

GENDER, PROTEST AND THE PRODUCTION OF HISTORICAL MEMORY:
CHANGING REPRESENTATIONS OF THE SUFFRAGETTE EMILY WILDING
DAVISON IN BRITISH NEWSPAPERS, 1913-2013

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Abstract:

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. Using a combination of qualitative content and critical discourse analysis, we showcase the various ways that Davison was delegitimized, recuperated and trivialized in four British newspapers throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. In doing so, we provide original insights into the ways that the fight for women's rights has been figured both in the media realm, but also – significantly - through the mediated historical imagination and public memory. Notably, we argue that representations of Davison changed across newspapers and over time. Through our analysis, we chart the extent to which Davison has been visible (or not) through different historical periods; consider the specific ways in which Davison's image was transformed along with changes in women's status; address the ways she has been trivialized as a historic figure; and address the political implications of these (in)visibilities and representations.

Keywords: Emily Wilding Davison; suffragette; newspaper; representation; feminist 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. 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 this 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 public 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 fresh insights into not only the ways in which women's movements are framed by news media at their particular, contemporaneous historical moment of protest and activism, but also how the *memory* of individuals and these movements 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 literature (see for example Purvis, 2006, 2013; Joannou and Purvis, 2009; Cowman, 2011; Rowbotham, 1997) - including the ways in which the movement produced its own strategies and channels of media and communication (Ditzeno, Delap and Ryan, 2011; Chapman, 2015) - there have been markedly few studies into the ways that suffragettes were represented in the *mainstream* press (for exceptions see Kelly, 2004; and Gupta, 2015). This stands in contrast to the second-wave feminist movement of the 1960s, 70s and 80s, whose relationship with and representation within mainstream media has

been closely analysed in a growing body of scholarship (see as examples Brunsdon, 2000; Dow, 1996, 2014; Hollows and Moseley, 2006; Kay, 2015; Mendes, 2011). In addition, scholars continue to research the media representations of contemporary feminist activism (see Darmon 2014; Mendes, 2011, 2015), yet the first wave of feminism remains almost entirely 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, we contend that the ways that the women's suffrage movement has been mediated have continuing implications for feminism today.

The article begins by setting out some of the historical context of Emily Wilding Davison's life and death and emphasises the contested ways that she in particular – but also suffragettes more broadly – have been pilloried, demonised, and caricatured, but also legitimised, lionised, and celebrated. It also considers the paradox of the mainstream political *legitimation* 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 Davison was initially pilloried and demonised; secondly, the ways her image was recuperated over time in relationship with changing views on 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 joined 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. The feminist historian of women's suffrage, June Purvis

(2013), 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 (p.355). 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 (ibid). 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 (ibid, p. 356).

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 the organisation had not sanctioned her actions, Davison was mourned, commemorated and lionized by the WSPU as a "martyr," "soldier" and a "fallen comrade" (Crawford, 2014) – 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" (cited in Reid, 2013). Davison even received hate mail from anonymous members of the public as she lay

on her deathbed, expressing a wish for her to “suffer torture until you die” (Women’s Library, n.d.).

Elizabeth Crawford (2014) argues that at the 2013 centennial commemorations of her death, the diverse ways that she was invoked and imagined showed that she had “become a construct, shaped to reflect all manner of enthusiasms” (p.1000) – she was variously figured as “a bit of a battleaxe”, “our first suicide bomber” and “the mother of Pussy Riot and Femen” (p.1001). Crawford also identifies what she calls the “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 the controversial disqualification of the winner, a complicated tale of feuding owners and jockeys” (ibid, pp.1003-4). As such, while for many, Davison has become a lauded symbol of feminist martyrdom, for others she is placed 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 (Crawford, 2014), 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* 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 visibility of the movement 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 (Liddington, 2005, p.212; Purvis, 2006). While a plaque in Davison's memory currently stand 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 in 1991 at his own expense (UK Parliament, n.d.). The somewhat uneasy and relatively marginal position Davison occupies within public memory therefore points to the enduring ways in which women are "hidden from history" (Rowbotham, 1973), as well as the broader discursive context in which feminists are pilloried as "deviant" (see Mendes 2011, 2015).

Crawford (2014) suggests that there may also be contemporary anxieties around putting Davison "on a pedestal" (p.1006) 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 democratically necessary and '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 dis-ease in a culture that continues to designate spaces in which women's bodies are 'out of place'. This dis-ease around the actions of radical, activist women who defy social and gender norms is also perceptible in the continuing salience of the myth that Davison was "an unbalanced suicidal fanatic" (Purvis, 2006, p.359).

