

The Cat and Mouse Act: Deconstructing Hegemonic Masculinity in Edwardian Britain

by

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Abstract

The Cat and Mouse Act was the soubriquet assigned to the notorious Prisoners (Temporary Discharge for Ill-Health) Bill introduced to British Parliament by the Rt. Hon. Reginald McKenna in March 1913. This Bill garnered intense media attention, inflamed many Members of Parliament, and sparked a backlash of angry protest by supporters of the women's vote. The Cat and Mouse Act was an emergency measure meant to apply to a specific group of radical women known as the suffragettes, who hunger-struck when imprisoned for carrying out illegal and frequently violent acts to pressure Parliament to give women the vote. The Cat and Mouse Act was presented as a way to alleviate the hunger-strike, but it also was meant to control the suffragettes' mobility and provide a deterrent to their illegal activities. This legislation became a dangerous and ineffective tool of Parliament to control the suffragettes, as well as an incitement to the suffragettes to continue radical demonstrations for the vote. An examination into the debates surrounding the Cat and Mouse Act show that British Government embodied a hegemonic masculinity as it attempted to control the suffragettes, and their supporters in Parliament, while passing this controversial legislation.

Keywords: Suffragettes; Cat and Mouse Act; Hegemonic Masculinity; Edwardian Britain; Women's Suffrage

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my family. To my sons, Trevor and Justin, with pride at the compassionate young men they are growing up to be, and to my husband, Sean, who has believed in me from the moment I met him.

This thesis is also dedicated to my father, Rod, for being proud of me as a student even after all these years.

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1. Introduction

This thesis will examine how British Members of Parliament constructed a complex web of physical and discursive masculinist strategies to uphold hegemonic political masculinity in Edwardian Britain. MPs were the personification of a political power that reached across a vast empire; but in the early twentieth century, Parliament faced significant challenges to its authority at home and abroad. Britain had long fought to create and hold onto a vast empire, but in the early twentieth century, that empire was shaky. The Boer War had been a disaster that arguably ushered in the demise of the British Empire and contributed to increasing criticism of imperialism. A growing social welfare movement led to strong questioning of how Britain treated its subject peoples at home and overseas. As Europe felt the rumblings of discontent that would lead to the First World War, Britain rushed to improve education and the social conditions of the lower classes in an effort to compete in an increasingly commercial and industrialized climate. Britain also struggled with economic questions as the decline of agriculture and industry in Britain required greater “National Efficiency” and revisions to the tariff policy in a changing global economy.¹

¹ Martin Pugh, *The Making of Modern British Politics 1867-1945* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002).

Added to these strains at the international level were factors that destabilized hegemonic masculinity at home. Women embraced a more public role and a growing women's movement challenged masculinist perspectives on issues such as matrimonial property, domestic violence, divorce, and prostitution. British Members of Parliament were also pressured to change the shape of national politics by demands to expand the pool of people who would be allowed to vote. Along with significant electoral reforms with the *Representation of the People Act* of 1867, when working-class men were first granted the franchise, came increasing pressure from the women's movement to extend voting privileges to women. By the early twentieth century, Parliament saw more changes, with a new working-class Labour Party and further reforms when the *Parliament Act* of 1911 granted the House of Commons greater powers than the House of Lords and the monarch. These important Acts had far-reaching consequences for the shape of British politics, challenging older, paternalistic forms of patriarchal power. Another, hitherto understudied piece of legislation greatly influenced perceptions of British masculinity at this time. British Parliament debated and passed the *Prisoners (Temporary Discharge for Ill-Health) Act* 1913 within the context of the women's suffrage campaign in Britain. This Act was an effort by men who upheld hegemonic masculinity to push back at militant suffragettes by controlling their bodies and punishing them for their radical agitation for the vote.

This thesis will explore this masculinist response to the feminist challenge to male power—a challenge exerted by both female and male women's suffrage supporters—within the framework of a hegemonic and patriarchal institution. As often happens with Government reforms, the *Prisoners (Temporary Discharge for Ill-Health) Act* both reflected and shaped cultural understandings of gender of the time. When

Home Secretary Reginald McKenna stood up in the House of Commons on 2 March 1913 to introduce his new Bill, he stated:

We have today to deal with an unprecedented set of circumstances... a new set of prisoners have come into prison who have taken up as a policy the practice of hunger striking.... Those prisoners have declared war on society, and part of their campaign is to carry on war... against all Governments which are responsible to a House of Commons elected by men.²

McKenna's phraseology suggests that elite masculinities experienced the suffragettes' activities as a national threat and saw the new Bill as a measure to safeguard peace in the nation. While the actual legislation was broadly framed and could apply to any prisoner, the Home Secretary—the Member of Parliament in charge of prisons—designed this Bill to apply immediately and explicitly to suffragettes. This group of radical women refused to conform to Edwardian Britain's highly gendered domestic and supportive feminine roles and instead carried out drastic, violent, and frequently illegal acts to pressure Parliament to give women the vote.

“Suffragette” was the appellation that distinguished radical women's suffrage supporters from moderate, constitutional suffragists. Emmeline Pankhurst had revolutionized the women's suffrage campaign in Britain when she and her daughters Sylvia and Christabel broke away from predominant women's suffrage organizations and formed the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) in 1903. The Pankhursts felt that moderate methods had not been successful in agitating for the vote, and they transformed the WSPU into a militant and radical organization with a single-minded

² *Hansard*, 51 Parl. Deb. H.C. (1913) 404-75.

determination to win women the vote. For several years beginning in 1905, suffragettes demonstrated in the streets and held public rallies to speak about votes for women, and they heckled and harassed Members of Parliament on their way to sittings and during meetings. As Government declined to push forward the issue of woman's enfranchisement, suffragettes became more militant. They wrote "Votes for Women" on walls and burned the slogan in acid onto golf course greens; they broke windows and set fire to paintings in museums; they attempted arson at the private residences of MPs; and they planted bombs at public buildings, churches and cathedrals as well as at Home Secretary Reginald McKenna's office.³

The Home Secretary authorized increased police presence at the sites of the suffragettes' demonstrations, but this only provoked a more violent response and Government and the suffragettes became embroiled in an ever more militant struggle. As suffragettes were arrested and imprisoned more frequently, they continued to press their political agenda by demanding to be incarcerated with the status of political prisoners. When they were instead sentenced to serve their time in Division Three at Holloway Gaol, where the common criminals were held, suffragettes began hunger-striking in July of 1909. This ploy to gain political prisoner status was ineffective, however; the first hunger-striker, Marion Wallace Dunlop, found that she was released

³ C.J. Bearman, "An Examination of Suffragette Violence," *English Historical Review* 120, no. 486 (2005): 365. See also: Carolyn Christensen-Nelson, *Literature of the Women's Suffrage Campaign in England* (Toronto: Broadview Press, Ltd, 2004). This anthology of suffragette writing provides justifications for the suffragettes' increasingly militant methods and includes counter-arguments to the suffragettes' cause, based on their use of radical methods.

after only three days because prison officials were afraid that she would die in prison.⁴ Immediately, most imprisoned suffragettes adopted this tactic and achieved early release, only to directly resume their political protest activities. At first, Home Secretary Gladstone authorized hunger-striking suffragettes' early release due to ill-health, but when the Home Office reversed that decision in September 1909, Prison Medical Officers focused instead on the method of forcible feeding to end the hunger-strikes. Although Gladstone was originally against forcible feeding, King Edward VII and the President of the Royal College of Physicians pressured the Home Secretary to adopt the procedure, and in September 1909, the Home Office initiated the process.⁵ The first forcible feeding incident occurred at Winson Green Prison in September 1909. E. Sylvia Pankhurst wrote, "The Government was not slow to take advantage of the new tactics [of forcible feeding] to inflict harsher punishment upon their instruments."⁶ This gruesome measure only inflamed the suffragettes and their supporters more, spurring much public censure and even arousing sympathy for the suffragettes.

