

GENDER, MEDIA AND PROTEST: Changing representations of the suffragette Emily Wilding Davison in British newspapers, 1913-2013

This article traces the ways in which the British suffragette Emily Wilding Davison was represented in national newspapers between 1913 - the year she died - and 2013, the centenary of her death. We identify three key discourses through which Davison has been represented in four British newspapers throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first: delegitimisation, recuperation and trivialisation. In doing so, this paper provides original insights into the ways that the fight for women's rights has been figured in different historical moments. A key argument is that over time, Davison's militant actions – once cast as those of a hysterical lunatic - have slowly come to be recuperated and legitimised as part of the story of British democracy. However, this discursive shift cannot be straightforwardly celebrated as a progressive move in representations of women's movements, as Davison is frequently invoked to delegitimise contemporary feminism. Our analysis charts the extent to which Davison has been visible (or not) in newspapers through different historical periods; the specific ways in which Davison's image was transformed along with broader changes in women's status; and it considers the political implications of these (in)visibilities and representations for contemporary feminism.

Keywords: Emily Wilding Davison; suffragette; newspaper; representation; feminism; activism

Introduction:

At the Epsom Derby horserace in 1913, British suffragette Emily Wilding Davison stepped out from the barriers onto the racetrack and was trampled by King Edward VII's horse Anmer, dying four days later. Davison was a member of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), the leading and best-known militant organisation that campaigned for women's suffrage in the United Kingdom in the early twentieth century. The suffragette movement was instrumental in the extension of the voting franchise to some women in 1918, and then on equal terms with men in 1928. Although Davison is currently a relatively well-known and often celebrated historical figure, whose radical actions have frequently come to emblemise the women's suffrage movement in Britain, to what extent has always been the case? In what ways have representations of Davison changed over time - and what might this tell us about the shifting attitudes towards and collective memories of the movement of which she was a part? Using a combination of qualitative content and critical discourse analysis, this article traces the ways in which Davison was represented in four British national newspapers between 1913 - the year she died - and 2013, the centenary of her death. As such, this article provides original insights not only into the ways in which women's movements are discursively constructed by news media at the particular, contemporaneous historical moment of protest and activism, but also how the *memories* of these movements and the individuals within them are shaped through mediation over time.

While the British women's suffrage movement has been richly and extensively documented and theorised through a significant body of literature¹ - including the ways in which the movement produced its own channels of media and communication² - there have been markedly few studies into the ways that

suffragettes **were** represented in the *mainstream* press, with some important exceptions.³ This stands in contrast to the second-wave feminist movement of the 1960s, 70s and 80s, whose relationship with, and representation within, mainstream media have been closely analysed in a growing body of scholarship.⁴ In addition, scholars continue to research the media representations of contemporary feminist activism,⁵ yet the first wave of feminism remains largely ignored in this regard. While the need to understand how the first-wave feminist movement was mediated may seem to be less politically urgent than researching the representation of contemporary activism, this paper contends that the ways that the women's suffrage movement has been mediated have continuing implications for feminism today.

In relation to public history and popular memory of the militant suffrage campaign, Hilda Kean has argued that British suffrage feminists played a strategic role in the creation of their own history, carefully and consciously preserving and collecting the artefacts which represented the material culture of suffrage protest; additionally, the suffragettes' distinctive use of autobiography has meant that histories of suffrage have entered public memory through their personal stories.⁶ Kean also points to the significance of representations of suffragettes in popular cultural texts such as *Mary Poppins*.⁷ Other important work exists on mediated feminist memories of the suffragettes in the second-wave magazine *Spare Rib*⁸, as well as in the contemporary blog the *F-Word*⁹; however, what remains underexplored is how memory has been produced in mainstream, non-fiction contexts, as well as how these mediated memories might shift over time.

As such, this paper addresses two significant gaps in existing literature: both the *history* of news media representations of the women's suffrage movement, and the ways that the news media participates in the ongoing construction of collective

memory around the suffragettes. Joanna Garde-Hansen points to the functions of media both in their writing the ‘first draft of history’ and in their articulation of memory – or ‘the ‘personal, collective, cultural and social recollection of the past’.¹⁰ The relationships between media and memory – or what van Dijck has termed ‘mediated memories’¹¹ - are multiple and messy, and Garde-Hansen shows how mediated accounts of the past ‘intermingle in our minds with multimedia national/local museum exhibits and heritage sites’ as well as other sites such as popular media, advertising, and so on.¹² As such, this paper does not seek to argue that newspapers as sites of memory production should be considered as either uniquely privileged or separate from other cultural sites of meaning-making about the history of the women’s suffrage movement. However, as Barbie Zelizer and Keren Tenenboim-Weinblatt have powerfully noted, studies of memory have not adequately considered journalism as a site of memory work.¹³ Zelizer has argued that as ‘journalism continues to function as one of contemporary society’s main institutions of recording and remembering, we need to invest more efforts in understanding how it remembers and why it remembers and why it remembers in the ways that it does.’¹⁴ As such, the paper seeks to explore the ways in which newspapers, as powerful agents of ‘recording and remembering’, participate in cultural and collective memories of Emily Wilding Davison.