As we have 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 (2000) also points to a relative dearth of scholarship in this area in the US context. Jane Chapman (2013) in her book about the relationships between the British press, gender and citizenship notes that *The Times* and the *Morning Post* were the most "hardline" in their position against suffrage (p.146), 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 (p.148). However, as Katherine E. Kelly (2004) 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. It is important to consider, then, that even where the press was politically and ideologically opposed to the vote being extended to women, there were still commercial interests in drawing attention to the spectacular imagery of women's protest. Kat Gupta's (2015) recent book *Representation of the British Suffrage Movement* focuses on *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). 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. Gupta argues that the discourses in *The Times* "present a complex portrayal of Davison in which her dedication and intelligence is contrasted with allegations of madness" (p.222). More broadly, Gupta identifies how the limited opportunities for the suffrage movement's self-representation within the mainstream press - and therefore its representation by "outsiders" - led to both a narrow focus on

direct action over other activities, as well as to the conflation of what were in fact diverse suffrage identities (p.1). Gupta's research represents a valuable analysis of an underexplored area, performing a close and detailed study on 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 100 years.

Emily Wilding Davison in British newspapers

The following discussion is based on our analysis of 195 newspaper articles that were published in four national newspapers between 1913 and 2013 – the year of her death and its commemoration one hundred years later. Of course, this expanse of time covers significant changes and transformations in gender politics, including the extension of the voting franchise to certain women in 1918, and then finally on equal terms with men in 1928; two World Wars and the resultant changes to gender relations and women's participation in paid work; the postwar creation of the welfare state and its subsequent unravelling under neoliberalism, beginning in the late 1970s, when the first British female prime minister was elected; the second-wave feminist movement which brought with it significant legislative changes around equal pay; and the 'postfeminist' era, most often associated with the 1990s and beyond. 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 scholars have argued was politically hostile to women’s suffrage (Chapman 2013, Gupta 2015); *The Guardian*, which was based in Manchester until the 1970s when it moved to London, and 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 working-class and left-wing *Daily Mirror*; and the politically conservative *Daily Mail*, which has always had a significant female readership (Ryan, 2000).¹

Working with the digitised, online archives of each newspaper, we 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, we also used the spelling ‘Davidson’ to capture misspellings; we also searched for articles that included the terms both ‘suffragette’/‘suffrage’ and ‘Derby’ to capture those articles that referenced her without naming her. Because not all the digitised facsimile texts extend as far as 2013 in these archives, we also used the Nexis database to recover more recent articles. Of course, whilst we believe that our 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. Once the

¹ 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. The results in this article represent this fact.

articles were collected, we analysed them using both qualitative content and critical discourse analysis.

Qualitative content and critical discourse analysis are well used methods to study news, gender and representation (see Ashley & Olson 1998; Darmon 2014; Mendes 2011, 2015; Tuchman et al 1978; van Zoonen 1992). Content analysis' strengths lie in its ability to analyse large amounts of data, its meanings, symbolic qualities, and content (Deacon et al. 1999; Krippendorff 2004). While quantitative content analysis generally involves statistical analyses of the data using complex models and measures, qualitative content analysis is more interested in presenting simple frequencies (Battacherjee 2012). 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, which is why some scholars (Mendes 2011, 2015; Moore 2011) have used it in combination with methods such as critical discourse analysis (CDA), as developed by Teun van Dijk (2008) and Michelle Lazar (2005), 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 – or angle through which the story was told, the specific language used (whether positive, negative 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.

Outrageous, Lunatic Suffragette

Throughout history, scholars have demonstrated the ways in which feminist activists and their goals have been delegitimized in mainstream news media. In part, this is because the news media operates within a patriarchal framework (Robinson, 2005; North, 2009). It has also been because any woman, particularly before the 1960s and 70s, breaking from traditional norms of femininity were often cast as ‘militant,’ ‘radical,’ or ‘fringe’ (see Mendes 2011; Molotch 1978; Pingree & Hawkins 1978; van Zoonen 1992). It is therefore little surprise that Davison, a woman who shattered traditional gender norms (by seeking education, being unapologetically militant and political, and staking out a space in the public sphere) was also largely cast in this light, particularly between 1913 – the year of her death, and 1928, the year in which the vote was extended to British women on the same terms as men.

The demonization of Davison is evident across all four newspapers, and was identified 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 (see Benford & Snow 2000; Mendes 2011, 2015). Through analysing the language and angle used in headlines, according to the content analysis, nearly half of all articles (28 or 48 percent of total that year) could be classed as demonizing in tone. 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) in the *Daily Mail*. Even in *The Guardian*, a newspaper known for its long support of social justice more generally, and feminism specifically (Mendes 2011), it was suggested that Davison’s

deeds were those of ‘a mad person or suicide’ (‘Painful scene at the Derby’, Guardian, 5 June, 1913). *The Guardian* constructed her protest as a huge setback for the suffrage cause – and labelled her actions as a ‘wicked act’ that was a result of ‘diseased emotionalism’ and which gave 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’, Daily Mail, 5 June, 1913).