For four years, the Home Office and the suffragettes were embroiled in a vicious cycle of protest, arrest and imprisonment, hunger-striking, early release, and forcible feeding. McKenna's opening remarks on the Prisoners (Temporary Discharge for Ill-Health) Bill revealed his, and more generally, Government's frustration over the recalcitrance of the suffragettes. The sense of invasion of masculine space was palpable in his condemnation of the "war" against "a House of Commons elected by

⁴ J. F. Geddes, "Culpable Complicity: The Medical Profession and the Forcible Feeding of Suffragettes, 1909-1914," *Women's History Review* 17, no.1 (2008): 79.

⁵ Geddes, 82.

⁶ Pankhurst, quoted in Christensen-Nelson, 103.

men.” As Home Secretary and therefore in charge of increasing police presence at demonstrations and sanctioning forcible feeding, McKenna had been particularly targeted by the suffragettes. The main objective of McKenna’s proposed legislation was to enable the Home Secretary to release ill prisoners on temporary licence while suspending their prison sentences for the duration of time spent in convalescence. The Home Secretary already held the power of release under the *Prison Act*, but under that legislation, the currency of the sentence would continue during convalescent leave. Because suffragettes often had relatively short prison sentences, McKenna devised the *Prisoners (Temporary Discharge for Ill-Health) Act*—or the Cat and Mouse Act as it was most well known—so that convalescent leave would not be counted in the sentence term and thereby reduce time spent in prison. He proposed that the Act would at the same time limit the suffragettes’ mobility and provide a deterrent to their radical and often violent agitations for the vote. The Cat and Mouse Act accomplished neither of these goals and instead became a dangerous and ineffective tool of Government to control, and even punish, the suffragettes, as well as an incitement to the suffragettes to carry out further radical agitation for the vote. This legislation also entrenched the controversial practice of forcible feeding in penal contexts, a method that had previously only been employed as a medical necessity in hospital and asylum settings and that was not legislatively authorized for dealing with hunger-strikers in prison.⁷ The *Prisoners (Temporary Discharge for Ill-Health) Act* marks the climax of Government’s effort to suppress the militant protests of the suffragettes.

⁷ “Consent: Force Feeding of Prisoners,” *Medical Law Review* 3 (Summer 1995): 195.

The Bill was pressed through the House of Commons by the Liberal Government's Whip with Conservative Opposition's support, and was passed as an emergency measure in just one month. But despite the powerful support for the Bill in the House of Commons, there was still a great deal of heavy debate over the proposed legislation. MPs who disagreed with the Bill skirted the Whip by proposing amendments that would alter the nature of the Bill. Members of Parliament who argued for the Act were clearly frustrated over the increasingly violent activities of the militant suffragettes and anxious to put an end to their persistent hunger-striking tactics. Several Members felt that the Act was too harsh and reactionary in nature and accused McKenna of abusing his power and punishing the suffragettes. These MPs insisted that someone more neutral, such as a judge, should deal with the matter, and even asked McKenna to step down. While some of the opponents to the Act were motivated by a gendered sense of chivalry and protectiveness towards beleaguered womanhood, there were also Members who were sympathetic to the suffragettes and the issue of the women's vote. The disparity in these MPs' responses to the Cat and Mouse Act provides valuable insight into how some MPs moved to reinforce hegemonic masculinity while others sought to shift understandings of gender and redefine masculinity during this complex episode.

1.1. Historiography and Theory

Valuable research has been done into control of women's bodies and discipline and punishment as mechanisms of masculinist domination of women, but the Cat and Mouse Act has not been studied through these theoretical lenses. Furthermore, the Cat and Mouse Act, although an important piece of Parliamentary legislation, has not been

the focus of any single article or monograph and often occupies at most a page or two or as little as a paragraph or a phrase, even in writings about the women's suffrage movement.⁸ The British women's suffrage movement has drawn much attention from women's historians who have generated a great volume of literature on suffragist history. Sandra Stanley Holton argues that the British women's suffrage movement was a rare occasion in history when women were at the centre of the narrative of a political issue.⁹ Decades of women's history has addressed this skewed focus and, as Jill Liddington and Jill Norris write, "The earlier recuperative and celebratory narrative has been recast by consideration of 'gender history,'" leading to a greater ability to understand the women's suffrage campaign with all of its fractures and failures, as well as its successes."¹⁰ However, this gender history usually addresses how suffragettes' actions challenged established middle-class feminine gender roles of the time and often sensationalizes the WSPU, the suffragettes, and their supporters as an anomaly in the greater women's suffrage movement.¹¹ Any discussion of what the legislation reveals about Edwardian masculinities is absent. For example, C.J. Bearman argues that the

⁸ For example, the *Women's History Review* 14, nos. 3&4 (2005) is a special issue dedicated to articles related to the women's suffrage movement, yet there is no discussion of the Cat and Mouse Act. June Purvis, "The Prison Experiences of the Suffragettes in Edwardian Britain," *Women's History Review* 4, no. 1 (1995): 103-33. June Purvis is an authority on the British women's suffrage movement, but in her scope she does not allow for a thorough analysis of the Cat and Mouse Act.

⁹ Sandra Stanley Holton, *Feminism and Democracy: Women's Suffrage and Reform Politics in Britain 1900-1918* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

¹⁰ Jill Liddington and Jill Norris, eds., *One Hand Tied Behind Us: The Rise of the Women's Suffrage Movement* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 2000), Preface.

¹¹ Harold L. Smith suggests that the earliest histories were those of the suffragettes because of their militancy, and only in the 1970s did the constitutional suffragists receive their own attention, and that at that time, the historiography was the anomaly. Harold L. Smith, *The British Women's Suffrage Campaign 1866-1328*, 2nd ed. (Harlow, England: Pearson Education Limited, 2007).

suffragettes' intention in violence was "firstly to intimidate and secondly to punish [government and communities]... to create an impossible situation for the government in which it would be forced to grant women the vote."¹² Rachel Monaghan writes, "Attacks on private property were justified on the grounds that most owners were male and already possessed the vote."¹³ Yet, Bearman and Monaghan fail to recognize that men's responses and strategies are also worthy of study in that they were part of the conversation that created understandings of gender in Edwardian Britain.

