary Gawthorpe defended militancy by stating that women found the creation of public disorder unpleasant but continued using the method "out of a sense of public duty."⁶¹

There is some debate whether the 'militant woman' was an achievable representation of a woman of the WSPU or an unattainable ideal. Historian Lisa Tickner claims that it was an allegorical model which personified the militant ideals and the WSPU motto.⁶² Nevertheless, scholar Cheryl R. Jorgensen-Earp has argued that the value of Joan of Arc was that she had been a real woman and therefore could present a real example and act as a historical model for the suffragettes.⁶³ I believe that the 'militant woman' was mainly a spiritual model. The WSPU did not seriously argue that women should take up arms against the government like Joan did against the English, but the suffragettes wanted and were expected to emulate her strength of character, courage and martyrdom if necessary. Indeed, Christabel Pankhurst also called the suffragettes Joan's "spiritual descendants".⁶⁴ The militant woman was a contradiction of breaking the norms and even enjoying such deeds while maintaining traditional femininity. Nonetheless, its role in the altering of the perception of women and women's identities cannot be denied.

While the WSPU was engaged in its civil war against the British government, the NUWSS had to negotiate its stance towards the militant suffragists. On one hand, the organisation did not condemn them or want to do so when the suffragette tactics began. On the other hand, the National Union had to separate itself from methods which it did not utilise. Furthermore, the attitudes of the NUWSS towards militancy developed over the years. Initially, the WSPU's bravery and novel methods were a source of imitation and admiration. Although the NUWSS never heckled politicians or interrupted their meetings, they held large demonstrations, founded their own newspaper and became a more active organisation because of the WSPU. The National Union even defended the suffragette methods although they simultaneously highlighted their own policy as law-abiding campaigners. In 1906, Millicent Fawcett wrote to the *Manchester Guardian* to condemn and defend the disturbances which the WSPU was creating at political meetings. While writing that the NUWSS had nothing to do with such acts nor did she approve of them, Fawcett applauded the new methods as more efficient than constitutional tactics. She also criticised the violence the suffragette hecklers faced. She ended her letter with a plea to not condemn the WSPU: "Let me

⁶¹ "Suffragist Militancy", *Manchester Guardian*, 23 February 1909, 9.

⁶² Tickner, 1989, 207.

⁶³ Jorgensen-Earp, 1997, Chapter Four (no page numbers).

⁶⁴ Pankhurst, C., 1959, 282.

counsel all friends of Women's Suffrage not to denounce the flag-waving women... It is proving to men what many of them have not realised – that women are in earnest when they ask not to be put on a lower political status".⁶⁵

However, as the use of violence increased, NUWSS began to take a sterner stance against the militants. Fawcett wrote that she fully changed her mind and the policy of the National Union after stone-throwing and window-breaking became approved WSPU methods. She underlined how, in her opinion, the suffrage movement was about changing attitudes and winning the vote through arguments, not violence.⁶⁶ As the WSPU's methods escalated into arson and bombs before the First World War, the National Union began to harden its rhetoric about the suffragettes. However, it was always possible to see a hint of justification and defence on their behalf. In 1914, Fawcett wrote to *The Times* to once more express her disapproval the crimes of the WSPU. Nevertheless, she also noted how the WSPU had never taken a life like some other militant campaigns in British colonies. She suggested that a similar method should be taken with the present situation which was tried in the same colonies: the underlying reason for militancy, the lack of female suffrage, needed to be addressed to end the militancy.⁶⁷ Fawcett used the WSPU militancy as a reason to grant the vote for women which illustrates that despite the outward condemnation, the NUWSS could also use the situation to their advantage.

Not everyone in the NUWSS was happy about such sly tactics and lack of unconditional condemnation. The editor of the *Common Cause*, Helena Swanwick, resigned in 1913 because she felt that the National Union did not condemn militancy in strong enough terms. She saw militancy as the greatest threat to the cause and wanted to speak freely about it in the paper which the leadership did not allow.⁶⁸ I see the refusal to attack the WSPU as a way to maintain some resemblance of unity within the movement and avoid drawing even more attention to militancy. However, the method was not very successful as it caused inner drifts and could not hinder the reports about suffragette attacks.

For NUWSS, it was also important to emphasise their rational and calm tactics and conservative aims. The association with the WSPU could also ruin their image and have them associated with the 'irrationality' of the suffragettes. Swanwick later wrote proudly how the National Union was always self-controlled and never retaliated despite the hardships it faced.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Fawcett, "The Disorderly Questions at Liberal Meetings", *Manchester Guardian*, 13 January 1906, 5.

⁶⁶ Fawcett, 1925, 192.

⁶⁷ Fawcett, "The Militant Problem", *The Times*, 8 June 1914, 48.

⁶⁸ Swanwick, 1935, 223-224.

⁶⁹ Swanwick, 1935, 232.

Fawcett also emphasised how the NUWSS was democratic and well-organised despite its size. Its members took no action without the approval of the Council, and the suffragists did not allow their emotions to control them.⁷⁰ Although the attitude towards the WSPU was careful at times, Fawcett was not afraid to call them fanatics.⁷¹ Moreover, NUWSS emphasised that their or women's goals in voting were not radical or revolutionary. Fawcett often cited the enfranchisement of Finnish women who voted for such non-revolutionary issues as home, country and religion.⁷² Therefore, the NUWSS seems to have wished to appear more conservative and dispel any fears that enfranchised women would upset the status quo or order of the British society.

Perhaps the clearest example of the differences between the organisations is the historical women they chose as their predecessors. Suffragettes modelled themselves after Joan of Arc and her militancy. Suffragists also appreciate Joan and the Celtic warrior queen Boudica as examples of female leadership in war, but Crimean War nurse Florence Nightingale was more common example for the NUWSS. Helena Swanwick praised Nightingale for being independent and strong-minded to achieve her goal while also being womanly.⁷³ Ray Strachey also applauded her breaking through the stifling nineteenth-century ideology surrounding upper-class British women to pursue her nursing career and serve humanity.⁷⁴ Thus, the NUWSS appreciated the traditional female roles more closely than the WSPU.

Militancy was a controversial topic because of the use of physical force. It was also one of the key debates in the suffrage debate. Antisuffragists claimed that because women as the weaker sex were not required or capable of defending the state in war, they should not be able to vote. Vote, according to them, was restricted to those who could defend the state with physical force.⁷⁵ Suffragists and suffragettes countered this by pointing out that the voting requirements did not demand military service. More important, they argued that the state and citizenship did not and should not rely on physical force but on the consent of those they govern. Since the British government has the authority over both sexes, women should have the vote.⁷⁶ According to Helena Swanwick, physical force was also an archaic way to govern the state. Only uncivilised or barbaric states would base their governance on strength. As civilisation progressed and evolved, physical force as a way and reason to govern would be left behind and replaced by moral force. In highly

⁷⁰ Fawcett, 1920, 54-55.

⁷¹ Fawcett, "The Militant Problem", *The Times*, 8 June 1914, 48.

⁷² "Women and the Vote", *Manchester Guardian*, 9 July 1907, 7.

⁷³ Swanwick, 1913, 133.

⁷⁴ Strachey, 1928, 19.

⁷⁵ Harrison, 1978, 74-75.

⁷⁶ Nym Mayhall, 2003, 181-182.

developed societies, women's status was higher. Hence, women's position was connected to the development of British civilisation.⁷⁷

NUWSS saw the use of force as an imitation of men and betrayal of women's true nature. It argued that slow development and democracy were more appealing to women than revolution. It adhered to the Edwardian traditions by claiming that women were conservative by nature.⁷⁸ Therefore, they did not only disapprove of the suffragettes because of the negative press attention but also because they did not adhere to their feminine ideals. NUWSS saw itself as an organisation ushering in a new, nonviolent era with female votes.⁷⁹ Furthermore, militants courted martyrdom with their tactics which especially Helena Swanwick found deceptive and inappropriate.⁸⁰ WSPU, nonetheless, argued that the use of force and revolutionary tactics were acceptable in exceptional circumstances. Their actions reflected their spiritual and moral force which men were unwilling to listen. Women had to use the only way to which men would respond: violence. It was a "just war".⁸¹

Both NUWSS and the WSPU also emphasised several feminine traits which women would bring into politics and improve political life in the Edwardian Britain. The overarching theme connecting the different characteristics was morality and service. Suffrage campaigners argued that women would make politics less violent, chaotic and rude. They themselves continued to uphold the separate spheres by emphasising how public life, especially politics, was 'rough' and wild, and women would elevate it with their gentle and domestic femininity. NUWSS wrote in *The Common Cause*: "... women are met with courtesy and kindness when it is known or admitted that they come to bring courtesy and kindness; we believe that even the "rough and tumble" of politics might be smoothed by the presence of women".⁸² WSPU members expressed the same sentiment by stating that they struggled to clean and purify politics.⁸³ Such statements were founded upon the idea that women were more moral and purer than men.

Regarding service, the two organisations emphasised how the enfranchisement of women would help the poor and the society at large. *The Common Cause* wrote that the suffrage movement was a reform movement.⁸⁴ Emmeline Pankhurst often justified female enfranchisement

⁷⁷ Swanwick, 1913, 31-41.

⁷⁸ "Australian Experience", *The Common Cause*, 12 January 1911, 652.

⁷⁹ Fawcett, 1920, 65.

⁸⁰ Swanwick, 1935, 198.

⁸¹ Jorgensen-Earp, 1997, Introduction (no page numbers).

⁸² "News of the Week", *The Common Cause*, 13 May 1909, 65.

⁸³ "Votes for Women. Demonstration at the Free Trade Hall", *Manchester Guardian*, 18 December 1906, 10.

⁸⁴ "The Hope and the Meaning", *The Common Cause*, 15 April 1909, 3.

with her experiences as a poor law guardian in which she had seen the suffering of the poor.⁸⁵ These arguments relied on traditional femininity, since philanthropy had been established as one of the rare forms of public engaged in which women were encouraged to participate. Moreover, the idea of service also upheld the separate spheres ideology. In an article in *The Englishwoman*, Fawcett agreed with the antisuffragists that men are men and women are women but turned the argument on its head by pointing out that it is the reason why women need to be enfranchised. Men cannot fully understand or represent women which is why they need to vote and choose their Members of Parliament.⁸⁶ Both NUWSS and WSPU held and promoted traditional notions about femininity and women.

To assert their right to participate in the public sphere, the suffrage campaigners constructed new feminine ideals for women. The women would be active, yet feminine, and had an equal right to participate in politics like men did. They both upheld traditional gender roles for women, for instance women's superior moral character, and broke social norms and forced their way into male spaces. The WSPU believed that extreme methods were justified in winning the vote while NUWSS, although becoming a more active organisation because the WSPU, advocated traditional constitutional methods and conservative goals. This difference was a major drift between the organisations and hindered their possibilities of cooperation. Nevertheless, they held several same opinions about the nature of women in public as well as motherhood.

2.2 The Importance of Motherhood and Family

The main suffrage organisations were rather conservative about women's role at home. Family and home were firmly in the women's sphere in the Edwardian society which saw motherhood as women's role and duty. Being a childless woman was abnormal and caused suspicion about the woman's femininity.⁸⁷ Both NUWSS and WSPU emphasised motherhood. One of the founders of *Votes for Women* and prominent member of the WSPU Emmeline Pethick Lawrence wrote that suffragettes are acutely aware of the "supreme importance of motherhood".⁸⁸ *The Common Cause* also denied that the suffrage movement aimed to destroy the home and create domestic problems

⁸⁵ Purvis, 2002, 44.

⁸⁶ Fawcett, "Men Are Men and Women Are Women", *The Englishwoman*, February 1909, 17-31.

⁸⁷ Harrison, 1978, 60-63.

⁸⁸ Pethick Lawrence, E., "The Modern Woman and Motherhood", *Votes for Women*, 23 September 1910, 829.

between husbands and wives.⁸⁹ Despite wanting to improve women's opportunities to participate in the public life, they adhered to the Edwardian gender roles and saw maternity and home as women's central tasks.

Issues related to motherhood and family were also used to justify female enfranchisement. Women would be able to take care of their homes and families better if they could vote. Millicent Fawcett highlighted the improvements which had taken place in the British colonies of Australia and New Zealand where women already could vote.⁹⁰ Thanks to the enfranchisement, she wrote, women had a greater understanding of their public and private responsibilities, so they did their household work better. Fawcett even claimed that the birth rate had increased, and infant mortality decreased because of enfranchised women. She declared: "The free woman makes the best wife and the most careful mother."⁹¹ Hence, giving women the votes would enhance women's abilities to take care of their home and children because they had greater opportunities to influence policy on home life. Furthermore, the responsibility would have a positive effect on women at home. Emmeline Pankhurst echoed the same sentiment and claimed that giving votes to women would make "the homes of the nation brighter and better".⁹²

Moreover, women's influence in politics would ensure that necessary reforms would be passed. The suffrage campaigners were especially concerned about the welfare of mothers and children which were not adequately protected by law. Married women were economically dependent on their husbands and had no right to the custody of their children. Furthermore, illegitimacy laws and social norms made men think it was acceptable to take advantage of vulnerable women. Women, however, were ostracised for illegitimate children and if they committed infanticide due to the shame, the child's father would not be punished while the mother faced the consequences.⁹³ One again, the British colonies were highlighted as an admirable example. Emmeline Pankhurst claimed that an Act concerning the feeding of school children⁹⁴ would never have passed if the women voters were not taking part in the elections acting as a good influence in passing social reforms.⁹⁵

⁸⁹ "The Hope and the Meaning", *The Common Cause*, 15 April 1909, 3.