The article begins by setting out some of the historical context of Emily Wilding Davison’s life and death, and emphasises the contested and contradictory ways that she in particular – but also suffragettes more broadly – have been demonised and caricatured, but also legitimised, lionised, and celebrated. It also considers the paradox of the mainstream political *legitimisation* of the suffragette

movement within British history and culture alongside its relative *marginalisation*.

We then outline our methodological approach before moving to our analysis, which is presented in three sections: firstly, the ways in which Davison was initially pilloried and demonised; secondly, the ways her image was recuperated over time in relationship with changing views on the status of women; and thirdly, the ways she has been discursively trivialised in the press.

Emily Wilding Davison: suffragette militancy in history and memory

Emily Wilding Davison was a middle-class, highly educated feminist and socialist who in 1906 had joined the WSPU. The feminist historian of women's suffrage June Purvis writes that after studying at Royal Holloway College and Oxford University, and then working as a governess and teacher, Davison soon came to dedicate all her time to the women's movement, which meant that she also faced financial insecurity for the rest of her short life.¹⁵ Her commitment to women's suffrage and her willingness to take personal risks are indicated by the fact that she was imprisoned eight times, went on hunger strike seven times, and was forcibly fed forty-nine times.¹⁶ While she is most remembered for her actions at the Derby, her other, lesser-known acts of protest had included evading security staff to hide three times in the House of Commons, setting fire to post-boxes, and throwing herself three times over the landing railings at Holloway prison in protest at the force-feeding of suffragettes.¹⁷

At the Derby in June 1913, she ducked under the railings onto the racetrack and was fatally trampled by the King Edward VII's horse Anmer, dying four days later. Opinion is divided as to whether she was committing a public act of suicide in a desperate attempt to agitate for women's political enfranchisement, or trying to attach

a WSPU scarf to the King's horse to achieve a spectacular piece of visual propaganda. Despite her ambivalent relationship with the leadership of the WSPU, and the fact that they had not sanctioned her actions, Davison was mourned, commemorated and lionised by the organisation as a 'martyr,' 'soldier' and a 'fallen comrade'¹⁸ – and the suffragettes quickly seized upon the propagandistic potential of her death. However, elsewhere she was vehemently attacked as a lawless and deviant hysteric. For example, Queen Alexandra, wife and consort of the King, described her as 'a brutal lunatic woman'.¹⁹ Davison even received hate mail from anonymous members of the public as she lay on her deathbed; one of these letters, held by the Women's Library, expressed a wish for her to 'suffer torture until you die.'

Elizabeth Crawford argues that at the centennial commemorations of her death in 2013, the diverse and contradictory ways that she was invoked and imagined showed that she had 'become a construct, shaped to reflect all manner of enthusiasms'²⁰ – she was variously figured as 'a bit of a battleaxe', 'our first suicide bomber' and 'the mother of Pussy Riot and Femen.'²¹ Crawford also identifies a 'racing turn' in recent histories of Davison, in which she is increasingly analysed from the perspective of horse-racing; from this viewpoint, 'the real scandal of the 1913 Derby was not Emily Davison's incursion onto the course [but] a complicated tale of feuding owners and jockeys'.²² As such, while for many, Davison has become a lauded symbol of feminist martyrdom, for others she is understood within a history of terrorism; and for others still, the political brutality that drove her to protest is made historically peripheral, and she is refigured as a spectacular, but ultimately tangential, bit-part in a story about horse-racing.

The centenary of Davison's death in 2013 was marked in a range of media and academic contexts, and the cause that she fought for has gained official political, as

well as popular legitimacy. This was particularly evident in the 2015 film *Suffragette*²³ in which her death was suggested to have been a decisive turning point in public support for women's suffrage. Nevertheless, despite the recent increase in the movement's visibility through such popular texts, it is still the case that the public celebration and commemoration of women's suffrage occupies a considerably less privileged place in British culture than 'masculinist' historical events – for example the deeds of 'great men' such as Horatio Nelson or the D-Day landings.²⁴ While a plaque in Davison's memory currently stands in the Houses of Parliament, it is important to note this was not officially commissioned, but rather surreptitiously produced and mounted by the left-wing MP Tony Benn at his own expense.²⁵ The somewhat uneasy and relatively marginal position that Davison occupies within public memory therefore points to the enduring ways in which women are 'hidden from history'²⁶ - and why studies such as this are so important.