This thesis will demonstrate that this final moment in the struggle between the suffragettes and Parliament is highly significant, not only to the niche historiography of the suffragettes, but also to a greater understanding of British masculinities in the early twentieth century. In most suffragette historiography, male involvement is depicted as a reaction by legislators, male authorities, or police in response to suffragettes' militancy. There are numerous discussions of male detractors—or "antis"—but these studies focus more on the men's *reactions* to the *actions* of the suffragettes rather than how they were, at the same time, articulating masculinities in this context. There has been little, yet promising, work analyzing men's involvement in the British women's suffrage campaign while theorizing gender.¹⁴ Sandra Stanley Holton argues that male militants—

¹² Bearman, 375. Bearman writes that militancy's assumption "that it was necessary for male politicians to be terrorized into giving women the vote [is] highly contentious in [itself]." (quoting Purvis) Bearman's thesis is that militancy spoiled the chance of the vote being on the table.

¹³ Rachel Monaghan, "Single-Issue Terrorism: A Neglected Phenomenon?" *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 23 (2000): 261.

¹⁴ A volume edited by Angela V. John and Claire Eustance attempts to bring masculinity into the historiography, yet there is still a tentative feel to this volume; the foreword wrestles with the question "'Whose History?'" Paul Stigant, "Foreword: Whose History," in John and Eustance, xiii-xix.

“suffragettes in trousers”—were imprisoned and hunger-struck, and were forcibly fed just as female suffragettes were, yet were demasculinized by criticism from other men and unappreciated by female suffragettes of the women-only WSPU, Holton observes.¹⁵

There is room here to delve into the masculine identities of women’s suffrage supporters as well as its opponents. I will push the historiography’s portrayal of male supporters of the women’s agenda further to investigate how different masculinities aligned themselves vis-à-vis each other, and to suggest that the history of the British women’s suffrage campaign has a place for masculinity as well as femininity in its scope.

This legislation is usually discussed peripherally as an aspect of the suffragettes’ prison experiences, and the focus usually centres on forcible feeding more than the Cat and Mouse Act, itself. According to June Purvis, contemporary critics of the suffragettes painted a “picture of irrational women, deliberately seeking their own torture [which was] eagerly seized upon by male historians who sought to ridicule the WSPU and their politics.”¹⁶ Discussion of the Cat and Mouse Act is often used to show that Parliament succumbed to public outcry over forcible feedings and justified their passing of the Act as a more humane way of dealing with the suffragettes rather than forcibly feeding

¹⁵ Sandra Stanley Holton, “Manliness and Militancy: The Political Protest of Male Suffragists and the Gendering of the ‘Suffragette’ Identity,” in John and Eustance, 110-34.

¹⁶ Purvis, “Prison,” 104.

them.¹⁷ This line of reasoning can give readers the impression that the Act was indeed a benevolent manifestation of paternalism that put an end to forcible feeding, and can also distort understandings of masculinity in this episode by suggesting that all MPs participated in this patriarchal domination of women. In reality, articulations of masculinity among MPs were more complex. Parliament's heated debates over the actual purpose of the Cat and Mouse Act and wide disagreement over the entrenchment of forcible feeding provide us with valuable insights into the discursive shadings of masculinity throughout this episode. By examining the ways that men who upheld hegemonic masculinity in Edwardian Britain responded to the suffragettes' challenge and how hegemonic masculinity was imagined, contested, and reinforced in this episode, this thesis will contribute to the scholarship on masculinist control of women's bodies. By paying attention to differing masculine voices in the debate about the Cat and Mouse Act, it will also contribute to studies of divergent masculinities, and the way that discourses about masculinity evolved in response to different ideas about women's proper place and male political entitlement.

¹⁷ In their book entirely about the suffragettes, Jill Liddington and Jill Norris simply write, "Finally the Liberal Government responded [to hunger-striking]... with the cruel 'Cat and Mouse Act' which permitted prisoners to be temporarily discharged to recover their health and then readmitted to prison." Liddington and Norris, 210. John Williams writes, "Governments have resorted to extreme measures to ensure that hunger-strikers do not become martyrs"; he uses as his example the Cat and Mouse Act. John Williams, "Hunger Strikes: A Prisoner's Right or a 'Wicked Folly?'" *Howard Journal of Criminal Justice* 40, no. 3 (2001): 285. Harold L. Smith similarly observes that the Act was passed by a Government "concerned at the public outcry against forcible feeding, but fearful that a suffragette might die from hunger-striking and become a martyr." Smith, 52. Ian Miller, "Necessary Torture? Vivisection, Suffragette Force-Feeding and Responses to Scientific Medicine in Britain c. 1870-1920," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 64, No. 3 (July 2009): 361. Miller writes, "These methods [forcible feeding] were applied until the Cat and Mouse Act of 1913." Malcolm Pearce and Geoffrey Stewart, *British Political History 1867-2001: Democracy and Decline* (New York: Routledge, 2002): 208. Pearce and Stewart state that the Cat and Mouse Act was passed "instead of the unpleasant forced feeding [of suffragettes]."

Historians of gender have become increasingly engaged in the study of masculinity as an ever-shifting, historically influenced, and socially constructed phenomenon that can shed new light upon historical events. The study of masculinity can illuminate episodes hitherto considered men's province, but it can also affect the way historians interpret events that once fell, typically, into the category of women's history. The study of the British women's suffrage movement is an area that opens up significantly to new historical scrutiny when considered from a theoretical approach involving masculinity. Scholars such as Ava Baron, Joan Scott, John Tosh, and R.W. Connell assert that, although masculinity has often been treated as the universal, requiring no explanation, men are gendered too.¹⁸ Baron writes:

[H]istorians, disillusioned by their ability to explain social transformation, can benefit by studying masculinity as well as femininity, not as static concepts, but as processes, embedded in social, political and economic relationships, institutions and practices.¹⁹

In gender historiography, masculinity has been studied in terms of shifting and multi-faceted identities that must be contextualized. John Tosh urges historians to "not so much attempt 'a history of masculinity' as analyse the relationship between men's

¹⁸ John Tosh, "What Should Historians do with Masculinity?: Reflections on Nineteenth-Century Britain," *History Workshop Journal* 38, no. 1 (1994): 197-202; Ava Baron, "On Looking at Men: Masculinity and the Making of a Gendered Working-Class History," in *Feminists Re-Vision History*, edited by Anne-Louise Shapiro (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994); Joan Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

¹⁹ Baron, 150.

gender and the other ways in which their identity and behaviour are structured in specific historical formations.”²⁰

Sociologist R.W. Connell argues that masculinity is socially and culturally constructed, and that men experience multiple masculinities that they may draw on a “cultural repertoire of masculine behaviour.”²¹ Arthur Brittan similarly argues that even when men are involved in a collective power structure, masculinity is not a collective identity.²² Tosh also recognizes that masculinity is not monolithic, but makes “socially crippling distinctions... which have to be maintained by force, as well as by cultural means.”²³ Joan Scott’s theories on gender can also help us to understand how Government’s enactment of the Cat and Mouse Act resulted not only from Parliament’s belief that the suffragettes were not following socially accepted women’s gender roles, but also from these men’s anxieties and frustrations arising out of the pressures they faced as the gendered power relations of Edwardian Britain began to shift beneath their feet.

²⁰ John Tosh, “Hegemonic Masculinity and the History of Gender,” in *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History*, edited by Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann and John Tosh (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 41.