⁹⁰ New Zealand gave women the right to vote in 1893 and Australia in 1902. The suffrage campaigns in these colonies were constitutional.

⁹¹ Fawcett, 1911, 40-41.

⁹² "Released Suffragists", *Manchester Guardian*, 22 Apr 1907, 8.

⁹³ Pethick Lawrence, F., "The Trial of the Suffrage Leaders", 1908, 72-73.

⁹⁴ The article does not specify to what colony Pankhurst referred but she was most likely talking about Australia or New Zealand.

⁹⁵ "Released Suffragists", *Manchester Guardian*, 22 April 1907, 8.

Suffragists and suffragettes both argued that it was natural for women to look after the household and especially children. Women were able to understand children better than men, and they had innate ability for nurture. Evelyn Sharp of the WSPU wrote that due to “womanly instincts”, women understood children better than men. Although men knew of the suffering of children in Britain due to bad laws, they did nothing to change them because they were not considered important issues. Sharp claimed that children would not be adequately considered in laws before women participated in politics and represented them.⁹⁶ Nature was also used to ‘reclaim’ guardianship over children which was automatically handed to father in legislation. Mrs. Gerald Paget wrote in *Votes for Women*: “Nature decrees that the child is the mother’s: man decrees that it is his.”⁹⁷ NUWSS’ arguments followed the same lines. *The Common Cause* stated: “Women know the needs of the children better than men ... and that is why we want their influence brought to bear in Parliament – by their voting as their special knowledge and feeling instruct them.”⁹⁸ Women, the paper argues, have special feminine knowledge, especially regarding children, which make it important to have women, and through them children, represented in the Parliament.

Hence, childcare and nursing appeared to be a trait to which women were suitable do to their biology. However, both organisations also indicated that there was a choice involved in the matter, and women and girls needed training to be good mothers. Instinct was not enough. Evelyn Sharp, who has been a member of both WSPU and NUWSS, pointed out that the society could not expect girls grow up wanting to be mothers if they were taught by the society that women and mothers were subordinate to men. She mentioned that several girls grow up being pitied that they are not boys and wishing they had not been born as girls which is not the ideal environment for rearing future mothers. Sharp implied that such attitudes can make women choose not to have children.⁹⁹

The NUWSS argued even more strongly that women were more than their biological instincts to have children and needed education to be good mothers and housewives. *The Common Cause* proclaimed in 1909 that finally the general public was realising that women were not born with abilities for housekeeping. Girls needed to be trained to think and make housework more efficient.¹⁰⁰ Similar training should be provided about motherhood. Suffragists argued that future mothers were neglected at birth because they were not given sexual education and told frankly

⁹⁶ Sharp, Evelyn, “Woman’s Suffrage and the Child”, *Votes for Women*, November 1907, 16.

⁹⁷ Mrs. Gerald Paget, “The Good Motherhood”, *Votes for Women*, 13 January 1911, 243.

⁹⁸ “The A. B. C. of Women’s Suffrage”, *The Common Cause*, 9 March 1911, 775.

⁹⁹ Sharp, Evelyn, “Woman’s Suffrage and the Child”, *Votes for Women*, November 1907, 16.

¹⁰⁰ “The Technics of Housekeeping”, *The Common Cause*, 13 May 1909, 65.

about their own health and pregnancy. Bad education and healthcare were thus argued to be the main causes of infant mortality.¹⁰¹ Moreover, Ray Strachey outlined in *The Cause* how the thinking had advanced over the years. In the nineteenth century, girls' education was seen as redundant, since it did not prepare them for marriage. The suffrage campaign, however, managed to convince even previous antisuffragists that woman's place was not only the home.¹⁰² Biology, therefore, was not destiny but rather a basis upon which the training for 'womanly' roles were built. Nature provided women with certain nurturing traits, but it did not determine their lives.

The emphasis on motherhood was not only connected to passing appropriate laws or the state of British homes. The suffrage campaigners very early on linked their struggle to perspectives for the British Empire and race. They argued that women had a special role in the continuation of the British race. As Helena Swanwick stated, only women "can be mothers of the race".¹⁰³ This gave women a significant status in the discussions on race. Especially the suffragettes painted women as guardians of Britain's future who would ensure that the country would remain a strong and vital nation. Christabel Pankhurst attacked men vehemently in her 1913 pamphlet *The Great Scourge and How To End It*. Despite the pamphlet being controversial, especially today when she is accused of misandry, according to historian Susan Kingsley Kent, her statistics were accurate by the contemporary standards, and she was not the first to make some of the arguments about the prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and men's attempts to hide them from their wives.¹⁰⁴ Christabel Pankhurst claimed that the declining birth rate and women's illnesses were caused by promiscuous men who obtained sexually transmitted diseases from prostitutes and then infected their wives. STDs caused sterility and disability and disorders in children. There was panic in Britain about the declining birth rate and the decreasing vitality of the British race. Christabel Pankhurst claimed that these were not caused by any weakness of women's bodies or minds but by men's uncontrollable sexuality. Women, as the guardians of the race, had to put an end to this behaviour which would otherwise lead to "race suicide" which meant the destruction of the British race.¹⁰⁵

The strength of the race was a significant factor in the maintenance of the British Empire, but the suffragettes also stated that women's views were needed in British politics. The nation was compared to a family which also needed mothers to maintain it. Government was called

¹⁰¹ "Infant Mortality", *The Common Cause*, 13 May 1909, 67-68.

¹⁰² Strachey, 1928, 125, 355.

¹⁰³ Swanwick, 1913, 21.

¹⁰⁴ Kingsley Kent, 1990, 107-108.

¹⁰⁵ Pankhurst C., 1913, 10-18.

“the nation’s housekeeping”.¹⁰⁶ By equating nation and the state with family, women could make a natural claim to their right to participate in the political affairs and subvert the separate spheres argument. *Votes for Women* agreed that women’s place is the home and stated: “... as the State is only the larger family, and the country the larger home, woman must be admitted to her share in the management of the country.”¹⁰⁷ Considering how women saw mothers as the primary guardians of the children and the home, I would argue that the suffragettes even attempted to make higher claim on national politics than what the men had. After all, women were more capable of housework and childcare, not only according to the suffrage campaigners but also according to the antisuffragists. However, women could also be interested in politics for politics’ sake. Emmeline Pankhurst toured, for example in Canada, and spoke about suffrage. She noted that women also need to pay attention to the affairs of the Empire and build unity among the women in the different corners of the British rule. Pankhurst indicated that women should take interest in the Empire because it was important to have women paying attention to all aspects of British politics.¹⁰⁸

The physical force argument also appeared in the discussion on motherhood. The WSPU and NUWSS emphasised that women too had physical force, but it was represented in a different form. Men exhibited their physical force by fighting in wars and defending the state while women used their physical force to give birth and care for the children. Both were potentially dangerous tasks in their own rights. The powers of the sexes were complementary, since neither could have responsibility for both. Physical force could not therefore be used as an argument against women’s enfranchisement.¹⁰⁹ There were also some who stated that motherhood was more sacred and dangerous than defending the state. Suffragist Maude Royden argued that this was exhibited by the greater numbers of women dying in childbirth than men dying in wars.¹¹⁰

It seems contradictory for the suffrage organisations to argue that women have physical force which entitles them to the vote while they also claimed that force should not be the basis of franchise. The militant WSPU had a complex relationship with physical force – it proclaimed to be its victim and advocated peace while calling the campaign a war – so I understand why they could be less hesitant to embrace physical force in a positive sense. The NUWSS, however, was championing a more peaceful society and strongly disapproved of the militants because they were too violent and did not believe in the power of words and peaceful agitation.

¹⁰⁶ Pankhurst S., 1911, 505.

¹⁰⁷ “Answers to Correspondents”, *Votes for Women*, 21 May 1908, 186.

¹⁰⁸ “Mrs. Pankhurst’s Departure”, *The Standard*, 5 October 1911, 176.

¹⁰⁹ “Women’s Physical Force”, *The Common Cause*, 3 February 1910, 601; Housman, Laurence “The ‘Physical Force’ Fallacy”, *Votes for Women*, 26 February 1909, 372.

¹¹⁰ “Cause of Women’s Suffrage”, *Manchester Guardian*, 1 October 1908, 12.

Helena Swanwick addressed the question physical force in her book *The Future of the Women's Movement* (1913) which indicates that NUWSS members accepted the idea that men and women had complementary forces but also considered that men should find another outlet for their physical force than war. A peaceful society, one which was not based on violence, was still their aim.¹¹¹ Hence, I interpret the NUWSS stance on the argument as a way to realistically acknowledge that physical force still had a role in the British society while trying to make it present itself in a more acceptable and constructive form.

Nevertheless, linking women to the creation of life was a common and powerful argument. *The Common Cause* stated in its first number that the “mother-half of humanity... the preserver and producer of life” should be as appreciated as men in the British society.¹¹² Christabel Pankhurst also defined women through motherhood, calling them “the mother sex”. She argued that the duty of motherhood, which involved the passing on life, was not given to the weaker sex. Motherhood, she wrote, was a sign of women’s unique worth in the society, and lack of political rights was an insult to maternity.¹¹³ This was a conservative argument and very much in line with the science of the day. Women were defined mainly through their sexuality and reproductive capabilities in the Victorian times. Hence, they were known as “the sex”.¹¹⁴ However, the suffrage campaigners used these claims to assert their right to the public sphere and uplift women’s position. Maternity and giving life, as tasks which only women could do, created a great need for female franchise which would ensure that motherhood was appreciated not only in words but also in deeds. The birth of a boy, who could legislate on her mother’s behalf, was not a political reward.¹¹⁵ Hence, the traditional argument was used to WSPU and NUWSS’s advantage and to improve lives of mothers and women in general.

The suffrage campaigners also questioned the idea of separate spheres as to family and work. This was done through critique over the claims that women did not need the votes because public life did not affect their domestic lives. The WSPU and NUWSS were vocal in pointing out that politics did infer with the private life of women. For instance, laws about inheritance and children influenced women’s lives. The Suffrage Atelier, a group of suffragists and suffragettes publishing artwork and cartoons for the suffrage movement, did a series on unequal laws which affect women. “How the Law ‘Protects the Widow’” and “How the Law ‘Protects the

¹¹¹ Swanwick, 1913, 34-41.

¹¹² “The Hope and Meaning”, *The Common Cause*, 15 April 1909, 3.

¹¹³ Pankhurst, C., 1913, 109.

¹¹⁴ Kingsley Kent, 1990, 32.

¹¹⁵ Galsworthy, John “The Strong-Minded Man”, *Votes for Women*, December 1907, 32.

Widower”” showed that a widow with several children has no right to alter her husband’s will nor is the dead husband obligated to provide for his children due to the laws of England. The widow, however, must provide for her children. The cartoon with the widower demonstrated how man was entitled to her wife’s property if she died without a will. It also notes that if he had died without a will, she would only have the right to a third of his property. The widow is especially portrayed with her children surrounding her to highlight her need as a mother.¹¹⁶ Thus, the laws affected women in their private sphere just as much as they affected men. Despite the suffragettes and suffragists believing and using the separate spheres argument, they could also blur the lines of the sphere and point out double standards.

This was especially demonstrated in the case of working women. The struggles of the working-class, especially women, were a common argument in the rhetoric of NUWSS and WSPU. Women were paid less than men for the same work and had no trade unions to protect or campaign for them. The textiles workers in Northern England were unionised, but it was rare outside that area and industry. The suffrage campaigners argued that the vote would improve their pay and conditions although they were not campaigning for the working-women to get the vote. The unequal wage and work laws affected seriously the life of the working women who could not stay in their ‘own sphere’ but had to work to survive and feed their families.¹¹⁷

Although many suffrage campaigners clearly cared for the struggles of working women, their attitudes could be less than progressive. Several campaigners were patronising and condescending towards them and used the women as props to make a greater impact with their argument. Christabel Pankhurst, who had taken Annie Kenney with her to the Liberal meeting to initiate militancy because a working-class woman would make a greater impact on the Liberals,¹¹⁸ later considered working-class suffragettes less impressive members because she saw them weaker and less intelligent than upper-class women.¹¹⁹ Fawcett claimed militancy as a tactic of working-class women who acted independently. Her use of this argument indicates to me that Fawcett perceived working-class women as wilder than ‘proper’ women which justifies such behaviour.¹²⁰ Even the socialist Sylvia Pankhurst, who especially campaigned amongst the working women of London’s East End and founded the East London Federation of Suffragettes after leaving the WSPU in early 1914, exhibited same arrogance as her sister. In 1909, she portrayed women working as

¹¹⁶ Tickner, 1989, 157.

¹¹⁷ Tickner, 1989, 178.

¹¹⁸ Pankhurst, C., 1959, 50.