What this analysis reveals is that while Davison continued to be labelled as ‘radical’ and ‘militant’ throughout our entire sample, we argue 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 we will detail in the next section. As a result, starting in 1928, we slowly begin to see the recuperation of Davison from a ‘mad, lunatic woman,’ to a martyr, a soldier, and a cultural symbol of legitimate activism.

The Recuperation of Davison

Beginning around 1928, the year the vote was extended to women on the same criteria 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 very likely aided by the fact that, in 1913 giving women the vote was still largely opposed by the political mainstream, but by 1928 the logic and rationale of woman’s suffrage was becoming more ‘common sense.’ And by the late 1970s, following the introduction of laws such as the Equal Pay (1970) and

Sex Discrimination Act (1975), woman's participation in the public sphere was again largely taken for granted, particularly their right to vote.

In addition to general cultural and political changes which permitted (though perhaps didn't quite invite) women into the public sphere, there were other factors which allowed the discursive process of Davison's recuperation to begin. In part, this was due to the types of stories in which Davison appeared, and an increasing turn towards reflective historical features in newspapers towards the end of the twentieth century. For example, 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 we will discuss 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 legitimization 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).

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 telegraph from 1913 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, p. 26). Similar descriptions of Davison as a 'martyr,' 'heroine' and 'iconic figure' can be also be found elsewhere. A 2010 *Daily Mirror* feature entitled 'Iconic Figures in a Century of Greatness' (26 February, 2010, p. 8) listed Davison among 10 key women such as Civil Rights campaigner Rosa Parks, Holocaust victim Anne Frank, and famous scientist Marie Curie. Davison's inclusion in the list (which encourages readers to vote for the most inspiring woman of the century), and the fact her photo is the most prominent and her profile is listed first, suggested the ways she is an important historical figure who championed a worthy cause.

In the ensuing description, Davison is described as 'fearless' and as being 'appalled at the way women were treated'; her martyrdom was invoked when the feature noted the ways she 'lived and died for the cause.' This feature is also interesting because it signals a shift in the ways Davison and the suffragettes' tactics were framed. The word 'militant,' rather than being used to delegitimize her, showcased 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 didn't give up after subsequent force feeding. That Davison's 'militancy' was re-framed over time is an significant and important historic development, particularly in light of the ways that this word, alongside others such as 'radical' have long been used to de-legitimize feminism (see Mendes 2011). In addition, Davison was also often evoked in general protest stories, often as a means to

demonstrate what *real* dedication and legitimate causes look like. It is to this discursive framing that we now turn.

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 as well as a barometer for 'legitimate' feminism. For example, in 2012, when Oxford student Trenton Oldfield jumped into the water to disrupt the annual boat race between Oxford and Cambridge, he compared his act of protest to Davison's. In response, many media outlets, such as *The Times*, produced scathing responses, noting that despite 'both disrupting famous sporting events' there was 'no real comparison' (Simpson 2012, p. 3). The article went on to note Oldfield's extremely privileged position compared to Davison (who also studied at Oxford and received a 1st, but was not awarded a degree because of her gender), who 'devoted herself to her cause' while 'his cause is less clear' (ibid, p.3). The article finished by noting the ways 'she lost her life' for the sake of her cause, while he walked away 'grinning,' thus implying the extreme differentials in both the radicalism and legitimacy of their respective protests.

Legitimising Davison at the Expense of Contemporary Feminists

While Davison was often used as a marker against which other types of activism were measured, in some cases she was specifically used as a marker by which to measure (the failing status of) contemporary *feminism*. As scholars have noted, it has been a common trope for the news media to pit generations of feminists against one another, as a means of (de)legitimizing one 'wave' over the other (see

Dean, 2010; Douglas, 2010; Mendes 2012), and this was also evident in our sample. For example, in a 2010 *Daily Mail* feature, the 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' (McKinstry 2010). In an ostensibly 'pro-women' 2005 *Times* article ('Sexy dressing? Relax, sisters', 17 December, p.36) about 'prudish' feminists, the writer states 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' (but then goes on to castigate 'uptight prisses' for criticising women who dress in 'sexy' ways).

Another example, is a 1997 *Daily Mail* column which laments the current state of feminism, using the popular pop group the Spice Girls as emblematic of this problem. Noting that 'instead of burning their bras, they wear push-up bras,' the columnist Lesley Garner asks: '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 recounts how the Spice Girls sexually objectify men in the same ways they have been objectified and asks: 'Is this what Emily Davison threw herself under the king's racehorse for? It may be Girl Power, but to me it sounds like the very old game of girls doing anything to get male attention.'