Crawford suggests that there may also be contemporary anxieties around putting Davison 'on a pedestal'²⁷ because to do so may legitimise extremism and violence in the pursuance of social justice and democratic rights. Indeed, Davison serves as a particularly compelling reminder that power is never freely given, but has to be fought for; her very visibility in public forums attests to the fact that women were not 'given' the vote, but rather that they won it after protracted, highly organised campaigns that were often met with public derision and state violence. As such, Davison represents a particularly interesting historical figure, because whilst the extension of the voting franchise to women is now broadly accepted as 'common-sense', she reminds us of the extreme lengths to which women had to go to in order to secure this right; furthermore, the transgressive spectacle of women partaking in

direct action perhaps still produces a sense of unease in a culture that continues to designate spaces in which women's bodies are 'out of place'.

As this paper has already emphasised, there are only very few studies which take the representation of the British women's suffrage movement in mainstream media as their focus; Linda J. Lumsden also points to a relative dearth of scholarship in this area in the US context.²⁸ Jane Chapman notes that *The Times* and the *Morning Post* were the most 'hardline' in their position against suffrage,²⁹ while the *Manchester Guardian* was 'the most energetic champion of feminism, democracy and left Liberalism' - although, significantly, like all mainstream papers, it did not support militancy.³⁰ However, as Katherine E. Kelly notes in her analysis of London newspapers between 1906 and 1914, there was also a kind of *collaboration* between the press and the women's movement as they both worked to produce, as well as benefit from, the public spectacles of suffrage campaigns.³¹ It is important to consider, then, that even where the press was ideologically opposed to the suffrage movement, there were still commercial interests in drawing attention to the spectacular imagery of women's protest. In their recent book, Kat Gupta analyses *The Times* during the period 1908 to 1914, in the lead up to the Representation of the People Act in 1918 (when the vote was extended to women over 30 with certain property qualifications).³² Gupta dedicates a chapter to the representation of Davison, focussing on the newspaper's reporting of her actions at the Derby, her death, inquest, and funeral procession. They argue that the discourses in *The Times* 'present a complex portrayal of Davison in which her dedication and intelligence is contrasted with allegations of madness'.³³ More broadly, Gupta identifies how the limited opportunities for the suffrage movement's self-representation within the mainstream press led to a narrow focus on direct action over other activities, as well as to the

homogenisation of diverse suffrage identities.³⁴ Gupta's research represents a valuable analysis of hitherto underexplored texts from a key period in the history of the suffrage movement. Our analysis extends this focus on the framing of Davison to consider her changing representations across different newspapers over one hundred years.

Table 1 – Number of Articles Per Newspaper, 1913-2013

Decade	<i>Daily Mail</i>	<i>Daily Mirror</i>	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>The Times</i>
1913-1923	18	13	27	6
1924-1933	5	1	1	1
1934-1943	6	3	1	0
1944-1953	3	0	0	1
1954-1963	3	1	0	1
1964-1973	3	0	0	0
1974-1983	3	2	2	0
1984-1993	6	0	6	4
1994-2003	7	1	12	5
2004-2013	20	12	2	25
Total Articles	74	33	51	43

Emily Wilding Davison in British newspapers

The following discussion is based on our analysis of [two hundred and one](#) newspaper articles that were published in four national newspapers between 1913 and 2013 – the year that Emily Wilding Davison died, and the centennial commemoration. It is beyond the scope of this article to document all the changes and complexities in gender politics that occurred in these one hundred years, but suffice to say that our data spans a huge expanse of historical time, and our analysis takes into consideration the shifting political and cultural contexts of the texts.

For our analysis, four newspapers were deliberately selected to represent a range of political positions within the context of the mainstream British press (see

Table 1): the London-based *Times*, frequently held to be the national newspaper of record – which has already noted, was politically hostile to women’s suffrage; *The Guardian*, which was sympathetic to suffragists who favoured constitutional reform but much less tolerant of militant action, as well as its Sunday version the *Observer*; the broadly working-class and left-leaning *Daily Mirror*; and the politically conservative *Daily Mail*, which has always had a significant female readership.³⁵

Working with the digitised, online archives of each newspaper, the authors used the search terms ‘Emily Wilding Davison’, ‘Emily Davison’, ‘Wilding Davison’ and ‘Davison’ to identify all those relevant articles that were explicitly about her. Additionally, the spelling ‘Davidson’ was used to capture misspellings; as were articles that included the terms ‘suffragette’/‘[suffragist](#)’/‘suffrage’ and ‘Derby’ to capture those articles that referenced Davison without naming her. Because not all the digitised facsimile texts extend as far as 2013 in these archives, the Nexis database was also used to recover more recent articles. Of course, whilst believing that the sample represents a rich set of data that provides important insights into the mediation of Davison, the nature of this research and the variable quality and different search mechanisms of the archives means that it should be taken as a broad indication of the ways in which she has been represented, rather than an exhaustive account.