¹¹⁹ Pankhurst, S., 1935a, 517.

¹²⁰ Fawcett, “The Disorderly Questions at Liberal Meetings”, *Manchester Guardian*, 13 January 1906, 5.

potato pickers as ugly, dirty “miserable creatures” dressed in rags and exhibiting coarse behaviour. The imagery was a way to condemn wealthy women for not acting sooner to get the vote and improve the status of their suffering sisters who lived in slums.¹²¹ The well-to-do women had clearly let the world go astray, since these potato pickers had fallen so far from grace.

These examples indicate that the organisations were often unable to surpass their class prejudice and that there were different types of femininity. The working-class femininity was questionable femininity to the upper-class women. It was wilder or could completely be missing from the ‘creatures’ that hard working life had destroyed. There was also certain ruthlessness in the WSPU to use the working-women as an argument and yet be ready to discard them when it suited the leadership. WSPU has been accused of ignoring and taking advantage of the working-class women in the historiography. Such claims are often based on Sylvia Pankhurst’s *The Suffrage Movement* where she voiced her disappointment with her mother’s abandonment of socialism.¹²² Historian June Purvis has countered the interpretation with a focus on Emmeline Pankhurst’s radical feminism and disappointment with trade unions who sometimes ignored women’s issues completely. She also notes that the WSPU was always a diverse organisation which had working-class members.¹²³ However, the investigation of both NUWSS and WSPU’s use of working-class women in their arguments indicates to me that at least the leadership was from mainly upper- and middle-classes. The working-class women seemed to have smaller role in the organisations despite some notable exceptions, such as Annie Kenney in the WSPU.

However, the organisations and their upper-class members were highly aware of the struggles the working-class women faced by participating in the movement and wanted to highlight it. Lady Constance Lytton took upon herself to show the double standards in the treatment of working women. As an upper-class lady, she was quickly released after her imprisonments because of her status and fear over her heart condition. However, when she disguised herself as a working-class woman called Jane Warton, her health was not properly examined, and she was treated brutally and force-fed. The procedure resulted in permanent disability.¹²⁴ The suffrage campaigners had a complex relationship to class, and they could simultaneously respect and underrate working-class women.

¹²¹ Pankhurst, S., “The Potato-pickers”, *Votes for Women*, 28 January 1909, 34-36.

¹²² Stanley Holton, 2000, 20, 27.

¹²³ Purvis, 2003, 78, 85.

¹²⁴ Lytton, 1914, 235-295.

Although housework was a slightly less discussed topic, the suffrage campaigners also highlighted how housework was real and arduous work which went unpaid and unappreciated by men and the society. A 1908 suffrage demonstration in Manchester placed “home-makers” among other women’s professions.¹²⁵ Furthermore, Helena Swanwick argued that once women were able to enter the work force, they realised the ‘men’s jobs’ were not as exhausting as they had been led to believe. The suffrage campaigners challenged the idea that women should serve men who come home from their work. Housework could be much more tiring, and it was unpaid and gave women no free time. The life of housewives was far from idleness, so husbands should not expect to come home every day to and have a meal prepared for them.¹²⁶ Moreover, working women had the double burden of housework, children and paid jobs.¹²⁷ Even middle- and upper-class women could have such a fate. Emmeline Pankhurst, for instance, had to both work and take care of children after her husband died.¹²⁸ The suffrage campaigners wanted the British society to realise that housework was real work and needed to be appreciated.

I believe that family and housework were key arguments for both organisations for three reasons. Firstly, it showed that women are central to the existence of the British society. As women’s special qualities as mothers and housewives were highlighted, the suffrage campaigners could illustrate how the society and men could not function without them or their work. Secondly, it illustrated that despite militancy and changing image of women, the suffragettes and suffragists still believed in and upheld certain traditional gender roles. By highlighting motherhood and family, the campaigners made themselves seem more moderate and feminine. When the antisuffragists claimed that the vote would destroy homes and tear families apart,¹²⁹ the campaigners could illustrate their traditional thoughts and show how the vote would benefit the home life. This is not to say that they did not believe in their arguments. Many of leaders of the campaign were mothers, and the continuous focus on the rights of the mothers demonstrates that it was a genuinely important topic for them. Nevertheless, the campaigners could and did also use such arguments in debates and gathered support from the British public. Thirdly, despite the glorifying rhetoric, motherhood and housework were not appreciated enough in the Edwardian society. Mothers had very little rights to their children and housework was not perceived as real work. By tying them to the society and

¹²⁵ “Procession in the Manchester Streets”, *Manchester Guardian*, 26 October 1908, 7.

¹²⁶ Swanwick, 1913, 11-12, 91-92.

¹²⁷ Liddington and Norris, 1978, 35.

¹²⁸ Pankhurst, C., 1959, 111.

¹²⁹ Harrison, 1978, 70.

highlighting their importance, the suffragists and suffragettes could uplift women's previously unappreciated work.

Regarding the private sphere, I claim that the arguments of the NUWSS and WSPU were largely similar. Motherhood was a sacred task of women, but they would only want to be mothers in an ideal society which truly appreciated women and mothers. They had the natural characteristics for it but without proper training and appreciation of women by the society, motherhood was less appealing to women. Choosing motherhood was important, but there was a presumption that most women would choose motherhood if the unequal status was fixed. Nature was seen to have a powerful influence over women. However, there were also some slight differences between the organisations. NUWSS highlighted that women could also be more than mothers and wives whereas to the WSPU the link to civilisation and race was important.

2.3 A Sex War? The Relationship Between Women and Men

The relationship of the NUWSS and WSPU to men and to the relations between women and men were complex. They supported equality, but at the same saw women superior to men in many ways and men even dangerous to women. Still, the organisations envisioned a transformation taking place in the relationship of the sexes which would benefit both sides.

Especially after the suffrage campaign ended when limited female suffrage was achieved and already during the movement's most active years, the suffragettes and suffragists highlighted how women gained a new sense of self and womanhood because of the campaign. Sylvia Pankhurst wrote that the atmosphere was so enthusiastic, positive and powerful at one WSPU meeting in 1908 that "not one woman there could wish in her heart, as so many millions have done, 'if I had only been a man.'"¹³⁰ Ethel Smyth, a suffragette and a close friend of Emmeline Pankhurst, regarded Pankhurst's legacy as gifting women an understanding of their strength, courage and perseverance which had been suppressed since the beginning of time.¹³¹

The organisations critiqued strongly the position in which women had previously held themselves. They claimed that the passiveness and lack of respect for womanhood was caused by men's rule over women. NUWSS and WSPU asserted that men considered women as slaves,

¹³⁰ Pankhurst, S., 1911, 209.

¹³¹ Smyth, 1934, 280.

children, subhuman, witches or animals¹³² which had influenced women's self-identity. Especially Christabel Pankhurst detested how lowly women thought of themselves and believed that militancy was a way to get rid of the "slave spirit" of women.¹³³ Her comment demonstrated that suffrage campaigners did not consider women's low opinion of themselves natural but a result of the socialisation they went through. Helena Swanwick has also realised this and wrote that if women seemed to enjoy and support their unequal status, it was only because of the thousands of years of suppression that they had been subjected to.¹³⁴ Hence, it was important women would start to respect themselves. Such arguments were often accompanied with the idea that men would not respect women if women did not respect their gender first. Christabel Pankhurst stated that women had learnt to respect themselves through militancy, and this newly found self-respect has also made men respect women.¹³⁵ Hence, obtaining men's approval was still as a necessity to fully achieve their goal of a better British society. For suffragettes, militancy was a way to attain it.

The suffrage campaigners particularly attacked the idea that women were men's property. The suffragettes especially argued that private property was appreciated over women. They contrasted the outrage which their destruction of property caused with the treatment of militant suffragists: property was valued over the lives of women and children. Therefore, Emmeline Pankhurst argued, their methods were an attempt restore the true values of the British society in which human life was sacred.¹³⁶ The suffragists also pointed this out when their 'pilgrims' were harassed during their journey. In 1913, the NUWSS decided to arrange a pilgrimage in Wales and England which would end in a great demonstration in London. The purpose was to travel through the countries to promote women's suffrage and come to contact with ordinary Brits. In August, NUWSS sent a letter to government which criticised how the pilgrims were attacked freely without consequences and how window panes were better protected than women.¹³⁷

Mary Richardson made the strongest statement about this by slashing a painting called *Rokeby Venus* by Diego Velázquez at the National Gallery in 1913. Richardson explained her action as a retaliation against the actions that the government took to stop Emmeline Pankhurst and to draw attention to the treatment of Pankhurst and other suffragette prisoners. She suggested that

¹³² Fawcett, 1911, 7, 10; Heale "The Wage of the Married Woman", *Votes for Women*, January 1908, 48; "The Hope and the Meaning, *The Common Cause*, 15 April 1909, 3.

¹³³ Pethick Lawrence, E., 1938, 63.

¹³⁴ Swanwick, 1913, 26.

¹³⁵ "The Social and Political Union", *Manchester Guardian*, 23 October 1908, 8.

¹³⁶ Pankhurst, E., (1914) 2015, 257.

¹³⁷ "Police and Women Suffragists", *Manchester Guardian*, 7 August 1913, 8.

the government tactics were an attempt to commit premeditated murder.¹³⁸ This was already the time of the Cat and Mouse Act which deteriorated the health of several suffragettes. Richardson even compared Pankhurst and the Venus of the painting to each other: “I have destroyed the picture of the most beautiful woman in mythological history as a protest against the government for destroying Mrs. Pankhurst who is the most beautiful character in modern history.”¹³⁹ She believed that the representation of artificial beauty was more appreciated than the life of a real and moral woman.

The WSPU also took the opportunity of shaping the image of women to improve its own negative reputation. Clothing was an important part of it, but the organisation also used humour to combat this view. In the autumn of 1909, Emmeline Pankhurst embarked on a tour to the US to spread the knowledge about their suffrage struggle and collect funds. She opened one of her meetings by stating: “I am what you call a hooligan.” The purpose of such comment was to ridicule the bad reputation of the WSPU by contrasting the feminine-looking Pankhurst with the stereotypes surrounding the suffragettes.¹⁴⁰ Nonetheless, it also showed that women could be radical and feminine at the same time and widened the possible roles for women.

This new, active and independent woman who was born out of the suffrage movement needed to be matched with a modern man. The WSPU highlighted the need for “a new race of men” which would be held to the same moral standards as women and would not oppress the other sex.¹⁴¹ Helena Swanwick also ridiculed the idea that women should be as they were hundred years ago and noted that the wife and husband must be of the same, twentieth-century generation to be complementary.¹⁴² The evolutionary thought of Darwin influenced even the suffrage discussion. However, the suffrage campaigners were also conservative in their ideas about the ‘New Woman’. New Woman was a literary character prevalent in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries who challenged sexual norms and rebelled against the society. Connection with such literary ideas could be used against the suffrage movement by the antisuffragists who saw the campaign as a sign of sexual deviance in some women. Therefore, the suffrage campaigners avoided the direct association with the free sexuality of the New Woman and focused more on the acceptable qualities, such as lack of passivity.¹⁴³

¹³⁸ “The National Gallery Outrage”, *Manchester Guardian*, 13 March 1914, 16.

¹³⁹ Richardson, 1913, 261.

¹⁴⁰ Purvis, 2002, 139.

¹⁴¹ “Mrs. Pankhurst at Kingsway Hall”, *The Times*, 12 August 1913, 5.

¹⁴² Swanwick, 1913, 9.

¹⁴³ Tickner, 1989, 183.

The necessity for a new relationship between men and women allowed an opportunity to imagine a new form of marriage. Although both organisations considered ideal marriage to be that of two equals, suffragettes showed real initiative to change it. Suffragette Una Dugdale married Victor Duval, a WSPU supporter, in 1912. The two attempted to revise the wedding service in which the bride had to promise to obey the groom. This part was meant to be omitted, but the reverend conducting the ceremony informed that the omission might invalidate the marriage. The statement about obedience was kept, but the bride refused to say the word “obey”.¹⁴⁴ Despite the intervention, the two obviously wanted to have a more equal partnership from the start of their marriage without the need of the wife to obey her husband. Nevertheless, it should be remembered that equality in marriage was possible already before the heydays of the suffrage movement. For instance, Emmeline Pethick Lawrence and her husband Frederick worked together for female suffrage for years although Frederick could not join the WSPU.

The organisations also emphasised female solidarity and unity as an opposition to obeying men. It was especially important to the WSPU which dedicated *Votes for Women* to

“the brave women who to-day [sic] are fighting for freedom: to the noble women who all down the ages kept the flag flying and looked forward to this without seeing it: to all women all over the world, of whatever race or creed, or calling, whether they be with us or against us in the fight.”¹⁴⁵

The suffragettes exhibited also their noble side with this statement as they claimed to fight for not only for their suffragette sisters but also to their opponents and all the women in the world. Furthermore, they stated that the sacrifices they were doing were for other women and not men.¹⁴⁶ The NUWSS also believed that women had sacrificed their lives for too long to comfort and provide for men. Ray Strachey criticised nineteenth-century female philanthropy for focusing mainly on men and their issues instead of the suffering of their own sex. Women still thought they came last.¹⁴⁷ The suffrage organisations believed that the warped thinking of women about their own status was the fault of men. Men as a group were perceived as an opponent who tried to keep women in their lowly position.