²¹ R. W. Connell, *Masculinities, 2nd Edition* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1995), xix, 76-80. R. W. Connell has recently self-identified as a transgendered person and has adopted the feminine pronoun as well as changing her first name to Raewyn. I will refer to Connell in the gender she identifies with at the time of writing of this thesis, even when the material I reference was written under Connell’s previous identification as a male.

²² See also: Jeff Hearn and David L. Collinson, “Theorizing Unities and Differences Between Men and Between Masculinities,” in *Theorizing Masculinities*, eds. Harry Brod and Michael Kaufman (London,: Sage Publications, 1994): 95-118; Arthur Brittan, *Masculinity and Power* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989): For a discussion of patriarchy as a socially and culturally constructed—and not always willing—masculinity, see: Roger Horrocks, *Masculinity in Crisis* (London: St. Martin’s Press, 1994).

²³ Tosh, “What Should Historians Do With Masculinity?,” 192.

Multiple configurations of masculinity were evident in British Parliament as MPs faced challenges from the suffragettes and from each other. The relational quality among masculinities becomes evident when investigating how Members of Parliament argued and debated among themselves over the nature of the Act and over the ramifications of granting women the vote. Examining masculinity can help us to understand that male authority figures felt threatened by suffragettes, who resisted masculine political authority and became increasingly aggressive, militant, and physically assertive. Yet it also helps us see that masculine responses were not homogeneous. MPs who supported and ultimately passed the Cat and Mouse Act may have exerted a hegemonic authority; but this thesis will reveal that masculinity was not monolithic in this historical moment.

John Tosh's work on British hegemonic masculinity can help make sense of why Members of Parliament, as men within this historical context, passed the Cat and Mouse Act primarily to block feminine inroads into masculine political power. Hegemonic masculinity is "insecure", Tosh writes, when "exposed to resistance."²⁴ The above contributions on hegemonic masculinity show how men in the hegemonic position, such as those in Government, defend their authority as a stake in their masculine identity. However, the Cat and Mouse Act debates show more complexity in the Parliamentary system and reveal a power structure that was subject to resistance not only from women, but also from men articulating other masculine identities within Parliament and without. R.W. Connell has identified a framework that shows how four main categories

²⁴ Tosh, "What Should Historians Do With Masculinity?," 184.

of masculinity may work together to maintain a system of hegemonic masculinity.

Connell describes the superordinate position within the framework:

Hegemonic masculinity... embodied the currently most honored way of being a man; it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men... Hegemony did not mean violence, although it could be supported by force; it meant ascendancy achieved through culture, institutions, and persuasion.²⁵

In Edwardian Britain, hegemonic masculinity was embodied by men in Government and its supporters; it was an elite, patriarchal, and paternal manifestation. The system of hegemonic masculinity relegated other masculinities outside of the dominant group to either a subordinate, a complicit, or a marginalized position, all of which were called upon to support hegemonic power's position because of the "patriarchal dividend" that accrued to all men within the system of power.

Connell's framework has been challenged by other theorists. Connell, herself, has acknowledged that there can be limitations and challenges to applying her framework in all historical contexts. (Originally the framework was conceived to describe gender relations among homosexual males in a high school setting.) Yet Connell defends the usefulness of her theory:

[T]he fact that the concept has been widely used suggests that it meets a need. From my reading of the literature, the key issues for which this concept has been providing a useful tool are the pervasiveness of relatively narrow cultural constructions of masculinity, the diversity of men's real experiences and trajectories, the significance of power

²⁵ R. W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity, Rethinking the Concept," *Gender and Society* 19, no. 6 (Dec. 2005): 832.

relations among men and between men and women, and above all the varying combination of these factors in real-life situations.²⁶

Clearly, the concept cannot be applied as an absolute, and does not transfer comprehensively to every gender setting without modification. While recognizing the importance of Connell's contributions to the understanding of masculinity, this thesis moves beyond Connell's approach to uncover not only the masculinities that propped up the hegemonic group in the Cat and Mouse Act debates, but also the pro-suffrage and/or pro-feminist men who refused to support that hegemony and were able to exert considerable pressure and even influence on the dominant group. Connell's framework requires modification to allow for this recalcitrant masculinity that would not come back into the fold. In my research, I have found that Members of Parliament who supported women's suffrage suggest yet another category beyond those in Connell's framework. I will argue that men who attempted to thwart the Bill through constant amendments, who engaged public opinion in support of women's suffrage, and who supported the militant suffragettes embraced what I call a subversive masculinity.

The concept of subversive masculinity explains how even MPs from the same political party, the same class, or the same ethnicity as those who supported the Bill operated not only to advocate for women's rights but, in the

²⁶ R.W. Connell, "On Hegemonic Masculinity and Violence: Response to Jefferson and Hall" *Theoretical Criminology* 6 (2002): 91.

process, to define an alternative, subversive masculinity. As Carolyn Spring has noted:

The advocacy of women's suffrage did offer men a platform on which to express a contradiction between the dominant notions of masculinity and individuals' reluctance to pursue that notion. Oratorical attempts to renovate masculinity embedded in a critique of the state not only functioned to promote a public distance from the hegemonic ideologies of manliness but also operated to re-establish men's self-affirmation.²⁷

In this thesis, I will show how pro-feminist and pro-suffrage MPs steadfastly opposed McKenna and the Cat and Mouse Act, refusing to conform to subordinate, complicit, or marginalized masculine roles. Subversive masculinity problematizes Connell's framework, because it was able to situate itself within the Parliamentary machinery, yet operate outside of the cosmology of hegemonic masculinity, even as it engaged with it. Parliamentary debates show that the men who articulated subversive masculinity created a counter-discourse to promote a secure masculinity that strove to recognize the rights of women and to curb the overwhelmingly patriarchal power of Parliament.

This thesis will also explore the significance of theories on punishment, the control of women's bodies, and rape to show how the Cat and Mouse Act was a strategy through which Government tried to stifle the suffragettes' political

²⁷ Carolyn Spring, "The Political Platform and the Language of Support for Women's Suffrage," in *The Men's Share?: Masculinities, Male Support and Women's Suffrage in Britain, 1890-1920*, eds. Angela V. John and Claire Eustance (London: Routledge, 1997), 171.

agency through physical punishment, or the threat of physical punishment.

These elite political men in Britain relied upon their dominance over women to maintain their power; as the suffragettes refused to submit to Government authority, this masculinist tool was wielded ever more heavily.