Qualitative content and critical discourse analysis are well-used methods to study news, gender and representation.³⁶ The strengths of content analysis lie in its ability to analyse large amounts of data, its meanings, symbolic qualities, and content.³⁷ While quantitative content analysis generally involves statistical analyses of data using complex models and measures, qualitative content analysis is more interested in presenting simple frequencies.³⁸ Here, the focus of tabulation is on qualitative aspects of the data such as themes, frames, discourses, story tone, and so

forth. However, even when taking this approach, qualitative content analysis is only capable of establishing patterns in data, such as identifying what is visible or absent. It is incapable of analysing systems of representations in text or speech,³⁹ which is why some scholars⁴⁰ have used it in combination with methods such as critical discourse analysis (CDA), as developed by Norman Fairclough⁴¹ Teun van Dijk⁴² and Michelle Lazar⁴³, which is specifically interested in the relationship between language, social practice, ideology and power. For this project, CDA was used to identify ideological themes (discourse) around Davison, her death, and feminist movements more broadly. These discourses were identified by examining the frame through which the story was told, the specific language used (whether legitimising, delegitimising or relatively neutral), the use of sources including the presence or absence of certain voices, and the (lack of) context around Davison's actions, including what drove her actions, and their possible consequences. Although there were a number of other discourses in circulation throughout the 100-year period (for example, suffrage as a worthy or unworthy cause; the psychological harm Davison caused the Jockey; Davison as a victim; Davison as a criminal), due to space constraints, this paper necessarily focused on the three most prominent ones in this paper.

Delegitimation: Outrageous, Lunatic Suffragette

Feminist scholars have long been interested in the ways in which feminist activists and their goals have been delegitimised in mainstream news media. In part, this is because the news media operates within a patriarchal framework,⁴⁴ as well as the broader ways in which mainstream news media portrays social movement activists as 'marginal to wider political processes, often constructing them as deviant'.⁴⁵ It is

also because women transgressing traditional norms of femininity are often cast as ‘militant,’ ‘radical,’ or ‘fringe’.⁴⁶ It is therefore little surprise that Davison, a woman who so publicly subverted gender norms, was also largely cast in this light, particularly between 1913 – the year of her death, and 1928.

The demonisation of Davison is evident across all four newspapers in the aftermath of the Derby event in headlines such as “Mad Woman’s Dash” (*Daily Mail*, 5 June 1913), “How A Suffragette Tried to Spoil the Derby” (*Daily Mirror*, 6 June 1913), “Miss Davison's Career in Militancy” (*The Guardian*, 5 June 1913), and “The Suffragist Outrage at Epsom” (*The Times*, 9 June 1913). Headlines are important to examine because they encourage the reader to understand the world in particular ways;⁴⁷ through analysing the language and angle used in headlines, the content analysis reveals that nearly half of all articles published in 1913 (48 percent) could be classed as demonising in tone. This is further demonstrated through the critical discourse analysis. For example, Davison was referred to as ‘a notorious militant with a thirst for martyrdom’ (“Day of Sensations at Epsom”, *Daily Mail*, 5 June 1913). Even in *The Guardian*, a newspaper long associated with its support for social justice more generally, and feminism specifically,⁴⁸ it was suggested that Davison’s deeds were those of ‘a mad person or suicide’ (“Painful scene at the Derby,” 5 June 1913). *The Guardian*, which was sympathetic to constitutionalist but not militant women’s activists, constructed her protest as a huge setback for the suffrage cause – and labelled her actions as a ‘wicked’ – the result of ‘diseased emotionalism’ which gave unfortunate credence to those who argue for ‘the emotional incoherence of feminine action in politics’ (“A horrible responsibility,” 9 June, 1913). This often-implied, gendered discourse of ‘madness’ is also identifiable in the *Daily Mail*’s description of

her as ‘the hottest of all Suffragette “Hot-Bloods”’ (“What the Derby Suffragette has done”, 5 June, 1913).

While Davison continued to be labelled as ‘radical’ and ‘militant’ throughout our entire sample, this paper argues that the underlying tone, and the connotative meanings of these labels changed over time – from being a disdainful description of ‘disordered’ femininity, to a badge of honour, as will be detailed in the next section. Starting in 1928, emerging from the data is the slow recuperation of Davison from a ‘mad, lunatic woman,’ to a symbol of legitimate activism.