However, NUWSS was also eager to emphasise the cooperation between men and women. Their newspaper was named *The Common Cause* to highlight that the women’s liberation

¹⁴⁴ “Marriage of a Woman Suffragist”, *The Times*, 15 January 1912, 11.

¹⁴⁵ “Dedication”, *Votes for Women*, November 1907, 13.

¹⁴⁶ Pethick Lawrence, E., “It’s Women for Women Now.”, *Votes for Women*, 30 July 1908, 344.

¹⁴⁷ Strachey, 1928, 88.

was also important for men and children. Instead of dividing men and women, suffrage could unite them. Hence, female enfranchisement was their common cause.¹⁴⁸ The NUWSS also allowed men to join their organisation and continuously highlighted how the society will not improve unless the sexes work together.¹⁴⁹ Conversely, the WSPU was a female-only organisation, and men supporters founded their own political union to support the militants, Men's Political Union for Women's Enfranchisement. Suffragettes considered it crucial that their movement was female-led as it was part of the process of women lifting themselves from the so-called slavery.¹⁵⁰ Historian June Purvis attributes this kind of distrust of men to Emmeline Pankhurst's disappointing experiences in the labour movement. Independent Labour Party, of which she was a supporter, emphasised class over gender and overlooked women's suffrage and participation in the labour movement. Hence, Pankhurst began to believe that only women can give justice to their sex and men should not be directly involved.¹⁵¹ To Purvis, the difference between the organisations arises from their strand of feminism: the Pankhurst-led WSPU was a radical feminist association which emphasised that the patriarchal structures oppress all women, thus requiring women to combat them together while NUWSS's liberal feminism highlights men and women having similar interests and ability to cooperate.¹⁵²

Another explanation for the different attitudes towards men's participation in a female suffrage organisation is that the NUWSS wished to appear as moderate as possible by avoiding accusations of a sex war. Did the suffragists and suffragettes consider themselves to be in a war with men? It is a difficult question to answer because the statement between different members (and even with the same member at a different time) are contradictory.

On one hand, NUWSS and WSPU stated that cooperation between men and women was desirable, and they were trying to establish equal relationship between the sexes. Suffragist Kathleen Courtney wrote to *The Common Cause* to refute the idea that men and women were enemies. Women were not trying to get equal suffrage to use it as a weapon against men, she stated.¹⁵³ The suffragists argued that overwhelming feminine or masculine influence in politics was unacceptable, and there needed to be equal influence on both behalf of men and women.¹⁵⁴ The WSPU chose to convince the public of their lack of sexual antagonism by directly claiming that

¹⁴⁸ "The Hope and the Meaning", *The Common Cause*, 15 April 1909, 3.

¹⁴⁹ "Mrs. Swanwick and the Attitude of Ministers", *Manchester Guardian*, 14 November 1913, 16.

¹⁵⁰ Pankhurst, E., (1914) 2015, 39.

¹⁵¹ Purvis, 2003, 78.

¹⁵² Purvis, 1996, 262, 268.

¹⁵³ Courtney, Kathleen, "Correspondence", *The Common Cause*, 15 April 1909, 11.

¹⁵⁴ "Judgment", *The Common Cause*, 3 February 1910, 387.

they were not trying to instigate one. In 1907, Christabel Pankhurst told the men in her audience to be glad that the war of the WSPU was not against them or all men but against the Liberal government which refused to give women the vote.¹⁵⁵

On the other hand, NUWSS and WSPU's statements about men on the whole support the idea that there was a sex war. Men were several times claimed to be dangerous to women. Men, they argued, had a physical force complementary to women, but it was not a creative force. Men's force was dangerous, violent and destructive, meant for war and battles. Thus, *The Common Cause* called man "the destroyer of life".¹⁵⁶ This was not solely a suffragist idea. The contemporary scientists as well as antisuffragists believe that male energy was potentially dangerous, also to women.¹⁵⁷ The suffragettes demonstrated this several times with their tales of how men had attacked the suffrage campaigners, torn their clothing and beaten them.¹⁵⁸ The reality of chivalry was questioned: women have been thought to need protection of men, but now the suffrage movement highlighted how women needed protection from men.¹⁵⁹

It was not only direct physical violence that the suffrage campaigners pointed out but also the indirect forms of abuse. Christabel Pankhurst emphasised how marriage tarnished woman's health because her husband most likely had been sexually promiscuous and spread the STDs he had acquired to his wife. Women in the early nineteenth century were known for having poor health and women's diseases which were credited to their physical frailty. Christabel Pankhurst argued that such illnesses were actually caused by men and their immoral behaviour. Men were dangerous to women's health and young girls should know this before they entered marriage.¹⁶⁰ Some might dismiss Pankhurst's comments as only presenting her extremist thinking about need for men to be as sexually pure as women, but also NUWSS members had similar ideas. Helena Swanwick also pointed out that many "diseases of women" were caused by STDs spread by men which would make many educated women to rethink marriage.¹⁶¹

Moreover, men were described to be incompetent lawmakers and voters. NUWSS claimed that the political system of Britain was not to blame for its problems but rather men had misused their vote or misunderstood the seriousness of the act of voting.¹⁶² The WSPU highlighted

¹⁵⁵ "Women and the Vote", *Manchester Guardian*, 6 December 1907, 7.

¹⁵⁶ "The Hope and the Meaning", *The Common Cause*, 15 April 1909, 3.

¹⁵⁷ Jorgensen-Earp and Jorgensen, 2016, 144.

¹⁵⁸ Pankhurst S., 1911, 414-418.

¹⁵⁹ Swanwick, 1911, 181.

¹⁶⁰ Pankhurst, C., 1913, 32, 66, 102-103.

¹⁶¹ Swanwick, 1913, 17-18.

¹⁶² "The Claim for the Vote", *Manchester Guardian*, 28 October 1911, 10.

how men had mismanaged the state: rich had all the political and economic power in the society while the poor and their despair was ignored.¹⁶³ Women were seen as the answer to fix the rotten situation. They would be eager voters who would take their duty seriously and contribute to the common good. A particular cartoon was popular among the suffrage campaigners which highlighted this aspect. It compared disenfranchised women and enfranchised men to each other. Women could be a mayor, nurse, mother, doctor or a factory worker and not have the vote. Men, however, could keep their right to vote even if they had been a convict, mentally ill, procurer of prostitutes, unfit for military service or an alcoholic.¹⁶⁴ The purpose of the cartoon was to critique the double standard in franchise and show men in an unfavourable light. The suffrage campaigners indicated that morally upstanding women are needed to balance the unfit yet franchised men. Once again, women were claimed to be more moral than men.

Men were not only declared dangerous and incompetent, but they were also heavily ridiculed. Both organisations infantilised men to mock their disapproval of voting women. Emmeline Pethick Lawrence called men babies for fearing equality with women when they actually need women's help in running the society.¹⁶⁵ NUWSS criticised the suffragettes for using violence because that was imitating "big babies of men" who are incapable of solving conflicts peacefully.¹⁶⁶ I see the suffrage campaigners emphasising themselves as motherly and nurturing figures in this scenario. Women take care of the childish 'man babies' and govern better. Men were also accused of being hysterical. *The Common Cause* noted that that women were no more hysterical than men,¹⁶⁷ and a militant suffragist told the police not to be too hysterical when they were arresting her.¹⁶⁸ The talk of hysteria was clearly an attempt to erase the idea that suffrage campaigners were women suffering from hysteria and point out that men could behave unreasonably as well.

The bravery and masculinity of men was also questioned. The WSPU took pride in being able to turn the gender roles upside down and demonstrate how male politicians avoided and ran from women asking for votes. They called the Cabinet Ministers "cry-babies and cowards" for avoiding the heckling suffragettes. Emmeline Pethick Lawrence compared such behaviour with the courage and strength of the suffragettes.¹⁶⁹ Christabel Pankhurst also pointed this out and derided

¹⁶³ "Woman Suffrage Demonstration", *The Times*, 8 April 1907, 10.

¹⁶⁴ Tickner, 1989, 159.

¹⁶⁵ Pethick Lawrence, E., "Should Women Have Special Tramcars?", *Votes for Women*, 13 August 1908, 376;

¹⁶⁶ "The Policy of the Militants", *Manchester Guardian*, 20 August 1912, 7.

¹⁶⁷ "A Silly Scare", *The Common Cause*, 15 April 1909, 1.

¹⁶⁸ "Militant Suffragists in Newcastle", *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 11 October 1909, 99.

¹⁶⁹ Pethick Lawrence, E., "Cabinet Ministers' Fear of Women", *Votes for Women*, 6 August 1908, 360-361.

how even the Minister for War Richard Haldane did not the courage to face the WSPU. She stated that some women were braver than some men.¹⁷⁰ Mocking men appears to have been a way to assert equality between the sexes or even female superiority. Ridiculing men challenged their dominance in the society and pointed out how men could behave in a ridiculous and weak manner, undeserving of the vote. It was also a way to improve the image of femininity in the society or at least among the suffrage campaigners.

Nevertheless, women were still tied to men and their nature which gave womanhood a responsibility over them. Since men were fighting children, full of destructive power and even hysteria, women had to act as a stabilising influence. I have already mentioned how women would act as moral influence in the society but the same applied particularly to men. Members in both organisations argued that physical force was a necessity of the past which was now behind. Women were the more peaceful and evolved sex which now had the responsibility to educate men and help them to progress to their level.¹⁷¹ This idea strikes to me especially as a statement of female superiority over men.

The direct statements of the WSPU and NUWSS on sex war are confusing. While the WSPU argued that there was no sex war, it claimed that only giving women the votes would end the “sex antagonism”.¹⁷² Similarly, Emmeline Pankhurst stated that the First World War ended “the war of women against men.”¹⁷³ Sylvia Pankhurst also claimed that her sister Christabel was supporting sex war in the few years preceding the war.¹⁷⁴ However, such statements by Sylvia Pankhurst must be considered critically because of her personal feelings towards her sister. With WSPU, it appears that the denials over sex war happened in the earlier years, before militancy increased. Therefore, I presume that they later embraced at least some idea of a sex war.

The NUWSS is a more complex case because of their emphasis on male-female cooperation in the campaign. To me it seems that the organisation was caught between promoting ‘feminine’ values and maintaining its moderate stance on men in a society where the WSPU was engaged in a guerrilla warfare and extreme rhetoric about men. No one embodies this contradiction better than Helena Swanwick. Her 1913 book is adamant that there was no sex war, but she also noted that only liberty can end “the war of the sexes”.¹⁷⁵ Hence, I believe that NUWSS held many

¹⁷⁰ “Miss Pankhurst at the Free Trade Hall”, *Manchester Guardian*, 20 January 1909, 4.

¹⁷¹ Pankhurst C., “The Commons Debate on Woman Suffrage, With a Reply”, 1908, 20; Swanwick, “The Policy of the Militants”, *Manchester Guardian*, 20 August 1912, 7.

¹⁷² Pethick Lawrence, F., “The Elements of the Woman Suffrage Demand”, *Votes for Woman*, 19 Mach 1909, 444.

¹⁷³ Pankhurst, E., (1914) 2015, 6.

¹⁷⁴ Pankhurst, S., 1935a, 522.

¹⁷⁵ Swanwick, 1913, 19, 34-35.

ideas in common with the WSPU and what can be called a sex war but did not fully commit itself to supporting one. Nevertheless, it should be noted that neither society imagined that women would end up dominating the society and suppressing men. They only thought that their moral values would become the new norm and help to improve and soften the society in which men and women would coexist in equality. The situation before the achievement of this end could be called a sex war in my opinion.

There has also been discussion among historians whether the suffrage campaigners considered to be their movement to be a sex war. I agree with Susan Kingsley Kent who has argued that the suffrage movement was the way to end the sex war which existed in the British society.¹⁷⁶ Martin Pugh disagrees with this interpretation and claims that several campaigners had good relationships with their fathers, husbands and other men, and they did not aim to radically change the gender roles.¹⁷⁷ Pugh seems to think that considering the sexes to struggle against each other means that the suffragists and suffragettes must have been bitter towards men which is not necessary. Being able to appreciate, work with and love men is not mutually exclusive to considering that the genders in the society are at odds with each other. Furthermore, he overlooks the concept that suffrage campaigners could both support subversive ideas about the roles of women and men while also maintaining some traditional gender roles.

The suffrage campaigners also had a contradictory view on masculinity. While masculinity was seen as a destructive power, the campaigners still defended men against the attacks of antisuffragists. The claim that the vote would make women masculine was a common one, but some suffrage opponents argued that it would make men effeminate. The suffragists pointed to Australia as an example where men were just as masculine as their English counterparts, so suffrage in the UK was not going to affect the masculinity of British men.¹⁷⁸ Furthermore, although men were dangerous to women and did not protect women as the rules of chivalry dictated, women could still demand chivalrous behaviour. For example, when a crowd of men attacked Emmeline Pankhurst during one of her tours in the UK, she asked them, “Are none of you men?”¹⁷⁹ She seemed to think that ‘real’ men would have not attacked her but respected a woman and defended her. Like with femininity, the suffrage campaigners both defended the traditional roles and demanded them to be changed.