Some secondary literature has come close to exploring male authorities' treatment of female women's suffrage supporters as a method of control, but these discussions fall short in not integrating in their scope the Cat and Mouse Act—the ultimate and most formidable expression of hegemonic masculine control in this campaign. In a section entitled “Protecting the Centre: National Parties and the Control of Women,” a volume edited by Myriam Boussahba-Bravard contains three articles discussing how British political parties controlled women's suffrage organizations by prescribing the lobbying and political activities of the members.²⁸ Yet there is no discussion of physical control of women in any of the three articles, and there is no mention of the Cat and Mouse Act, the most

²⁸ Myriam Boussahba-Bravard, ed. *Suffrage Outside Suffragism: Women's Vote in Britain, 1880-1914* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

serious and intentional method of control by representatives of national political parties as they voted in Parliament to pass this Act.²⁹

Historians of first-wave feminism and the women's suffrage movement in Britain have demonstrated how male authorities have clashed with suffragists, not just over the vote, but also over control of women's own bodies. Many women's rights organizations had attempted to place women's bodies on the political agenda. The Repeal of the *Contagious Disease Act 1864* (CDA) campaign is a well-known example of how women's rights groups lobbied for the women's vote and against legislation controlling women's bodies at the same time.³⁰ The CDA was legislation forcing prostitutes (or other women suspected of carrying venereal disease) to submit to gynaecological testing for venereal diseases. Opponents asserted that the Act defined women prostitutes as less moral and more likely to be diseased than their male clients, thus degrading the

²⁹ The three articles are: "Women in the Labour Party and Women's Suffrage" by Pat Thane, "The Conservative Party and Women's Suffrage" by Lori Maguire, and "Gender, Suffrage and Party: Liberal Women's Organisations, 1880-1914" by Linda Walker. All three of these articles have ample potential for delving more deeply into more stringent methods of control of women's bodies employed by representatives of all three of these parties. In fairness, perhaps it is Boussahba-Bravard's heading that is too ambitious, and misleading as to the intentions of these three authors.

³⁰ The *Contagious Diseases Act* was passed in 1864, was amended in 1867 and 1869 to be powerful and far-reaching, but was repealed in 1886 due to women's rights groups campaigning. Mary Maynard refers to the *Contagious Diseases Act* as an "anti-woman" law. Mary Maynard, "Privilege and Patriarchy," in *Sexuality and Subordination: Interdisciplinary Studies of Gender in the Nineteenth Century*, edited by Susan Mendus and Jane Rendall (London: Routledge, 1989), 225. Rendall writes that the campaign against the *Contagious Diseases Act* "gave a particular moral cutting edge [to] the militant suffragism of the early 1900s." Jane Rendall, ed., *Equal or Different: Women's Politics 1800-1914* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1987): 141.

female body, and also exerted direct control over women's bodies by compelling them to be physically tested. Josephine Butler, the head of the campaign, referred to the examinations as "instrumental rape"; she, Frances Power Cobbe, and J. Ellice Hopkins all decried male control over women's bodies as an offshoot of their assertion of masculinity.³¹ The *Contagious Diseases Act* campaign is only one of several instances in the late nineteenth century in which women attached the issue of women's suffrage to agendas that addressed laws regulating women and their bodies.³²

This thesis will show that control of women's bodies became even more significant to elite masculinity when that control became inextricably linked to the vote and hence political power through the single-issue platform of the WSPU. Emmeline Pankhurst and members of the WSPU asserted that women would never be free from masculine domination in all its forms until they had the right to vote. The WSPU believed that the vote was the only measure that would ensure

³¹ Maynard, 233. Carolyn Christensen-Nelson's volume, *Literature of the Women's Suffrage Movement* contains many similar analogies in reference to forcible feeding.

³² Some further, but not exhaustive, examples are: the *Matrimonial Causes Act* 1878; the *Married Woman's Property Act* 1885 *Criminal Law Amendment Act* to raise age of consent for women; and the *Infants Act* 1886 giving the right of custody and guardianship to mothers. See also Barbara Caine, *Victorian Feminists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

women's physical and political emancipation.³³ The lengths to which Government went to control suffragettes' bodies and punish them for their insistence on campaigning for the vote show that Pankhurst's prediction was astute. Discussion of the Cat and Mouse Act attests that control of women's bodies was essential to shore up the masculine power of elite political men.

Control of women's bodies was a recognizably masculinist strategy that influenced gender relations between men and women, and even between men, in the episode of the Cat and Mouse Act. Rebecca Whisnant writes that "patriarchy systematically denies the bodily sovereignty of women as such, by defining [their] bodies as existing *for* the use and benefit of others... and then constructing institutions... that serve to normalize and enforce this definition."³⁴ In the case of the women's suffrage campaign, women rejected the patriarchal message that their bodies were best suited to motherhood and marriage and asserted their right to participation in national sovereignty, yet were still thwarted by an all-male Government. Carol Smart argues that as male authorities of this period increasingly defined women's behaviour as irrational, men's actions by

³³ The WSPU published its objective: "To secure for Women the Parliamentary Vote as it is or may be granted to Men; to use the power thus obtained to establish equality of rights and opportunities between the sexes; and to promote the social and industrial well-being of the community." Frank Moxon and Women's Social and Political Union, *What Forcible Feeding Means*, (London: Woman's Press, 1914): Endpage. <http://www.brynmawr.edu/library/exhibits/suffrage/MoxonForcibleFeeding.pdf>.

³⁴ Rebecca Whisnant, "A Woman's Body is Like a Foreign Country," in *Global Feminist Ethics: Feminist Ethics and Social Theory*, eds. Rebecca Whisnant and Peggy DesAutels (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2008), 161.

contrast were represented as more rational, and this discourse justified the increased disciplinary regulation of women's bodies. Smart asserts that women's bodies had been constructed as unruly subjects in order to allow men to disqualify them from the vote.³⁵ This disqualification, I will argue, reached its culmination with the issues surrounding the Cat and Mouse Act. The WSPU broke further from women's established roles and, in turn, Government devised the Cat and Mouse Act specifically to restrict the suffragettes' bodily sovereignty. MPs and others opposed to the suffragettes branded the women as hysterical in their hunger-striking, and therefore justified Parliamentary entrenchment of the regulatory method of forcible feeding as a rational response to justify unstable womanhood.

The Cat and Mouse Act clearly shows how Government attempted to control these women's bodies through their prison sentences, forcible feeding, and restrictive temporary release licences. Michel Foucault argues that the object of discipline and punishment is to control the body.³⁶ As he observes, "The old power of death that symbolized sovereign power was now carefully supplanted by the administration of bodies and the calculated management of

³⁵ Carol Smart, ed. *Regulating Womanhood* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 12.

³⁶ Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 138.

life.”³⁷ While Foucault's bodies are not gendered, the issue of forcible feeding of suffragettes related in a singular way to women's control of their own lives.

Forcible feeding can be seen as a way that male Parliamentarians and prison officials literally took the lives of the suffragettes into their own hands; they asserted dominance over life by forcing the women to take sustenance so that they would not die and leave martyrs for their cause.

A further exploration into the methods of the forcible feeding employed before and after the passing of the Cat and Mouse Act suggests that this method resounded strongly of rape and sexual assault. Sociologists, philosophers and other theorists, as well as radical feminists in the 1960s and 70s, theorized rape and sexual assault, including the *fear* of it, as a mechanism for maintaining male control and domination over women. Keith Burgess-Jackson writes, “The radical [theorist] views rape as a kind of degradation, as a kind of class-based (in this instance the classes are sexes) subordination... It is a way of lowering a woman's social status, of establishing a hierarchy and placing her low on it.”³⁸ Arthur Brittan argues that rape is political, and that from the threat of physical force or rape, the subjection of women, and all other subjection, becomes

³⁷ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (New York: Random House, 1978), 139-140.

³⁸ Keith Burgess-Jackson, *Rape: A Philosophical Investigation* (Hants, England: Dartmouth Publishing Company Limited, 1996), 53.

possible.³⁹ Suffragettes' own writings show that women who had been forcibly fed felt degraded, intimidated, and threatened by prison medical officers and even the Government. Furthermore, even police became more sexually aggressive in their treatment of the suffragettes soon after forcible feeding began. Clearly, even though suffragettes refused to bow to the image of woman as a sexualized being, they still experienced highly sexualized forms of domination by men.