The Recuperation of Davison

Beginning around 1928, the year the vote was extended to women on the same terms as men, but accelerating in the late 1970s, when second-wave feminism was in full swing, findings from the content analysis reveal a slight shift in the ‘tone’ of articles about Davison. This was clearly shaped by the changing social and political context; while in 1913 giving women the vote was still largely opposed by the political mainstream, by 1928 the logic and rationale of woman’s suffrage had become ‘common sense’.

In 1930, the *Daily Mirror* referred to Davison in an article about the unveiling of a statue of Emmeline Pankhurst, a key founder of the WSPU. The article noted how women at the unveiling were prompted to recall the radical actions of the movement, including Davison’s. The headline - “Life’s Work for Women Crowned” (March 7) – as well as the reporting of how policemen in attendance ‘paid tribute to her [Pankhurst’s] memory’, indicates the extent to which the movement was increasingly being figured as ‘legitimate’ and mainstream.

By the late 1970s, following the introduction of laws such as the Equal Pay (1970) and Sex Discrimination Act (1975), part of the success of the second-wave feminist movement was the increasing acceptance of women's visibility in the public sphere. In 1975, when Margaret Thatcher became the first woman to lead a major political party in Britain, the *Daily Mail* published a short article entitled "If only Mrs Pankhurst were here" (February 12, 1975), in which 85-year-old former suffragette Nina Popplewell lamented that Davison and others were not alive to witness this momentous development. While the implications of Thatcher's ascendancy were ambivalent for the feminist movement (to say the least), the fact that her success was discursively linked to the suffragettes suggests again that the movement was now viewed as legitimate, mainstream and successful.

In addition to general cultural and political changes, which permitted (though perhaps did not quite invite) women into the public sphere, there were other factors which allowed the discursive processes of Davison's recuperation to begin. In part, this was due to the types of stories in which Davison appeared, and the increasing turn towards reflective historical features in newspapers towards the end of the twentieth century. For example, using terminology assigned by the newspapers themselves, nearly one quarter of all articles included in our sample (45 in total) can be classified as 'Moments in History', 'Suffrage History', or 'Women's History.' These articles range in scope – from book reviews, to full 'feature' articles providing historical accounts of important figures or events, to timelines which documented important moments in history.

As will be discussed further in the next section, while these timelines often say little about Davison, and instead reduce her to a 'fun fact' or piece of historical trivia, her inclusion as a figure of historical importance nonetheless signals both a

recognition and a legitimisation of her actions by placing them firmly within a history of democracy and the struggle for political equality. For example, Davison was included in a 1993 *Daily Mail* feature on the 100 most influential women in history (“Fortitude and Feminine Wiles”, 14 April, 1993). She was also listed in a *Daily Mirror* as part of a column entitled “My 12 champions of the worker” (29 December, 2006) (interestingly, this was an isolated example of her association with socialism, which is otherwise absent in her figuration).

Davison’s image was also recuperated in longer, feature articles, where she was often described as a ‘martyr’ for the worthy cause of women’s suffrage. In 1996, the *Daily Mail* ran a feature on the sale of a 1913 telegraph from Queen Alexandra to the royal Jockey Herbert Jones (who was injured when Davison was trampled by the King’s horse). This article opened with the following description of Davison: ‘She is almost the patron saint of women’s rights. Suffragette Emily Davison died after throwing herself under King George V’s horse in the 1913 Derby, and the votes-for-women movement found its first martyr’ (“Queen who rode roughshod over women’s martyr,” 21 October, 1996). Similar descriptions of Davison as a ‘martyr,’ ‘heroine’ and ‘iconic figure’ are also found elsewhere. A 2010 *Daily Mirror* feature entitled “Iconic Figures in a Century of Greatness” (26 February, 2010) listed Davison among 10 key women such as Civil Rights campaigner Rosa Parks, Holocaust victim Anne Frank, and scientist Marie Curie. Davison’s photo is the most prominent in this feature, and her profile is listed first.

In the ensuing description, Davison is described as ‘fearless,’ and as being ‘appalled at the way women were treated’; she was said to have ‘lived and died for the cause.’ The word ‘militant,’ rather than being used to delegitimise her, now came to showcase her dedication to what is understood as a worthy cause. For example, the

feature noted that despite being imprisoned several times, she ‘continued campaigning in jail’ via hunger strikes, and did not give up after subsequent force feeding. That Davison’s ‘militancy’ was re-framed over time is a significant and important development, particularly in light of the ways that this word, alongside others such as ‘radical’, have long been used to delegitimise feminism.⁴⁹ Davison was also often evoked in stories about contemporary protests, often as a means to demonstrate what *real* dedication and legitimate causes look like. It is to this discursive framing that the paper now turns.