¹⁷⁶ Kingsley Kent, 1990, 5.

¹⁷⁷ Pugh, 2000, 30-32.

¹⁷⁸ “Australian Example”, *The Common Cause*, 12 January 1911, 652.

¹⁷⁹ Pankhurst, E., (1914) 2015, 91.

Overall, the suffrage campaigners had somewhat similar views on men and women, masculinity and femininity, as the scientists of that era. Havelock Ellis, an English physician, wrote several works on women, men and sexuality. For example, he argued that women had a closer connection to children which helped them to care for them better than men. Men and women had clear differences between them as to emotionality and force, but these characteristics were designed to be complementary and neither sex was superior to the other. Equality between women and men was good for the society and British civilisation, he argued.¹⁸⁰ Still, the demands and ideas of the suffrage campaigners did not adhere to the views of the public, even if they were similar to the writings of scientists and were therefore radical to the general audience.

The relationship between women and men according to the suffrage campaigners was based on the renegotiation of femininity and masculinity. Some aspects of the traditional gender roles would stay but others would be discarded. Both genders needed to evolve to better match and respect each other. Although there was an ongoing sex war, its end would mark a new and an equal era for both. The arguments by the NUWSS and WSPU were highly similar in this regard. The main difference was that the National Union was more hesitant about declaring an all-out sex war than the WSPU.

¹⁸⁰ Ellis, 1894, 313-314, 369, 395-396.

3. The First World War 1914-1918

3.1 War and Gender

United Kingdom declared war to Germany on August 4, 1914, thus making Britain a participant in the First World War. The decision did not come as a surprise to the suffrage movement. Throughout the summer, the suffrage campaigners had been aware of the heightened situation in the European politics although many had hoped that the conflict could be solve peacefully. Ever since the Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria was assassinated in Serbia, the stability of peace in Europe had been shaky. When the war finally broke out, NUWSS and WSPU were unified in condemnation of violence. Emmeline Pankhurst's autobiography was finished in the autumn of 1914, and she called the war "savage, unsparing and barbarous" and insisted that women's militancy was not as destructive. Pankhurst saw war as a form of men's militancy and used the opportunity to once again point out the double standards between men and women. Women's militant campaign, which claimed no outside lives, was condemned while men's bloody wars were celebrated.¹⁸¹ Christabel Pankhurst's attitude was more disparaging towards men. In an article in the *Suffragette*, she wrote how the war was a punishment by God and nature for the subjugation of women. Man-made civilisation was going to be destroyed, as it should, and a better society raise from the ruin.¹⁸² The WSPU leaders used the war as an opportunity to point out the shortcomings of men and why female influence was required in politics.

While the WSPU perhaps received some enjoyment from being proven right about men's nature, the NUWSS participated in a mass demonstration by several suffrage and women's organisations to urge for a peaceful solution to the conflict on August 4. Helena Swanwick noted in her autobiography that the meeting turned out not to be a peace gathering. The original resolution advocating peace was abandoned in favour of emphasis on the effects of the horrors of war on women, children and civilisation. Nevertheless, the resolution also encouraged governments to find a peaceful solution to their differences. Still, the drifts between women on the peace issue were already beginning to show. This is evident from the confusion and changing purpose of the meeting, and the some of the comments by the participants. Aino Malmberg, a Finnish journalist, shocked Millicent Fawcett by stating that although she was against war, she was glad that finally her country

¹⁸¹ Pankhurst, (1914) 2015, 5.

¹⁸² De Vries, 1994, 76.

was going to be freed from Russian domination. As the UK was now an ally of Russia, Fawcett disapproved of such comments about their partner in war.¹⁸³

Soon the opinions began to change. The government chose to release the remaining suffragette prisoners, so in a letter dated August 13, Emmeline Pankhurst declared that the militant campaign would be suspended. Although the decision was reasoned with the need to recuperate after the years of arduous campaigning and militancy seeing mild compared to actual warfare in the European continent, the organisation had also changed its view on the war. She wrote:

“... we believe that under the joint rule of enfranchised women and men the nations of the world will, owing to women’s influence and authority, find a way of reconciling the claims of peace and honour and of regulating international relations without bloodshed; we nevertheless believe also that matters having come to the present pass it was inevitable that Great Britain should take part in the war”.¹⁸⁴

Although women were still viewed as a central factor in creating a peaceful society without warfare, the current situation dictated that the UK take part in the war, and the WSPU declared to support it in the present situation.

Why did the WSPU change its attitude? Several historians have followed Sylvia Pankhurst’s arguments that the organisation abandoned suffrage because it became caught up in the militarism and xenophobia which was prevalent in the British society in the early phases of the war, thus abandoning the peaceful goals of the women’s movement.¹⁸⁵ However, Sylvia Pankhurst herself has also presented another reason. In *The Life of Emmeline Pankhurst*, she echoed the reasons given by her mother and argued that it was a practical adjustment of policy as the suffragette violence would not advance the cause. Furthermore, she highlighted Emmeline Pankhurst’s private reasons. Pankhurst had a great love for France where she had lived as a young woman and for a short while planned to stay and found a family. Now France was suffering from German aggression which was perceived as unacceptable in the UK.¹⁸⁶ Among historians, Nicoletta F. Gullace has suggested a different answer. She argues that supporting war was a practical move, but not for the reasons that Sylvia Pankhurst argued. Being patriotic would prove to be useful in the long-term for the suffrage movement. Gullace claims that the organisation evaluated the situation and saw the best way to serve women’s cause in the long-term was to support the war and prove

¹⁸³ Swanwick, 1935, 239-240.

¹⁸⁴ Pankhurst, E., *Votes for Women*, 13 August 1914, 282.

¹⁸⁵ Pankhurst S., 1935a, 593-595.

¹⁸⁶ Pankhurst S., 1935b, 150-151.

their patriotism. By demonstrating that women did equal service in war, the WSPU would be able to make a strong case for suffrage when the question of franchise rose again.¹⁸⁷

I perceive the policy change was both a practical change and based on a real worry over the survival of Britain. The German invasion of Belgium was widely sensationalised, and there were stories of rape and murder of women and children. Although many of them proved to be fabrications, the invasion and subsequent German actions became known as the Rape of Belgium.¹⁸⁸ Hence, there was a genuine fear of the behalf of countries like France and Belgium and that the same could happen to Britain. However, there was also a pragmatism as indicated by Christabel Pankhurst's comment on her return to home from France after the war broke out. She had been hiding in Paris to avoid arrest in the UK due to militancy. On her journey to London, she recalled how she was trying to see how the WSPU could best work to maintain women's rights and work for the vote during the war.¹⁸⁹ This indicates to me that the decisions were made with the suffrage movement in mind.

Ultimately, supporting the war was not such an ideological leap as some might suggest. The organisation indicated early on that it saw the war as similar to their militant campaign. It was a 'just war' against a dangerous enemy. Christabel Pankhurst actually called the war "national militancy" and stated that the suffragettes could not be pacifists because their country was in danger. The WSPU leadership explained that they had fought to improve their country with militancy and now they fought for it by supporting the war. Campaigning during the war was pointless because they were in danger of losing their country to the foreign invaders.¹⁹⁰ Patriotism was portrayed as a natural continuation of their pre-war policy to work for the betterment of the British society with whatever means necessary. Like with militancy, the WSPU argued that there was no other choice than to wage war in the present situation.¹⁹¹

Moreover, the war was constructed as a gendered conflict in which the suffragettes would naturally support the female side. This helped to maintain ideological continuation about physical force and gender. Christabel Pankhurst particularly focused on the differences between the British and German societies and states. She argued that Germany was a militaristic and autocratic state which governed by force and not by consent of the people. Militants, like the suffragettes, had always fought for governance by consent and morals and resisted force. Now the UK had to be

¹⁸⁷ Gullace, 2002, 118-119, 141.

¹⁸⁸ Gullace, 2002, 17-18.

¹⁸⁹ Pankhurst, C., 1959, 287.

¹⁹⁰ Pankhurst, C., 1959, 288.

¹⁹¹ "Mrs. Pankhurst's Exhortation to Patriotism", *The Times*, 1 December 1914, 5.

militant to resist this force and fight for peace. Germany's aggression and militarism were explained as it being a male nation. Male nations did not grant freedom to women which made German women one of the most oppressed groups in Europe. Moreover, male nations were aggressive, militaristic, brutal and less developed than other nations.¹⁹² War was justified because otherwise Germany would destroy other smaller and female nations, such as Belgium. Belgium had been invaded by the Germans and several refugees had arrived in the UK. In the WSPU rhetoric and the rare demonstrations which were held, Belgium was represented as a barefooted woman with a tattered flag. 'The Rape of Belgium' also connotated a strong threat of sexual violence against women.¹⁹³ Thus, WSPU combined patriotism with their feminism and the values they had advocated the before the war. Men were still dangerous destroyers but this time it was the male nations and men in other states which needed to be defeated. As the historian Jacqueline de Vries notes, the WSPU still spoke of a sex war, only now in a different context and a real war.¹⁹⁴

Despite the continuing to promote the idea of a sex war, the WSPU was forced to re-evaluate its stance of British masculinity. The British society during the war was focused on praising the British masculinity of its soldiers. Compared to the brutal German soldiers, the British men were honourable, gentle and kind to their enemies, especially to women. They respected women more than the German men. Nevertheless, there was a contradiction with the British soldier being both an efficient killing machine and a protector of women.¹⁹⁵ Still, the chivalry of the soldiers was emphasised. Emmeline Pankhurst noted that men were fighting to protect women because women could not do it themselves.¹⁹⁶

Moreover, the ideal masculinity in war was closely connected to service in the eyes of the WSPU. It was men's duty to fight in the war. Emmeline Pankhurst claimed that there were now women who envied men for their ability and opportunity to go to frontlines of this honourable fight although they had never before been jealous of men.¹⁹⁷ In 1916, when the government began considering the widening of franchise also to women and a larger group of men, Emmeline Pankhurst objected to it if soldiers and sailors were not enfranchised as well. She was horrified by the idea that Britain could be ruled by pacifist men who would have let Germany conquer the UK.¹⁹⁸ Pacifists were not considered real and masculine men because they avoided their duty to

¹⁹² Pankhurst, C., 1914, 2-5.

¹⁹³ Tickner, 1989, 232-233.

¹⁹⁴ De Vries, 1994, 82.

¹⁹⁵ Gullace, 2002, 49.

¹⁹⁶ "Mrs. Pankhurst's Exhortation to Patriotism", *The Times*, 1 December 1914, 5.

¹⁹⁷ "Mrs. Pankhurst's Exhortation to Patriotism", *The Times*, 1 December 1914, 5.

¹⁹⁸ Pankhurst S., 1935a, 601.

fight. Nevertheless, Christabel Pankhurst never fully discarded her contempt for men or the juxtaposition of women and men. When she was heckled in New York, she told the audience that men are the truly protected sex, since women would never mistreat them for interruptions the way the suffragettes had been assaulted.¹⁹⁹ In 1915, Christabel Pankhurst noted that Belgian women needed protection, and the British women were ready to provide the army for Belgium if their men were not.²⁰⁰ Although the protection by British army meant that male soldiers' chivalry was necessary, women's commanding position in the scenario meant that women were more willing to act to protect small nations from Germany than men. Thus, she questioned men's masculinity and willingness to fight.

Not all suffragettes were satisfied with the new direction of the WSPU. Some felt that the WSPU leadership had discarded the suffrage goal. In October 1915, some suffragettes gathered to a meeting and passed a resolution condemning the use of the WSPU name in association with the causes which had nothing to do with women's enfranchisement.²⁰¹ This was a clear criticism of especially Emmeline Pankhurst who travelled around the UK making recruitment speeches under the WSPU name. By March 1916, two new organisations, *The Suffragettes of the WSPU* and *Independent WSPU*, were established. They planned to refocus their energies to the suffrage campaign.²⁰² Moreover, some former WSPU leaders also disapproved of Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst for their militarists war policy. Emmeline and Frederick Pethick Lawrence and Sylvia Pankhurst had left the organisation in the pre-war years because of the increasing militancy which they were not able to support. The Pethick Lawrences founded *United Suffragists* in early 1914 to create a suffrage association open to all. During the war years, the organisation focused on suffrage and peace work.²⁰³

In the NUWSS, the conflicts within the organisation were more profound. As a democratic society, the Union wanted to determine its policy according to the opinions of its branches. In the autumn of 1914, it sent out a letter asking what the policy of the organisation should be. They received around 200 replies, and majority of the branches supported the suspension of suffrage campaigning and starting relief work. This became the official policy. Millicent Fawcett wrote a statement to *The Common Cause* to explain the abandonment of suffrage work. She explained that although the organisation had worked for peace as long as possible, now that the war

¹⁹⁹ Pankhurst, C., 1915, 5.

²⁰⁰ Pankhurst, C., 1915, 8.

²⁰¹ "The Women's Social and Political Union", *Manchester Guardian*, 23 October 1915, 11.

²⁰² Purvis, 2002, 284.