1.2. Sources

Members of Parliament exercised the greatest political power in this episode, and their discussions have been essential to this project. Debates in Parliament were transcribed verbatim and appear in *Hansard*, available through the Simon Fraser University Library website.⁴⁰ These transcribed sessions have created an archive of materials that reveal the motives, concerns, and dispositions of many Members of Parliament in regards to perhaps the most harsh and gruelling Parliamentary backlash that supporters of women's suffrage in Britain had ever seen. Within *Hansard*, one of the key foci of my research has been the arguments among several central figures in Parliament, the most notable being: Liberal Home Secretary Reginald McKenna, who introduced the

³⁹ Brittan, 1989.

⁴⁰ *Hansard*, 50 Parl. Deb. H.L. (1913) 1489.

legislation; Keir Hardie, the first Labour MP to be elected to Parliament, close personal friend of the Pankhursts, and long-time advocate of women's suffrage; and Charles McCurdy, a Liberal MP returned by Northampton in 1910. By examining the arguments among these and other men, I will show how Home Secretary McKenna tried to control the suffragettes and assert Government's hegemonic authority over those MPs who supported them. The opposition by subversive masculinity is most exemplified by Keir Hardie and McCurdy, as these men introduced amendments and attempted to persuade their fellow MPs to modify the nature of the Cat and Mouse Act. Although men exemplifying subversive masculinity did not defeat the Cat and Mouse Act and did not win women the vote in the immediate event, their opposition does show that not all men served to reinforce the hegemonic system; nor were they always dependent upon the hegemonic articulation to define their masculine identities.

The discourses studied in this thesis are not restricted to Parliamentary debates. Many other men and women—such as authors and news reporters; suffragettes and conventional suffragists; doctors, prison wardens and wardresses; judges and police officers—all contributed to the cultural understandings that MPs both drew upon and influenced during the debates over the *Prisoners (Temporary Discharge for Ill-Health) Act*. Certainly, the voices that emanated from Parliament over the Cat and Mouse Act were not in unison. I have therefore examined a variety of other sources that have helped expand understandings of masculinity in this period. Contemporary periodicals are an important resource for the episode; the public followed the debates of Parliament

and contributed to these discussions through the press. Roger Fulford wrote that in the 1860s, the early years of Parliamentary reform and the era in which the movement for the women's vote first got its start, "an educated public followed every syllable of Parliamentary debates with the same concentrated attention with which they read their bibles."⁴¹ Many MPs used *The Times* newspaper to inform themselves about the suffragettes' agitation for the vote, as well as to gauge public sentiment over the suffragettes' actions and the MPs' own responses. In the Commons, MPs often referred to newspaper articles to illustrate a point about the suffragettes or about public opinion. Members of Parliament responded to suffragettes' protests through letters to the editor and used the press to articulate their stance upon the question of the women's vote, as well as to respond to public outcry over imprisonment, forcible feeding, and the Cat and Mouse Act.⁴²

⁴¹ Roger Fulford, *Votes for Women: The Story of a Struggle* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1957), 44.

⁴² For a discussion on how political men were compelled to address the public in their campaigning, see: Kit Good, "'Quit Ye Like Men': Platform Manliness and Electioneering, 1895-1939," in *Public Men: Masculinity and Politics in Modern Britain*, ed. Matthew McCormack (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007). For discussion of the importance of language in the construction and representation of gender, see John Stoltenberg, "How Power Makes Men: The Grammar of Gender Identity," in *Men and Power*, ed. Joseph A. Kuypers (New York: Prometheus Books, 1999). Stoltenberg argues that the word "men" can only be understood as an active noun, and that what "men" must do is power; this creates a collective "men" that necessitates the "doing" of power to gain membership into the collective. See also Cecilia Morgan, *Public Men and Virtuous Women: The Gendered Languages of Religion and Politics in Upper Canada, 1791-1850*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).

The press had long been a powerful venue for discussions of gender; the suffragettes used this medium because they knew that this was an effective way to bring the discussion of political entitlement—and consequently their challenge to hegemonic masculinity—before the broader public. Suffragettes used public protest and the popular press as well as their own periodicals to forward their agenda for the vote and to condemn Government for refusing women’s enfranchisement. The suffragettes used the press to provide graphic accounts of their imprisonments and the brutal practice of forcible feeding, casting aspersions upon male authority figures and accusing them of cruelly punishing the women for campaigning for the vote.⁴³ This type of exchange forced MPs into even more dialogue to rebut accusations and to enforce their positions as respectable patriarchs. As John Mercer observes, “Used alongside [radical protests] as a central strand of the organization’s campaign, the propaganda produced by the WSPU was fuelled by, and in turn underpinned, suffragette militancy.”⁴⁴

Parliament recognized the potentially threatening nature of the suffragettes’ media attack; the Home Office made considerable efforts to suppress *The Suffragette*, illustrating how potentially damaging the suffragettes

⁴³ John Mercer, “Media and Militancy: Propaganda in the Women’s Social and Political Union’s Campaign,” *Women’s History Review* 14, nos. 3&4 (2005).

⁴⁴ Mercer, 472.

gendered discourse might be to masculine power.⁴⁵ For my research into the suffragettes' own press, *Votes for Women* and, later, *The Suffragette*, I have had to rely upon secondary literature from authors who have had access to primary material and have done original research. I acknowledge the limitations of this methodology but feel that the inclusion of these writings, although selected by others, provides extra depth to my analysis. Suffragettes and their supporters were also prolific in literary publications and in their own private writings, contributing volumes of primary source material for consideration in this thesis.⁴⁶ I first learned about the Cat and Mouse Act in the volume *Literature of the Women's Suffrage Campaign in England*, edited by Carolyn Christensen Nelson. I have also relied upon several other anthologies that contain excerpts from dozens of such primary sources.⁴⁷ I intend to draw upon all of these sources to bring a fresh perspective to the contestation of hegemonic masculinity in this historical context.

⁴⁵ Elizabeth Crawford, "Police, Prisons and Prisoners," *Women's History Review* 14, nos. 3&4 (2005), 496. MPs' challenges to Government for attempting to suppress *The Suffragette* are strewn throughout Hansard.

⁴⁶ See: E. Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Life of Emmeline Pankhurst: The Suffragette Struggle for Women's Citizenship* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1936). This book is part-memoir of Sylvia, part-biography of Emmeline. See also: Emmeline Pankhurst, *My Own Story* (New York: Source Book Press, 1970); Constance Lytton, "Prisons and Prisoners: The Stirring Testimony of a Suffragette," in Christensen-Nelson, 138-144; and Christensen-Nelson.

⁴⁷ Cheryl R. Jorgensen-Earp, *Speeches and Trials of the Militant Suffragettes: The Women's Social and Political Union, 1903-1918* (London: Associated University Presses, 1999). Other collections include: Alison Lee, ed., *Suffragette Sally: Gertrude Colmore* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2008); Antonia Raeburn, ed., *The Suffragette View* (London: David & Charles, 1976); and Joyce Marlow, ed., *The Virago Book of Suffragettes* (London: Virago Press, 2000).