Legitimate Activism

Our analysis found that Davison’s actions came to be used as a cultural symbol of legitimate activism - most particularly into the noughties and beyond - and were often used as a counterpoint for contemporary activism and as a barometer for ‘legitimate’ feminism. For example, in 2012, when activist Trenton Oldfield jumped into the water to disrupt the annual boat race between Oxford and Cambridge in protest at class elitism and government cuts, he compared his actions to Davison’s. Many media outlets including *The Times* produced scathing responses, noting that despite ‘both disrupting famous sporting events’ there was ‘no real comparison’ (“Out of the drink and into the clink? Boat race saboteur is found guilty”, September 27 2012). The article went on to note Oldfield’s privilege compared to Davison’s, who had ‘devoted herself to her cause’, while ‘his cause is less clear’. The article finished by noting the ways ‘she lost her life’ for the sake of her cause, while he walked away ‘grinning,’ thus implying extreme differences in both the radicalism and legitimacy of their respective protests.

Legitimising Davison at the Expense of Contemporary Feminists

In some cases, Davison was specifically used as a marker by which to measure (the failing status of) contemporary feminism. It has been a common trope for the news media to pit generations of feminists against one another, as a means of (de)legitimising one ‘wave’ over the other⁵⁰ and this was also evident in our sample. For example, in a 2010 *Daily Mail* feature, a columnist contrasted the work done by ‘heroic’ suffragettes such as Davison, with that of ‘today’s political feminists’ who ‘betray the cause of women's justice, not only by their promotion of the shrill cult of victimhood, but also with their call for institutionalised prejudice in favour of women’ (“The day that changed Britain for ever,” 10 April 2010). In an ostensibly ‘pro-women’ 2005 *Times* article (“Sexy dressing? Relax, sisters”, 17 December) about ‘prudish’ feminists, the writer stated that ‘when you hear some dumb cow mewling on about how empowering it is to learn pole-dancing, you want to give her a good shove under the racehorse that killed Emily Wilding Davison’.

Similarly, a 1997 *Daily Mail* column lamented the current state of feminism, pointing to the popular pop group the Spice Girls as emblematic of this problem (“Lewd, loud and loaded: What do the Spice Girls tell us about sex, morality and our age?”, May 17). Noting that ‘instead of burning their bras, they wear push-up bras,’ the columnist Lesley Garner put the question: ‘Ask yourself if the early suffragettes – of whom the Spice Girls claim to be great admirers – would recognise the noble cause they fought for in the behaviour of the Spice Girls in full flight.’ Garner then recounted the Spice Girls’ sexual objectification of men, and asked: ‘Is this what Emily Davison threw herself under the king’s racehorse for?’

The notion that contemporary women misuse and misunderstand their ‘freedom’ is also apparent in an article in the *Daily Mail* about the fashion ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ at the 2010 Derby, in which Davison is once more invoked as the essence of legitimate feminism at the expense of contemporary (objectionable) women (“The Epsom Derby Winners and Losers in the Style Stakes”). Whereas Davison died for the ‘emancipation of women,’ the writer Liz Jones wonders ‘what she would have thought of the women who turned up for Ladies’ Day,’ concluding that ‘the level of artifice on show might have prompted Ms Davison to wonder why on earth she sacrificed herself’.

As such, while Davison becomes increasingly visible, prominent and more lauded across the timeframe of our sample, it is important to attend to the discursive uses to which this visibility is put, and the complex implications of this for contemporary gender politics and political activism. The legitimisation of her radical protest towards the end of the twentieth century occurs at the same time as a strong emphasis on the differences between her actions and those of contemporary activists. The ‘radical’ and ‘extreme’ nature of her actions – which had been used to demonise Davison in the early part of the twentieth century - becomes precisely the ways by which contemporary activists and ‘objectionable’ women are undermined in the late century and the early twenty-first. Arguably, this is important in understanding the terms upon which violent or otherwise ‘extreme’ political activism can come to be accepted as legitimate, and to take its place in mainstream history. When Davison’s actions have been invoked as legitimate democratic protest, this is more often to *disarticulate* rather than to inspire contemporary feminist activism - or to castigate women who are figured as audaciously misunderstanding and misusing their democratic freedoms.

Trivialisation of women's history

As discussed previously, the historian Elizabeth Crawford has recently identified a 'racing turn' in the ways that Davison is approached as an historical subject, meaning that she is increasingly figured through the perspectives and interests of horse-racing history (rather than, say, through a history of women's rights or political activism). Of course, the implications of her being framed via this particular modality are that her actions become merely an anecdote about disruption and disorder in a story about something else. In the analysis of newspaper texts, a recurrent theme emerged which prefigures this recent 'racing turn': that is to say, Davison's death has been repeatedly reduced to the status of a 'factoid' or a piece of historical 'trivia', made visible not in the context of women's history or political history but in the context of horse-racing.