²⁰³ "The Herald of the New Year", *Votes for Women*, 1 January 1915, 1.

was raging on, they had the duty to serve the British state. Nonetheless, she also connected war service to suffrage: "Let us show ourselves worthy of citizenship".²⁰⁴

Not all of the Executive Council of the NUWSS were satisfied with this decision. Several members, such as Helena Swanwick, Catherine Marshall and Isabella Ford, felt that NUWSS should be an organisation advocating peace. These pacifists identified militarism as the main cause of women's subjugation. Militarists societies, according to C. K. Ogden and Mary Sargent Florence, were controlled by physical force and violence. Militarism infiltrated every aspect of the society, even in peace times. Women would always be the oppressed sex in societies where the strongest dominated purely because of their physical prowess. Patriarchy was interwoven into the fabric of militarism. They also claimed that nations, such as Australia, New Zealand or Finland, had enfranchised women because they were most free from the influence of militarism. Furthermore, once women had gained equal political power with men, peace in the society would be guaranteed because of women's peace-loving nature.²⁰⁵ These arguments were a direct continuation of their pre-war views of physical force and women. The only addition was the use of militarism as the overall cause of women's oppression instead of physical force.

The pacifists saw women's peacefulness caused by their traditional roles in the society. Especially Catherine Marshall articulated it clearly in her 1915 pamphlet *Women and War*. Women are mothers, wives and housekeepers, and war seeks to destroy their homes and families. Their motherhood causes them to be horrified by the destruction and desire to protect life and home.²⁰⁶ Helena Swanwick also noted this. She claimed that men were the creation of women which is why women or mothers maintained rights to their sons and through them to international affairs and wars.²⁰⁷ The pacifists remained committed to the view which all suffragists and suffragettes proclaimed before the war: motherhood was the supreme power in the world to create life and peace and gave women a special place in the society.

It is particularly interesting to notice that the arguments of the pacifist suffragists and the suffragettes supporting the war were based upon the same assumptions about physical force and women's status. Patriarchal 'male' nations suppressed women and disrespected femininity because they relied on physical force to conduct the society's affairs. However, the groups disagreed on appropriate action, much like the constitutionalist and militants on militancy. Emmeline and

²⁰⁴ Wiltsher, 1985, 27.

²⁰⁵ Ogden and Florence, 1915, 56-59.

²⁰⁶ Marshall, 1915, 35-42.

²⁰⁷ Grayzel, 1999, 159-160.

Christabel Pankhurst, and those suffragettes who still followed them, saw the First World War as another just war which meant that the use of physical force to oppose force was acceptable. To them, it was the only way to protect the higher position of women in the United Kingdom. Pacifist suffragists had disapproved of militancy because it used their much-disliked physical force and transferred this thinking into warfare in 1914. Use of force was never acceptable because it would not improve women's status. Furthermore, the groups had different views on women's peaceful nature. Both agreed that women were naturally more peace-loving than men. Christabel Pankhurst, however, saw it as a threat, since Germans might appeal to women's "noblest sentiments" and manage to hinder the war effort²⁰⁸ while the pacifists praised it as a necessary quality for the creation of a better world.²⁰⁹

These pacifist suffragists of the NUWSS believed they had to change the policy of the National Union and began to work towards it already in early the autumn of 1914. In October, Helena Swanwick wanted to call a Council meeting to debate the potential terms of peace. The idea was rejected, but a normal Provisional Council Meeting was held in November. It passed a resolution which recommended establishing the terms of peace on partnership and not revenge.²¹⁰ Nevertheless, two camps were already forming with the NUWSS: the pacifists and the war supporters.

Millicent Fawcett strongly rejected all pacifist attempts. At the end of 1914, Dutch suffragists began to arrange an international suffrage meeting under the auspices of the International Women's Suffrage Alliance (IWSA) in Hague for April 1915. The goal of the meeting was to discuss on what terms lasting peace could be achieved, and it was open to all women from neutral and belligerent countries as it agreed not to examine culpability of the current war.²¹¹ Fawcett strongly disapproved of this meeting ever since NUWSS was invited to participate in December 1914 although several suffragists were interested in attending. According to historian David Rubinstein, she was ready to use her considerable influence and respect in the NUWSS and the suffrage circles to rein in the pacifist suffragists. She believed that the conference would only result in infighting and threatened to resign as IWSA vice-president if the meeting was arranged.²¹²

The Annual Council Meeting of the NUWSS in February 1915 was the final breaking point. Some of the suggested resolutions were hardly pacifist, but they were still rejected by the

²⁰⁸ Pankhurst, C., 1915, 15.

²⁰⁹ Ogden and Florence, 1915, 59.

²¹⁰ Wiltsher, 1985, 64-65.

²¹¹ "Report of the International Congress of Women", 1915, 3-5.

²¹² Rubinstein, 1991, 218-219.

Chair. For example, a resolution calling the NUWSS to campaign for peaceful arbitration of conflicts and reject the use of physical force in international affairs was renounced.²¹³ Moreover, Fawcett held a speech during the Council meeting in which she discarded the members' attempts to advance peace and claimed that until France and Belgium were free, "it is akin to treason to talk of peace".²¹⁴ Soon afterwards, the pacifist members of the Executive Council began to resign. They explained that the question was not about supporting or opposing the war but rather about the use and meaning of the vote. In a joint statement, they argued that

"The real cleavage of opinion in the Union lies between those who consider it essential to work for the vote simply as a political tool, and those who believe that the demand for the vote should be linked with the advocacy of the deeper principles which underlie it."²¹⁵

The pacifists argued that they saw female suffrage as a way to reform to society and even the world into a peaceful civilisation while the remaining NUWSS members perceived the vote only as way to get women's voices heard in politics. They imagined that women's enfranchisement would uplift female ideals of peace and cooperation into the mainstream politics. The NUWSS, however, was perceived as betraying these ideals with its more pragmatic look on the war and suffrage.

Why did Fawcett deprioritise these ideals and vehemently opposed the pacifist suffragists when she had also supported them before the war? Firstly, it was impossible to not to harm the reputation and chances of success of the NUWSS and oppose the war. British society especially in the early stages of the war was overrun with what might be called war fever. Support for the war was demanded from all citizens, and everyone was expected to do their part to support the British war effort. Pacifists and conscientious objectors were ostracised by the society because they were seen as shrinking from their duties or sometimes even as pro-German spies. Historian Anne Wiltsher has pointed out that if the NUWSS and women in general had appeared too pacifist and conciliatory towards their enemies, women might have not been enfranchised during the war.²¹⁶ Therefore, it is perfectly understandable why Fawcett wished to disassociate her organisation from pacifist suffragists and their efforts. Moreover, many women could be genuinely patriotic and want to do what they could to help their country.

²¹³ Wiltsher, 1985, 70-71.

²¹⁴ Rubinstein, 1991, 219-220.

²¹⁵ "Women Suffragists and the War", *Manchester Guardian*, 7 June 1915, 9.

²¹⁶ Wiltsher, 1985, 81.

Secondly, Fawcett had a different concept of the war than the pacifists. She always viewed the suffrage movement as a democratic movement for women's freedom.²¹⁷ Germany was an autocratic state that threatened the democracy of the UK. She argued that women's suffrage was a part of the freedom and democracy the Allies were trying to preserve. Therefore, it was the duty of women to support the war in their own ways or their cause would be lost.²¹⁸ Much like the WSPU, Fawcett believed that unless the war was won, there would not be any suffrage movement or democracy left. It was more important to maintain a British state where they could still struggle for the vote than to adhere pre-war ideals.

The split within the NUWSS also reflected in the groups' views on men. NUWSS changed its perception on masculinity like the WSPU. *The Common Cause* described how military training turned boys into men, physically as well as psychologically, and made them ready for heroism.²¹⁹ Masculinity was now something to be praised and achieved through war. The pacifist suffragist, however, still discussed the dangers of masculinity. Men were still perceived to have destructive powers which were used in supposedly heroic bloodshed. Women were needed to temper men.²²⁰ Nonetheless, pacifist women could also work with men and appreciate them. Helena Swanwick was a member of the *Union of Democratic Control* which aimed to make the control of the foreign policy democratic and thus deny states the opportunity to declare war without the approval of their citizens. She later recalled how kind and gentle the pacifist men of the organisation had been.²²¹ It seems to be that to women like Swanwick, men as a large group could be destructive force due to the societal structures but individually be pacifists and work for the common good.

There were also some similarities between the NUWSS and its former members which demonstrates that the NUWSS did not completely abandon its previous ideological stances or ideas. Both groups of suffragists highlighted how women suffered the most in war. Although the focus in the society was usually on the soldiers, their sacrifice and hardships, these suffragists emphasised that women had always suffered during wartimes and usually more than the men at the front. Pacifist suffragist Margaret Ashton argued that non-combatant women had an equal burden to bear in war when compared to the soldiers.²²² Millicent Fawcett similarly claimed that women's position was worse than that of men and soldiers because they faced unique circumstance unknown to

²¹⁷ Rubinstein, 1991, 138.

²¹⁸ Fawcett, 1920, 86-87.

²¹⁹ "The Cup of Strength", *The Common Cause*, 23 July 1915, 210.

²²⁰ Ogden and Florence, 1915, 140.

²²¹ Swanwick, 1935, 254-257.

²²² "Suffragists' Activity in Relief", *Manchester Guardian*, 11 November 1914, 3.

males.²²³ She then referred to Belgian women, so it is possible that she indicated the (sexual) violence that civilians had faced when the German army invaded the country. This emphasis on women's sacrifice served two ends. Firstly, it challenged the idea of war as an entirely male experience where women had no role. Especially in the total war of the First World War, the home front had an equal role to the frontlines in France in ensuring the survival of Britain. Secondly, it was a way to stake claim in political participation and society. Women might not fight in wars, but they suffer equally from the consequences, and therefore should have a say on whether wars are waged or not.

The war changed the power dynamics between the different suffrage organisations or groups, and the state and public. The fervent patriotism of the WSPU made them popular among the public, and the militants improved their reputation. Even the British government could now approve of their actions and even cooperate with them if necessary. Pacifist suffragists, however, could now be attacked when they tried to advocate for a peaceful resolution, regardless of whether they had been a peaceful suffragist or a militant suffragette before the war.²²⁴ Since the state perceived pacifism as treasonous and suspicious behaviour, suddenly even the law-abiding suffragists were in opposition to the government which expected total loyalty to the British state and its war effort. The tables had turned: militancy was no longer dangerous and revolutionary because pacifism had taken its place.²²⁵

War was a gendered issue in the First World War to the suffragists and suffragettes. It was proof of what the women had claimed before 1914: masculinity was dangerous and destructive. However, both NUWSS and WSPU members became split on the issue of what to do in war. It boiled down to their different views on women's duties: other chose patriotism and defending the UK while others considered their peaceful ideals more important. With the WSPU, their past ideology and militancy explains why it easy for them to support the war. NUWSS, however, was torn between two factions which ultimately led to the resignation of the pacifists. Moreover, the perceptions of masculinity changed among the campaigners. British men became heroic figures in the British society which some of the suffrage campaigners also supported. Although men had caused the war, not all men, particularly the British soldiers, were as brutal as their German enemies. But how did women perceive themselves and their tasks in Britain in a state of war?

²²³ "The Suffering Belgians", *Manchester Guardian*, 21 October 1914, 7.

²²⁴ Gullace, 2002, 124, 127.

²²⁵ Grayzel, 1999, 157.

3.2 Canary Girls and Patriotic Mothers: Women's Work and Family in War

Since the suffrage work was suspended, the NUWSS and WSPU directed their energy to other, usually women-related, tasks. Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst considered women to have a two-folded duty in the war. Firstly, women needed rally the whole nation to support the war and get men to enlist in the army which was volunteer-based until 1916. In her first meeting in England when she returned from exile, Christabel Pankhurst said that militant women need to awaken the militant men into enlisting and fighting for their country.²²⁶ The speaking tours of the two Pankhursts throughout the UK were a reflection of the government's propaganda to make men enlist by using women. A famous poster showed two women and a child watching leaving soldiers together from a window with a text which stated: "Women of Britain say – GO!"²²⁷ Women were meant to encourage men to defend their country. For the Pankhursts, the motivation was to prove that women were as patriotic as men although they could not show it by enlisting and going to the front. Emmeline Pankhurst especially requested women to do what they could for the war effort to prove this.²²⁸

This duty to pressure men into enlisting and demonstrating women's patriotism is clearly illustrated by the stories of the white feathers. According to Sylvia Pankhurst, the suffragettes "handed the white feather to every young man they encountered wearing civilian dress".²²⁹ Since white feather was a sign of cowardice, the followers of the WSPU publicly shamed men who they presumed to be civilians and not serving their country by going to the front. Today it is a difficult topic to study because these women have been shamed and the stories of soldiers receiving the feather out of uniform or enlisting because of it and dying are prevalent. Very few women have admitted after the war that they were one of these feather-handing women.²³⁰ Nevertheless, the usual stories which survive describe an ununiformed soldier who is confronted by woman and given a white feather. The man is then revealed to be a soldier, often a wounded one, and the woman is shamed instead. For example, P. C. S Vine had lost his leg in France when a woman met him in at a train station. She did not realise his injury and gave him the feather. Vine simply stood up to show his lack of a leg, and the woman fled, horrified by the situation.²³¹

²²⁶ "Our London Correspondence", *Manchester Guardian*, 9 September 1914, 4.