1.3. Chapter Outline

This thesis will include three additional chapters. Chapter Two will provide background about previous efforts by Government and political masculinities to exert control over the women's suffrage movement, and will describe how the threat that suffragettes posed to hegemonic masculinity provoked Government to enact the Cat and Mouse Act to further control the suffragettes' political lobbying and to punish them for the unwomanly nature of their campaign techniques. The chapter will end with an analysis of gendered discourses to discuss how forcible feeding was a highly intrusive masculinist strategy to control the suffragettes' very bodies, and was even experienced as rape by some who had suffered the procedure. Chapter Three will focus on how the debates of MPs and other interested parties in public, in Parliament, and in the press reflected and shaped constructs of masculinity. Drawing upon Connell's framework and my own adaptation of subversive masculinity, I will demonstrate that many MPs deployed clearly recognizable strategies to uphold hegemonic masculinity and, in some cases, shifted from one articulation of masculinity to another in their interactions with each other. I will also elucidate the ways in which some MPs refused to cooperate in the project of reinforcing hegemony. A concluding chapter will draw together my observations about how British Parliamentary masculinity was multi-faceted and ever-changing as it faced a transformative phase during the debates over the Cat and Mouse Act.

2. Chapter Two—Control of Transgressive Bodies

In this chapter, I will argue that the Cat and Mouse Act was the culmination of a long and determined effort of male politicians in Britain to constrain women's agitation for the vote and to eventually control their very bodies. By the 1880s and 90s, women were able to vote in municipal elections and sit on school boards, but they still could not participate fully in national politics. Furthermore, political parties kept the campaigning of constitutional women's suffrage groups close to home by affiliating these groups to the party structure. When the suffragettes began their militant campaigning, however, the control of women's suffrage activists took on a distinctly physical characteristic. As women inserted themselves physically into the men's arena of national politics, male authorities pushed back with ever-increasing intensity.

Male-dominated political parties recognized in the early stages of the women's suffrage movement that they could tap the support of a larger percentage of the population by including women in their own campaigning activities. For example, the Primrose League, established in 1883 and long associated with constitutional women's suffrage organizations, was actually a Conservative Party institution that extended membership to women and relied upon their efforts in organizing events, fundraising, and promoting Tory ideology to the public. Even when women created their own separate leagues and committees to raise awareness for issues that concerned women, as with the Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Association (CUWFA), they were careful to adhere to women's expected gender roles and to support political men of

their respective party alliances. Lady Knightley of Fawsley, president of the CUWFA, wrote to *The Times*, “[E]very effort will be made to have a large and representative body of Conservatives and Unionists pledged to assist their leaders, and to influence the Conservative Party to extend the franchise to duly-qualified women.”⁴⁸ The subtext of this message to the members of the Conservative Party and to the public was, “You scratch our backs, and we’ll scratch yours.” However, the reality was that men had the power to grant or deny women the vote and that women’s usefulness to any party was judged according to their support of men’s political endeavours. There was no guarantee that women would obtain men’s support for enfranchisement in return for their support of men’s political campaigns.⁴⁹

Many Parliamentarians and political party members used women’s groups to forward men’s political agendas, while undermining the women’s own aspirations towards the vote. As Connell writes, “Politics-as-usual is men’s politics. Women’s attempts to gain a share of power have revealed a defence in depth operated by the men behind the barricades: from legal exclusion... to a rich variety of informal biases and assumptions that work in favour of men.”⁵⁰ Because the women’s suffrage issue was based upon gender, and not upon party loyalty, party leaders worried that the issue would encourage stronger cross-party or non-party alliances. Both Conservative leader

⁴⁸ Louisa M. Knightley, “Conservative and Unionist Women’s Franchise Association,” Letter to the Editor, *The Times*, 09 November, 1908; pg. 16; Issue 38799; col B.

⁴⁹ Bousahba-Bravard describes how, in the Conservative and Liberal Parties, “Female activism had been encouraged on the basis of service to the party, and to male members, while women were still excluded from membership.” Myriam Bousahba-Bravard, “Introduction,” in *Suffrage Outside Suffragism: Women’s Vote in Britain, 1880-1914*, edited by Myriam Bousahba-Bravard (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 14.

⁵⁰ Connell, *Masculinities*, 205.

Arthur Balfour and Liberal leader William Gladstone felt that women deserved the vote, but that the suffrage issue would be “damagingly ‘divisive’” for their parties.⁵¹ Only the Labour Party, established in 1900, allowed membership to women as part of its socialist mandate. The other parties declined to incorporate women’s enfranchisement into their platforms based on defence of the party structure as a whole. Yet this discourse around protecting the party was primarily an evasive manoeuvre to shore up masculine power.

To British MPs, one of the most disturbing aspects of suffragette activism was the way that suffragettes inserted their bodies, as well as their rhetoric, into masculine spaces. Suffragettes had directed even their earliest and more peaceful protests at male political authorities and the spaces they inhabited, and they faced considerable resistance from these political men. In 1905, when Christabel Pankhurst and Annie Kenney unfurled a banner that read “Will You Give Votes for Women?” at a Liberal Party meeting, they were removed bodily from the assembly and arrested. Kenney later described the moment: “The strong arms of Liberal stewards dragged us from the meeting and literally flung us out of doors.” When Kenney attempted to address the audience that followed this spectacle outside, she was “marched off between two policemen.”⁵² Although Kenney and Pankhurst’s had been public demonstration non-violent, male authorities exerted physical control over the two women. As historian Elizabeth Crawford observes, “It was this [physical and discursive] intrusion of heckling

⁵¹ Boussahba-Bravard, 16. Also see Lori Maguire, “The Conservative Party and Women’s Suffrage” and Linda Walker, “Gender, Suffrage and Party: Liberal Women’s Organisations, 1880-1914” in the same volume.

⁵² Annie Kenney, “From Memories of a Militant: [London: Edward Arnold and Co, 1924.] Copyright by Annie Kenney,” in Christensen-Nelson, 119.

women into the male world of party politics that so incensed the audience that evening.”⁵³ Annie Kenney herself hinted at the effect of their physical invasion of masculine space when she described press reaction to this first militant incident: “The very extremity of abuse, criticism, and condemnation hurled at us by the morning Press [of both political parties] for such an inoffensive protest... was in itself a sign that astute parliamentarians realized that we knew what we were about.”⁵⁴

The suffragettes posed a significant challenge to male authority figures, both by verbally and physically denigrating MPs, perhaps the most prominent figures of masculine power in Edwardian Britain, and by defying existing socially constructed gender roles and power relations in formal politics. Early women’s suffrage groups had campaigned on the premise that the gender order would not change much when women got the vote. Suffragettes destabilized gendered expectations by showing that, vote or no vote, they would no longer continue to support political parties from the sidelines. E. Sylvia Pankhurst wrote that in 1906, when the Liberal Party took control of Government, “The W.S.P.U. policy was simple: to urge the electors to vote against Government candidates until the Government agreed to grant [women] the vote.”⁵⁵ The Liberal poll was, indeed, reduced, at least in part, because of suffragette efforts. While they had previously been able to dominate women by withholding the vote, MPs now faced a shift in the balance of power. Michel Foucault describes how the struggle for power is potentially reversible “by a confrontation with those whom one governs and their

⁵³ Crawford, 488.