In fact, a total of 31 articles (15.5 percent of total) were published in either generic sports news coverage, or that relating specifically to horse racing news. For example, in 1930, when the winning, though later disqualified, thoroughbred of the 1913 Derby died, one *Daily Mail* headline read: "Craganour Dead: Favourite of the Famous 1913 Derby" (August 22). Within this narrativisation, the history of women's suffrage is almost entirely displaced, with no context given for the reasons for Davison's actions.

A 1934 *Daily Mail* article entitled "My Memories of Twenty Derby Days" (June 6) refers to the 1913 race: 'I saw the unfortunate suffragette throw herself in front of the flying horses at Tattenham Corner in the year Craganour won and was disqualified'. Although not quantified in the content analysis, this forms one of many examples across our data in which the names of the horses involved in the 1913

Derby race are remembered, but where Davison's own name is absent. As such, the 'racing turn' in recent historical scholarship has a longer precedent in newspaper representations, where the horses themselves and the outcome of the race are clearly assigned more historical importance than Davison, or indeed the motivations of her actions that day. Also seen here, in the description of Davison merely as a 'suffragette', the conflation and homogenisation of diverse identities within the suffrage movement that Gupta identifies. As with almost all articles in our sample, there is no mention of the wider movement or discussion of her intentions; moreover, here it does not even mention that she died from her injuries – of concern here is only the spectacular disruption to the race.

A 1934 *Daily Mirror* article entitled "Big Moments in Sport Recalled" (November 29) refers to the 'Suffragette Derby' of 1913, indicating the ways in which Davison's actions have become immortalised in racing history, but also how they have been subsumed and obscured by it. Frequently, Davison was reductively framed as an unnamed and generic suffragette; a mere trope signifying the threat of disruption. The authors argue that this contributes to understandings of Davison as a one-dimensional figure whose individual complexity has been made invisible. In a *Daily Mail* article from 1990 entitled "Come rain or shine – it's Pimmsville" (May 19), Davison was mentioned merely as an item of interesting trivia in a feature anticipating the summer sporting calendar.

However, in the move into the twenty-first century, the 'racing discourse' - which most often works to figure Davison as a 'bit-part' or 'fun factoid' in histories of sport – begins to fall away. In all newspapers, it is replaced as the dominant discursive frame by more celebratory accounts of Davison as an 'inspirational' historical figure who is now linked firmly and explicitly to histories of politics and

feminism. However, as noted, the implications of this recuperation for feminism are highly ambivalent, because the effect is more often to disarticulate than inspire contemporary women's activism.

Conclusion

Using a combination of qualitative content and critical discourse analysis, this article reveals three key ways Emily Wilding Davison was discursively constructed across four national British newspapers between 1913-2013. Although these discourses did not necessarily emerge in a neat, linear fashion, it is clear that Davison went from being cast as a deviant, militant, and irrational character, to one whose status was slowly and somewhat complexly recuperated. Significantly, while there were some differences between the newspapers in their discursive construction of Davison, these discourses were in fact broadly reproduced across the four publications – somewhat complicating the idea that newspapers can be historically categorised as either simply 'pro' or 'anti' suffrage. Across the four newspapers, Davison's image was rescued from that of a 'brutal lunatic woman' to that of a heroic, iconic martyr, who died for a worthy cause. Red Chidgey argues that with 'the passing of generations, this notorious and sometimes violent struggle has been transformed into a symbol of modernity and civilization' – indicating the ways in which suffragettes have both been 'recuperated' and 'domesticated'.⁵¹ Our analysis shows that this recuperation has often been constituted through an insidious undermining of contemporary social movements. Davison's image has often been evoked to showcase what 'true' dedication to a cause looks like, and used as a marker of legitimate activism. In many ways her increased visibility in these forums reveals

the successful outcome of long-fought feminist struggles to secure a place for suffragettes in public memory. However, the legitimisation of suffragette protest appears largely at the expense of contemporary feminists and indeed of women more broadly, who are castigated for misusing their freedoms and privileges. Finally, the article has noted the ways that Davison has been trivialised, often reduced to a ‘fun factoid’, particularly in the context of horse-racing history. In these contexts, what has been emphasised is the *spectacular* nature of her protest, obscuring the motivations behind her actions. Again, this attests to the ambivalent implications of visibility within public memory – while such representations have meant that her name appears with some frequency throughout our hundred-year timeframe, this cannot be understood straightforwardly as an indicator of the worth ascribed to women’s history within our culture.