²²⁷ Grayzel, 1999, 86-88.

²²⁸ "Women for Work on Munitions", *Manchester Guardian*, 2 July 1915, 8.

²²⁹ Pankhurst, S., 1935a, 594.

²³⁰ Gullace, 1997, 198; Beckett, 2008.

²³¹ Gullace, 1997, 200-201.

The white feather campaign has made several historians to examine the power structures in the relationship between the genders as to the recruitment and women. Handing out feathers was a way for women to do their war duty very publicly and encourage men to enlist. It questioned a man's masculinity and could force him into enlisting by essentially calling him a coward. Thus, it was a gendered act. Men, who were expected to be chivalrous and protect women, were not doing their job, so women challenged them and even forced them to lay down their lives for their country and British women.²³² Historian Nicolletta F. Gullace has argued that recruiting women were both conservative and radical. On one hand, they maintained the old gender structures and expected men to be 'manly' and prove their masculinity by enlisting and fighting. On the other hand, it was a chance for women to assert their superiority and define what it meant to be a man. Women were doing their duty and encouraging men to enlist, so men should actually do as they were told. A man who refused to enlist although they could have done it was not a real man and deserved to be called a coward.²³³ The post-war situation with these stories shows how the control of the narrative has returned to men, since they have been able to frame the stories in a manner which restores their honour and humiliates the women.

The WSPU was not alone in uplifting women's service. *The Common Cause* strongly disapproved of using 'woman' as an insult against pacifists and other non-enlisted men. Mainstream press often suggested that pacifists should use petticoats and other women's clothes, since they were not real men. The NUWSS noted that such men would find it hard to dress in women's clothing which now included nurses, doctors and munition workers' uniforms. However, at the same time NUWSS argued that there was no "nobility" in using femininity to recruit men for the army.²³⁴ Although both organisations emphasised that women were doing their part of the war effort and were ready to question masculinity, NUWSS still rejected using femininity for recruitment. Women could no longer be called the weaker sex, and this was to be publicly known, but recruitment of strangers and sending them to their potential deaths was not women's task.

Nevertheless, Emmeline Pankhurst also adhered to the official state propaganda by pointing out that recruiting family members, like husbands and sons, was not just women's duty but also their sacrifice. She signed a petition to fight against the spread of sexually transmitted diseases among soldiers which stated: "Soldiers' mother write that they have given their sons willingly to die for the Empire, but not like this."²³⁵ This refers to the idea spread by the British war propaganda

²³² Gullace, 1997, 184-186.

²³³ Gullace, 2002, 45.

²³⁴ Gullace, 2002, 45, 125.

²³⁵ "Women Social Workers' Appeal", *The Times*, 23 October 1916, 5.

which encouraged the mothers to away their sons to the state to die in battle. Patriotic motherhood meant that women were meant to strongly support or indicate to their sons that they should enlist. It was women's duty in war. Men fought for their families and the British society while women did military service by giving away what was dearest to them. This sacrifice was a part of being a mother in war time.²³⁶ The idea of giving birth as women's military duty was now propagated by the state as well as the suffrage societies. Motherhood was elevated for propagandistic purposes, but it did not escape the sacrificial aspect common to femininity. Nonetheless, this time the sacrifice was for the UK and not for men.

The second important aspect of women's service in war for the WSPU was women's war work which the NUWSS also emphasised. As men left their jobs to go to the front, it was essential that women take their place and release even more men for their share of war duties. However, some of the professions that needed women workers were not traditionally feminine, and there was a lot of reluctance to admit women to these places. Furthermore, women were always paid less than men, so trade unions did not want women to come to the workplaces and harm men's wages. Emmeline Pankhurst was highly dissatisfied with this situation. She claimed that women should not only be considered for traditionally feminine professions, but like the French, the British society should utilise the full force of its women. The French women could serve as tram conductors, clerks and cashiers. Emmeline Pankhurst wanted the government to realise this and began to advocate women's war work in her speeches as well. In March 1915, women were accepted to a newly-created Register of Women for War Service. Especially munitions work need more workers to provide material for the soldiers at the front. Liberal politician David Lloyd George, who was now the Minister of Munitions, decided to ask Emmeline Pankhurst and the WSPU for assistance to convince the employers and trade unions to employ women.²³⁷

On July 17, 1915, she helped to arrange a war work demonstration of women in London. *Manchester Guardian* wrote that it was the biggest march the WSPU had ever arranged and contained women from all different classes. Unlike the previous pre-war demonstration to which the public was sometimes hostile, the audience now welcomed the women and supported their march. One of the banners summed up the central message of the demonstration: "Men must fight and women must work."²³⁸ Recruitment of soldiers was not women's only duty now that workers were needed. Furthermore, war work was an equal sacrifice to going to front. The NUWSS

²³⁶ Gullace, 2002, 54-63.

²³⁷ Purvis, 2002, 272-273, 276.

²³⁸ "Women and Munitions", *Manchester Guardian*, 19 July 1915, 6.

also highlighted this aspect of work. It had arranged training for women to work in factories and noted how women were willing to leave home and work night and day for the war effort. Those working with explosives turned yellow because of TNT and became known as ‘canary girls’. TNT was poisonous, and the women knowingly put their lives at risk. Accidents were also common, and women workers died in explosions. Still, the munition workers claimed that they could do no less, since men were putting themselves in the firing line at front.²³⁹

The NUWSS also advocated other non-traditional professions. Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) was founded as a part of the British army in 1917, but it had several similar voluntary forerunners, like the Women’s Reserve Ambulance. Although the women worked at the front and were in a sense like soldiers and could get injured, their tasks were, for example, clerical work.²⁴⁰ Women could also work as police officers. *The Common Cause* wrote a glowing assessment about the use of policewomen. They supervised certain areas and factories and helped to keep the public order. Nevertheless, women’s femininity was again the key trait in their work. Policewomen took care of especially girls and children and acted as a calm influence in the streets. It was easier for women to support and approach women, also prostitutes, and help them.²⁴¹ Although the NUWSS also highlighted the traditional femininity of women in these new professions, it was a radical change from its pre-war pacifism to take pride in women in the army and police forces where the use of force was normal.

Nonetheless, the traditionally feminine professions and traits were also central to the NUWSS work in war. This was much closer to the organisation’s usual forte and thus the NUWSS emphasised those qualities more clearly than the WSPU. Workshops were opened to train women for new professions as well as maternity and childcare units. Millicent Fawcett considered women’s war work to be very close to their usual, pre-war tasks.²⁴² Nursing services abroad proved to an essential task for the NUWSS. A Scottish doctor Elsie Inglis, a member of the NUWSS’ Scottish Federation, founded Scottish Women’s Hospitals which send hospital units to the front in France and Serbia. Inglis was especially respected by the Serbians as she had worked tirelessly for the wounded in Serbia and been captured by the German forces when she refused to abandon her patients.²⁴³ Moreover, the NUWSS arranged maternity units to be sent to Russia to help refugees in

²³⁹ Fraser, 1918, 111, 124-125.

²⁴⁰ Fraser, 1918, 215-231.

²⁴¹ ”The Women Police Service, *The Common Cause*, 2 February 1917, 561.

²⁴² Rubinstein, 1991, 215,

²⁴³ Fraser, 1918, 61-63.

1916.²⁴⁴ The organisation thus proved that women's 'natural' tasks can be as central in war effort as fighting as they helped the wounded allies of the UK.

Furthermore, motherhood was still an important female task at the home front. The National Union used maternity to emphasise the need for votes, especially once the discussion about the widening of the franchise began in 1916. Some of the arguments were the same to those used during the pre-war years. For instance, Millicent Fawcett once again highlighted that enfranchised women can enact changes about childcare on the state level and reduce infant mortality. She wrote: "Where women have the most power the babies have the best chance of living."²⁴⁵ Power in this case meant the ability to participate in public and political life.

Although the WSPU did not arrange nursing services systematically like the NUWSS, individual suffragettes could embody both feminine nurture and the independent spirit they had cultivated in the organisation. Doctors Flora Murray and Louisa Garrett Anderson had left the WSPU because of its militancy but never abandoned the suffragette cause. After the war began, they founded Women's Hospital Corps (WHC). In 1915, it became affiliated with the British army and began to work in London with an all-female staff. Murray and Anderson did not hide their suffrage history but rather emphasised it. Although their hospital treated the wounded soldiers, it also had a political purpose of educating women, preparing them for future citizenship and demonstrating the women could do their duty in war time. In a way, it was also a WSPU organisation. The motto of the WHC was "Deeds, not words."²⁴⁶ The hospital services associated with both organisations kept women in their own, feminine sphere but also altered the gender relations. Researcher Jennian F. Geddes has pointed out that although there was traditional relationship between nurturing women and nurtured men, who were called "'babies'" at the hospitals, the gender roles were also reversed because the wounded men were totally dependent on the women and had to follow their orders and instructions.²⁴⁷ In addition, there was a lack of understanding on post-traumatic stress disorder or shell shock, as it was known, which led to men suffering from the disorder being described hysterical like women.²⁴⁸ Hence, the women were now actually the stronger sex who took care of the damaged men.

Overall, female patriotism and nationalism was a significant part of the NUWSS and WSPU during the war. The NUWSS published several articles in *The Common Cause* which

²⁴⁴ "Start of Our Maternity Unit for Relief of Refugees in Russia", *The Common Cause*, 4 February 1916, 570.

²⁴⁵ Fawcett, "Women's Influence for Reform", *The Times*, 12 April 1916, 11.

²⁴⁶ Geddes, 2007, 79-83.

²⁴⁷ Geddes, 2007, 88, 96.

²⁴⁸ Kingsley Kent, 1988, 251-252.

advocated patriotic self-denial and sacrifice for Britain. For instance, the paper released an article by a goldminer who wrote that the British should place their country above their own needs.²⁴⁹ In the WSPU, the emphasis of nationalism was even stronger than in the National Union. The remaining Pankhursts had become extremely hostile and xenophobic towards Germans or anything they perceived to be pro-German or pacifist. When their paper *Suffragette* was republished, it was named *Britannia* and dedicated for the King, country and freedom. *Britannia* did not even spare the politicians if the Pankhursts disapproved of their war policy. German needed to be completely crushed, they argued.²⁵⁰ Christabel Pankhurst spoke against internationalism several times. She opposed a formation of a European federation to stop future wars and called nationalism “one of the most sacred and beautiful things that humanity knows.”²⁵¹ This separates the organisations from the pacifist suffragists who emphasised international cooperation as a way to solve conflicts and war. This was one of the goals of the Hague Conference in 1915. The organisers of the meeting explained that women came together to affirm the power of international cooperation and demonstrate that faith in international outlook is compatible with patriotism.²⁵² I believe that this difference is most likely a result of their different views on the war. Pacifists believed they would stop the war with international cooperation while NUWSS and WSPU argued that there could be no peace before German nationalism had been defeated which required the total devotion of the whole British society to the war effort. Historian Nicoletta F. Gullace has argued that it was the nationalism of the WSPU and NUWSS which helped women to win the vote in 1917. War altered the idea of citizenship and tied it to service to the state. Female nationalism proved that women could serve the state like men which made it possible for women to be enfranchised.²⁵³

Before the war, the organisations had tried to increase the appreciation for women’s housework. Now that nurture was gaining societal significance, an opportunity arose to re-emphasise the household. Rationing and the need for raw materials meant that women, as the caretakers of the home economics, could also contribute to the war effort with good housekeeping. The NUWSS especially grasped this chance to not only educate women but also to prove their worth to the state. It participated in “Patriotic Housekeeping Exhibition” in Liverpool in the summer of 1915 with other female organisations. It taught women how to prepare food with limited ingredients, repair household items and even how to teach their servants to conserve food and other

²⁴⁹ “The War, Money, and Self-Denial”, *The Common Cause*, 7 January 1916, 527.

²⁵⁰ Smith, 2003, 107-109.

²⁵¹ Pankhurst, C., 1915, 19.

²⁵² Addams, Balch and Hamilton, 1915, 125-126.

²⁵³ Gullace, 2002, 195-196.

materials.²⁵⁴ Similar exhibitions were held elsewhere in the country as they became more popular.²⁵⁵ The name ‘patriotic housekeeping’ already shows that the women are emphasising the importance of their work to the state. Housework was not only women’s ‘natural’ task but also a patriotic act.