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: 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’.

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 legitimization of her radical protest towards the end of the twentieth century occurs at the same time as the *difference* in worthiness and justifiability between her actions and those of contemporary activists is strongly emphasised. The ‘radical’ and ‘extreme’ nature of her actions that had been used to demonise Davison in the early part of the century becomes precisely the ways by which contemporary activists and ‘objectionable’ women are undermined and pilloried. 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. The potential threat that is contained in our analysis of Davison is that the *efficacy* of radical activism can be neutralised by ensuring that when she is invoked, it is to disarticulate rather than to inspire contemporary feminist activism.

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). Similarly, Kat Gupta identified a “racing discourse” through which Davison was figured and understood at the time of her death. 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 our analysis of newspaper texts, we found a recurrent theme 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 29 articles (15 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.’ Davison’s actions are made secondary to this scandal, which made the 1913 Derby the ‘most sensational Derby in history.’

It is in the *Daily Mail* that the discursive trivialisation has occurred most strongly and frequently. While in most of the articles around the time of her death in June 1913 Davison is referred to by name, by December 1913 she is simply referred to as a “Suffragette”, in an article which reflects on the past twelve months in horse-racing terms. 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” that has been identified in recent historical scholarship has a long precedent in newspaper representations, where the horses themselves and the outcome of the Derby race are clearly assigned more historical importance than Davison, or indeed the political context or motivations of her actions that day. We can also see here, in the description of Davison merely as a “Suffragette” that recurs across

newspaper texts, the conflation and homogenisation of diverse identities within the suffrage movement that Gupta also identified.

In a *Daily Mail* article from 1934, entitled ‘My memories of twenty Derby days’, the writer’s recollection of the 1913 race includes the memory that the favourite horse Craganour did not win; however, Davison is not referred to by name, only recalled as an “unfortunate suffragette.” As with almost all articles in our sample, there is no mention of the wider movement or discussion of her intentions beyond the ambivalent connotations attached to the description ‘suffragette’; moreover, here it does not even mention that she died from her injuries – of concern here is only the spectacular disruption to the race. In line with this, a 1934 *Daily Mirror* article refers back to the “Suffragette Derby” of 1913, indicating the ways both in which Davison’s actions have become immortalised in racing history, but also how they have been subsumed and obscured by it. In a *Daily Mail* article from 1971 written by a jockey who had previously won the Derby, entitled ‘How I did it’, the sub-title reads: “Only a suffragette could have prevented Mill Reef giving me my great moment.” This discourse reductively frames Davison as an unnamed and generic suffragette, who has merely become a trope that signifies disruption and disorder; we suggest that this is part of the ways that Davison has been invoked as a one-dimensional figure whose politics and individual complexity are made irrelevant. This discursive figuring continues into the late twentieth century. In a *Daily Mail* article from 1990 entitled ‘Come rain or shine - it's Pimmsville,’ Davison is 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, but particularly the *Daily Mail*, it is replaced as a dominant discursive frame by more celebratory accounts of Davison as an ‘inspirational’ historical figure connected firmly and explicitly to histories of politics and feminism, but also the delegitimisation of contemporary activism mentioned previously.

Conclusion

Using a combination of qualitative content and critical discourse analysis, this article reveals three key ways Emily Wilding Davison was framed across four national British newspapers between 1913-2013. Although these frames did not necessarily emerge in a neat, linear fashion, it is clear that Davison went from being cast as a deviant, militant, irrational character, to one whose status was slowly recuperated as wider views about women’s status changed. In doing so, Davison was rescued from being a ‘brutal lunatic woman’ to that of a heroic, iconic martyr, who died for a worthy cause. Throughout time, but particularly towards the noughties and beyond, Davison’s image was often evoked to showcase what true dedication to a cause looked like, and she was not only used as a marker of legitimate activism, but of legitimate *feminist* activism. In doing so, we can identify a discursive process with ambivalent implications for contemporary feminism. In many ways this reveals the successful outcome of the long-fought struggles of many feminist historians, writers and activists in recovering the histories of first-wave feminism and securing a place for suffragettes in public memory. However, the legitimization 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 finished by noting the ways Davison has been trivialised over time, and 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, which has worked to obscure the motivations behind her actions, the conditions of women’s lives, and the vast inequalities they have sought to rectify. 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 the hundred year timeframe of our newspaper texts, 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, 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. We suggest 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 relationship between media, movements, and memory. We hope that it will open up space for further explorations and detailed analyses of how the fight for women’s rights has been represented in the mainstream media, but also how the movement has been figured in historical imaginaries and public memories. Significantly, our findings demonstrate that even when political rights – such as women’s right to vote - have been formally won, the discursive struggle to recognize and legitimize the activism that enabled these rights continues.

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