Our analysis is an entry point into, rather than an exhaustive account of the changing newspaper representations of Emily Wilding Davison – and the suffragette movement more broadly – over a long period of time. It points to the need for further research into the mediation and public memory of suffrage in a wide range of media forums and historical contexts. This paper suggests that by paying attention to the ways in which the framing of social and political movements shifts over time, new and important insights can be offered into the relationships between media, movements, and memory. Our intention is that it will open up space for further explorations and detailed analyses of how the fight for women’s rights has been *reported* in the mainstream media, but also how the movement has been *remembered*. Significantly, our findings demonstrate that even when political rights – such as women’s right to vote - have been formally won, the discursive struggle to recognise and legitimise the activism that enabled these rights continues.

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7490 words inclusive of title, endnotes, and bibliography

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1. Purvis, "Introduction: the suffragette and women's history".
 2. Kelly, "Seeing through spectacles; and Gupta, *Representation*.
 3. Diconzo et al, *Feminist Media History*; and Chapman, *Gender, Citizenship*.
 4. See as examples Brunsdon, *The Feminist*; Dow, *Prime-time Feminism* and *Watching Women's Liberation*; Hollows and Moseley, *Feminism in Popular Culture*; Kay, "Speaking bitterness"; Mendes, *Feminism in the News*.
 5. See Darmon, "Framing SlutWalk London"; Mendes, *Feminism in the News* and *SlutWalk*.
 6. Kean, "Public history and popular memory."
 7. Robert Stevenson, 1964
 8. Cowman, "'Carrying on a long tradition'".
 9. Chidgey, "A modest reminder".
 - ¹⁰ Garde-Hansen, *Media and Memory*, 3.
 - ¹¹ van Dijck, *Mediated Memories*.
 - ¹² Garde-Hansen, *Media and Memory*, 6.
 - ¹³ Zelizer and Tenenboim-Weinblatt, *Journalism and Memory*.
 - ¹⁴ Zelizer, "Why memory's work".
 15. Purvis, "Remembering Emily Wilding Davison (1872–1913)," 355.
 16. Ibid.
 17. *ibid*, 356.
 18. Crawford, "Emily Wilding Davison: centennial celebrations."
 19. Cited in Hodgman, "The fight for women's suffrage."
 20. Crawford, "Emily Wilding Davison: centennial celebrations," 1000.
 21. *Ibid*, 1001.
 22. *Ibid*, 1003-4.
 23. Gavron, 2015.
 24. Liddington, "Era of commemoration," 212; and Purvis, "Introduction."
 25. UK Parliament, "Women and the Vote."
 26. Rowbotham, *Hidden from History*.
 27. Crawford, "Emily Wilding Davison," 1006.
 28. Lumsden, "Beauty and the beasts."

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29. Chapman, *Gender, Citizenship*, 146.
30. *ibid*, 148.
31. Kelly, "Seeing through spectacles."
32. Gupta, *Representation*.
33. *Ibid*, 222.
34. *Ibid*, 1.
35. Ryan, "All the world". Please note that the *Times*, *Daily Mail*, and the *Mirror* digital archives do not include the Sunday versions of the newspaper, whereas the *Guardian* and *Observer* are both included in the same digital archive. As such, articles from the Sunday editions of these first three newspapers were not included in our sample.
36. Ashley and Olson, "Constructing reality"; Darmon, "Framing SlutWalk London"; Mendes, *Feminism in the News* and *SlutWalk*; Tuchman et al, *Making News*; van Zoonen, "The women's movement."
37. Deacon et al, *Researching Communications*; Krippendorff, *Content Analysis*.
38. Bhattacharjee, *Social Science Research*.
- ³⁹ Deacon et al., *Media Research Methods*
40. Mendes, *Feminism in the News* and *SlutWalk*; Moore, "Tracing the Life."
- ⁴¹ Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis*
33. Van Dijk, *Discourse and Power*
34. Lazar, *Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis*
44. North, "'Blokey' newsroom culture."
- ⁴⁵ Atton, "Activist Media as Mainstream Model."
46. See Mendes, *Feminism in the News*; Molotch, "The News of Women"; Pingree and Hawkins, "News definitions"; van Zoonen, "The women's movement."
35. Benford & Snow, "Framing Processes and Social Movements"; Mendes, *Feminism in the News*, and *SlutWalk*
48. Mendes, *Feminism in the News*.
49. *Ibid*.
50. See Dean, "Feminism in the papers"; Douglas, *The Rise of Enlightened Sexism*; Mendes, *Feminism in the News*.
51. Chidgey, "A modest reminder," 52.

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