The militants had been known for their readiness for action before the First World War. Now women’s traditional and non-traditional roles gained traction, the WSPU was once again ready to illustrate its willingness to serve a cause through the use of force. Christabel Pankhurst was asked in 1914 should not the suffragettes behave like Joan of Arc, since Britain was at war and the entire world threatened by masculine German aggression. She answered that women would do what was most useful for the UK and what was asked of them. Currently, their task was to stay at home and maintain the home front. It was the duty given to them by the state. Nevertheless, she boldly stated, “If we are needed to fight, we shall be ready for it. We are not afraid.”²⁵⁶ Moreover, the WSPU showed great respect for female military service. Emmeline Pankhurst visited Russia in 1917 to keep the country in the war. She was introduced to the women’s battalion, called the Battalion of Death, and spoke highly of them. According to Pankhurst, these women were an example for Russian men, since they knew that it was better to die in battle against the Germans than to become their subjects.²⁵⁷

Although the WSPU claimed to be willing to fight in the war if necessary, it should not be overstated, since the British society was very against of using women soldiers. At the start of the war, there were rumours of British female battalions which were composed of suffragettes. Women did actually organise into voluntary forces, such as the Women’s Emergency Corps and Women’s Voluntary Reserve. The latter practised drilling and other tasks in case of a land invasion. The public, however, was not impressed. The women were accused of wasting their time, imitating or playing men and disrespecting the uniform of a British soldier. Several commentators also stated that women should take up work more suitable for them, such as nursing.²⁵⁸ The WSPU’s readiness for battle can therefore be interpreted as a more of a rhetoric device and wish to indicate the deepest commitment for the war effort than actual willingness to participate in actual warfare.

Despite the non-traditional feminine roles that the WSPU emphasised, there was still aspects of traditional femininity in the organisation. Motherhood was still important, as indicated by

²⁵⁴ MacAdam, Elizabeth, “Patriotic Housekeeping”, *The Common Cause*, 20 August 1915, page numbers not legible.

²⁵⁵ Fraser, 1918, 197-198.

²⁵⁶ Pankhurst, C., 1914, 19.

²⁵⁷ Purvis, 2002, 295-296.

²⁵⁸ Grayzel, 1999, 192-193.

Emmeline Pankhurst's support for patriotic motherhood. She also had a project which combined her maternity with a feminist agenda. In early 1915, she had the idea of adopting the so-called war babies. These were the illegitimate children of soldiers and unmarried women. Her project received very little support from her friends or the WSPU members, so she decided to be an example and adopt four girls if she was assisted with their upkeep. She planned to raise the girls to be ready for the British society where women would have the vote and equal rights with men. However, Pankhurst's finances had never been stable, and now the babies increased her financial difficulties.²⁵⁹ Her project was not a success but demonstrates that the WSPU did not lose their appreciation for motherhood and necessity of helping women and children even in war although for instance Sylvia Pankhurst has claimed that they forgot suffrage and feminism entirely.

Morality of women became an increasingly important topic during the war. The British government began to take action to protect its soldiers from sexually transmitted diseases and potential immorality of women to which the suffrage campaigners had to respond. However, their actions were not always consistent with their pre-war deeds or arguments. *The Defence Against the Realm Act* (DORA) was enacted in 1914 and was meant to give the state large-scale abilities to defend the state. It violated several civil rights of the British citizens by, for instance, enacting censorship. Some articles of the Act especially controlled women's behaviour and sexuality. Throughout the war, the press spread rumours about the growth of women's immorality and turn to prostitution, thus not only inflicting the soldiers they seduced with STDs but also ruining their moral character. In 1916, the Royal Commission on Venereal Diseases published a report on STDs in the UK. Emmeline Pankhurst was among the women who after the release of the report demanded that STDs should be treated like other infectious diseases which were dealt with compulsory treatment and official notification.²⁶⁰ They justified their position by claiming that compulsion and education are both needed, or the spread of diseases cannot be stopped nor the health of the British troops protected.²⁶¹ The NUWSS and Millicent Fawcett, despite her belief in purity and good morals, were more hesitant to accept the recommendations of the report because such measures were often one-sided and blamed women for men's behaviour. She and other women argued that sexes and all classes should be treated equally which was usually the case as to STDs.²⁶² Although Christabel Pankhurst had led WSPU's crusade against men's immoral behaviour, her

²⁵⁹ Purvis, 2002, 279-280.

²⁶⁰ Grayzel, 1999, 129-148.

²⁶¹ "Venereal Diseases", *Manchester Guardian*, 18 December 1916, 7.

²⁶² "Venereal Diseases", *Manchester Guardian*, 11 December 1916, 9.

mother now prioritised men's health over women's equal rights. War greatly altered WSPU priorities.

Women gained limited franchise during the war. At the time, men who enlisted lost their right to vote because they no longer had a permanent residence which was one of the requirements for franchise. Politicians and the society began to demand a change to the franchise law, so that the British soldiers and sailors sacrificing their lives for the country could vote. The suffragists immediately stated that if the franchise was going to be widened, it should include women too. Although there were still several antisuffragist politicians, many former opponents of female enfranchisement had changed their minds. For example, Herbert Asquith, who was the prime minister from 1908 to 1916 and a fervent antisuffragist, now stated that he supported votes for women.²⁶³ The House of Commons voted to approve the new franchise bill in the summer of 1917 which enfranchised some women over 30, and the House of Lords passed it at the end of year. Suffrage campaigners had won the vote but were unable to remove the 'sex disability' and achieve equal voting rights, since majority of women still could not vote.

Historians have long debated about the effects of the war on women and gender roles. Initially, war was seen as a seismic event which properly 'freed' women from their stifling and limited position and won them the votes. It introduced women to new professions, and the enfranchisement was the result of the service they did during the war.²⁶⁴ Suffragists and suffragettes have generally expressed the same ideas although they also highlight that much work was still left to do. For instance, Millicent Fawcett wrote in 1920 that war did not only liberate women but also changed men's opinions about what ordinary women could do. The value of women and their work, public and private, rose in the eyes of the general public.²⁶⁵ Christabel Pankhurst agreed that women's service had been a key factor in winning the vote, but she also claimed that the threat of renewed militancy had a role in the enfranchisement.²⁶⁶ This way she claimed the victory for the suffragettes.

However, many historians have challenged this view and emphasised how the war put women back into their traditional roles. Jo Vellacott has argued that although the war made new professions open to women, women remained as subservient nurturers of men. They were meant to take care of women and children, and only take those employment opportunities that men did not.²⁶⁷

²⁶³ Rubinstein, 1991, 236-237.

²⁶⁴ Monger, 2014, 518-519.

²⁶⁵ Fawcett, 1920, 106.

²⁶⁶ Pankhurst, C., 1959, 292.

²⁶⁷ Vellacott, 1987, 88.

Susan R. Grayzel holds the same opinion. She also notes how the war gave some new opportunities for women but claims that women's identities were still centred on children and motherhood. The war had a conservative effect on gender roles.²⁶⁸ I agree with these assessments. The war opened certain professions and parts of the society to women, but it also affirmed women's traditional roles as mothers and nurturers of men. Although women became front-line nurses or police officers and proved their importance to smooth functioning of the society, their most important tasks were to support men as mothers or wives and take care of them. Moreover, the new professions were not permanent positions. Once men began to return from war, the previously praised women workers were fired despite the protests of the workers and women's rights organisations. Even the press, which had praised the female workers, pressured women to resign and return to their 'normal' duties at home.²⁶⁹ The war did not truly alter power structures between men and women despite men's temporary dependency on women. Furthermore, the changes in the ideologies of the suffrage organisations which emphasised the good British masculinity and limited women's rights to protect soldiers further support that the idea that the war had a conservative effect on gender roles.

²⁶⁸ Grayzel, 1999, 245-246.

²⁶⁹ Kingsley Kent, 1988, 238.

4. Conclusion: Between Change and Tradition

The ideas of the *National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies* and *Women's Social and Political Union* on gender were both traditional and ground-breaking, yet always feminist, before the First World War. The organisations were not completely radical but held several conservative notions about women and men. They had to balance between the two aspects which can explain some discrepancies in their argumentation and deepen the understanding of the organisations.

The NUWSS and WSPU wanted women to participate more actively in politics and the public sphere which was not approved of by the British society which considered the public sphere to be men's area of expertise. However, the organisations differed on how women should participate in the public sphere and agitate for the franchise when they lacked the right to vote. The militant WSPU believed that only real action would lead to enfranchisement. The organisation did not trust the politicians which had rejected even compromise bills. Their militancy increased as the time went on because the women became more and more frustrated with the British government for its lack of progress on women's votes and brutal response to the militancy. The suffragettes idealised a militant woman who was an active and brave public campaigner, ready to sacrifice everything for the cause and even become a martyr. The NUWSS disapproved of these tactics and emphasised the necessity of women to prove that they could achieve change through a peaceful campaign and education. It mainly used demonstrations, petitions and meetings to gather support for female suffrage and tried to normalise the idea of voting women by asserting that no major changes would take place in the society. Nonetheless, the National Union was careful in its condemnation of the suffragettes to avoid drawing more negative attention to their deeds and due to its initial praise of the early militancy. Later it became more important to distinguish between the NUWSS and the WSPU. The methods of campaigning were the major different between the organisations.

The suffrage campaigners in both organisations had a two-folded view on physical force. On the one hand, they opposed it. Physical was associated with destruction, death and dangerous masculinity. Men were argued to be unable to solve conflicts without violence. Women, according to the WSPU and NUWSS, were naturally peaceful and moral which is why their viewpoint was needed in politics to balance out male aggression. Peaceful and cooperative societies were also identified as more highly evolved civilisations. Using violence was a barbaric male vice to constitutional and militant suffragists. It only appeared in less developed civilisations.

Enfranchising women and moving to a more peaceful society was a sign of evolution in the British civilisation.

On the other hand, the organisations claimed that women had a physical force. However, in women the force was a positive feature. Women gave birth to children. Their physical force was a creative power in opposition to men's destructive tendencies. Although the forces were complementary, women's physical force was considered to be superior due to its productive and peaceful nature. Hence, motherhood was an important part of women's role in the society.

Both organisations also emphasised other feminine qualities of women and their campaigners. Suffrage campaigners, even the most militant of them, argued that they were feminine and peaceful and only used force to defend themselves or others. The WSPU commanded its members to be as feminine as possible outside of militancy. Furthermore, neither organisation fully questioned women's role in the private sphere. The most important task of women was to become a mother to which women were naturally suitable. Women were still meant to take care of the household as well. However, the suffrage campaigners attempted to uplift these traditionally feminine tasks in the eyes of the society. Especially the WSPU highlighted the link between British race and motherhood. British mothers should be more appreciated, since they were central to the creation of more British citizens and to the maintenance of the British Empire.

Although their opinions on the ideal woman and man could be vague and contradictory, it is also clear that the organisations envisioned that a new man and a new woman would be born in the British society due to their campaign. The new woman could be politically active if she wanted to and her traditional tasks as a mother and housekeeper were more appreciated. The enfranchised women ensured that men and women had equal rights and protections in the UK. The new man was not the destructive masculine and childish man of the contemporary Britain. Men had evolved, largely thanks to women's influence, and become more peaceful and appreciative of women. These new and equal citizens of the United Kingdom would transform the British Empire into a more highly evolved, peaceful and just civilisation.

The WSPU and NUWSS viewed gender roles as partially biological and partially socially constructed. Women were seen as naturally more peace-loving and nurturing while men were perceived as more aggressive and violent. Nevertheless, women needed to be trained to be good wives and mothers because gender roles were not only based on biological instincts. In a similar way, men could be educated to be calmer and rely on reason and discussion to solve conflicts.

The First World War caused a change not only in the British society but also in the suffrage organisations. As historians have argued, the war did not cause an entirely positive change concerning women. The NUWSS and WSPU demonstrate clearly how the war had a conservative effect on the ideas about gender. Although the organisations had dissenting members who left the suffrage associations to pursue their pacifist goals, the leadership stayed with members who believed that women's primary duty was to support the war. The First World War was understood as a gendered conflict where masculine Germany was trying to gain dominance over female and suffragist countries. Women's duty was to support the democratic and feminine states and fight against the militaristic autocracy of the Germans. Democracy was perceived as a feminine quality which needed to be defended violently if necessary. Once again WSPU took a more extreme view and advocated total suppression of Germany and devotion to the British army. The NUWSS saw the conflict in more democratic terms, but it also supported the war unconditionally.

The absolute commitment to war made the NUWSS and WSPU return to conservative thinking on gender issues. Although masculinity was dangerous, the maleness and chivalry of the British troops was celebrated by the suffrage campaigners. Women were admitted to new professions but only because they needed to replace men. Moreover, nurturing roles, such as motherhood or female nurses at the front, were central to the identity of many women during war time and received a new importance in the British society. This change is illustrated well by the acceptance of the once-ostracised militants back into the mainstream press and society while pacifists were attacked and criticised as traitors of the country. Although only limited suffrage was gained in 1918, the NUWSS and WSPU managed to create a greater appreciation for women's work in the UK. The only significant difference between the WSPU and NUWSS was their attitude towards the increasing control of women by the state which argued that there was a need to restrict women's rights because of their immoral behaviour. The WSPU agreed with the government and prioritised the soldiers and war over women while the NUWSS continued point out the double standard of only restricting women's freedom.

Both gender and class have received more and more focus in the research on the UK suffrage movement. Although a comprehensive and in-depth focus on gender is lacking from the historiography of the suffrage movement in the UK, another important topic which needs more examination is race and ethnicity. British Empire and countries which had given women the vote before the UK were themes which were often mentioned by the suffrage campaigners. It would be worth studying what role race and ethnicity played in the suffrage movement and its rhetoric and how the campaigners understood themselves in relation to other ethnicities.

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