⁵⁴ Kenney, 120.

⁵⁵ E. Sylvia Pankhurst, 63.

transformation into adversaries.”⁵⁶ In this sense, suffragettes confronted unsympathetic MPs, both by committing violence against MPs and their property and by challenging them in the realm of public rhetoric, thus staving off political impotence and becoming adversaries with whom the antis had to reckon.

Prime Minister Asquith was highly alarmed at how suffragettes interrupted public political meetings and placed themselves bodily in the way of MPs in order to protest. In the autumn of 1908, suffragettes’ heckling of Lloyd George at the Albert Hall provoked Government into introducing legislation to give authorities some weight in preventing future interruptions. Lord Robert Cecil, a Conservative backbencher at the time, introduced the Public Meeting Bill. Although Lord Cecil was a supporter of women’s suffrage, he did not approve of suffragettes’ militant tactics. His Bill provided “that if a person disturbed a public meeting... he should be guilty of a punishable offence” and could be subject to up to six months’ imprisonment, a fine, or both.⁵⁷ Liberal MP Cecil B. Harmsworth protested that the Bill had not been properly discussed in Parliament, going through two stages of readings in just one afternoon. The process had been conducted with undue haste, he argued, given that “the Bill caused the gravest infringement of the right of public meeting in this country.”⁵⁸ Liberal-Labour MP John Ward’s statements show that the Bill was clearly directed towards the suffragettes. Ward admitted that such a measure for making heckling a punishable offence “had not been thought of before, but it was only recently that deliberate attempts had been made to break up public

⁵⁶ Michel Foucault, “Power and the Subject.” *Critical Inquiry*, 8, no. 4 (Summer, 1982): 794.

⁵⁷ *Hansard*, 198 Parl. Deb. H.C. (1908) 2329.

⁵⁸ *Hansard*, 198 Parl. Deb. H.C. (1908) 2329.

meetings.”⁵⁹ This Bill was one of the first indications of the measures that Government was willing to take to control the suffragettes’ campaigning techniques by removing their bodies from political venues.

It was not only the suffragettes’ boldness and persistence that made MPs uncomfortable; MPs knew that the suffragettes’ determination was backed by real political knowledge. The first hunger-striker—Marion Wallace Dunlop—was arrested in 1909 for stamping in printer’s ink on the wall of St. Stephen’s Hall, House of Commons: “Every subject has the right to petition the king.”⁶⁰ She was charged with vandalism and imprisoned—a further example of physical confinement in response to suffragette actions. Even though Asquith greatly disliked suffragette tactics, his hand was forced in this instance and he reluctantly agreed to attach the suffragettes’ petition to a 1910 Conciliation Bill that was about to be circulated in Parliament and would enfranchise one million women who met a property qualification. However, Asquith allowed the Bill to die in committee, and this frustrating setback led to an increase in suffragette militancy. Enraged by the failure of the Conciliation Bill, suffragettes ramped up the intensity of their militant agitations, and they were more and more often imprisoned as a result.

The Cat and Mouse Act and its stipulations show how McKenna and his supporters attempted to reduce the suffragettes’ power to threaten political masculinity by controlling their very bodies. McKenna wanted to designate the suffragettes as criminal because of the way that they used their bodies in their campaign methods and

⁵⁹ *Hansard*, 198 Parl. Deb. H.C. (1908) 2329, 2330.

⁶⁰ “Charge of Willful Damage,” *The Morning Post*, 30 June, 1919, in Marlow, 92.

to exercise in the state's right to regulate these disorderly bodies. R.W. Connell asserts that men in patriarchal societies feel that their masculine identities are related to their political power, and are motivated to exert dominance over women. She argues that, in the women's suffrage movement, men felt compelled to defend the established gender order, while women strove to change it.⁶¹ According to Tosh, men who opposed woman suffrage often targeted women's bodies as sites of women's inferiority and, as such, "sustained their sense of themselves as men" without having to "dwell on men's stake in sexual power."⁶² Contemporary working-class historian Harold Owen published a pamphlet in 1912 exclaiming, "[W]oman is wholly superfluous to the State except as a bearer of children and a nursing mother."⁶³ To counter this type of physical justification for denying the vote, the suffragettes used their actual bodies as a method of protest. Wendy Parkins argues that the body was central to women's exercise of agency in this episode, observing:

In their performance of citizenship, which featured spectacular and daring feats of activism, suffragettes enacted a feminist agency which worked in three ways: it subverted dominant constructions of citizenship as exclusively masculine and primarily deliberative; it kept the women's cause at the forefront of public attention and debate; and it provided them with a powerful sense of their own bodily capacities, forming the basis of the women's self-proclaimed status as suffragettes.⁶⁴

The suffragettes were an enigma in that they deliberately dressed in a feminine manner when they carried out their militant protests. Part of the reason for the adherence to

⁶¹ Connell, *Masculinities*, 82.

⁶² Tosh, "What Should Historians Do With Masculinity?," 184.

⁶³ Harold Owen, "Superfluous Woman," in Christensen-Nelson, 55.

⁶⁴ Wendy Parkins, "Protesting Like a Girl: Embodiment, Dissent and Feminist Agency," *Feminist Theory* 1, no. 1 (2000): 63.

gendered assumptions about appearance, as suffragette Cicely Hamilton attested, was that the WSPU did not want to “shock male prejudice and make the vote harder to obtain.”⁶⁵ Yet they behaved aggressively and unlike the way society expected women to act.

John Mercer argues that “the heroic portrayal of militants in *Votes for Women*, the images of campaigners as victims in suffragette artwork, and the ‘feminine’ impression offered by the tricolour served to support militancy, and complement it with softer, more sympathetic portrayals of the militants.”⁶⁶ Members of the WSPU purposely maintained their feminine appearances while engaging in radical agitation for the vote in an effort to call attention to the paradox between gender stereotyping and the physicality of their activities. According to Emmeline Pankhurst, this was a deliberate choice of the suffragettes as they embarked upon “a sensational campaign to arouse the public to the importance of woman suffrage, and to interest it in our plans for forcing the Government’s hands.”⁶⁷ They wanted to force Government, and society more broadly, to see suffragettes as *women* who were tired of waiting peacefully for the vote. Yet when they deployed their bodies in ways that were seen as unfeminine, these strategies provoked an almost visceral response from men who upheld hegemonic masculinity.

Hunger-striking of the suffragettes was a powerful form of protest and was McKenna’s primary concern when he introduced the Prisoner’s (Temporary Discharge for Ill-Health) Bill. In 1909, forcible feeding was given court sanction as a result of a

⁶⁵ Cicely Hamilton, “Life Errant,” in Christenson-Nelson, 131.

⁶⁶ Mercer, 479.

⁶⁷ Emmeline Pankhurst, 61.

case involving a hunger-striking suffragette. Marie Leigh was arrested for interrupting a meeting of Prime Minister Asquith and took up a hunger-strike in prison. When she was forcibly fed, she appealed for a court injunction to prevent further forcible feeding. The Chief Justice, Lord Alverstone, refused to grant the injunction and instead declared that hunger-striking was a “wicked folly” and that prison officials had a duty “to preserve the health and lives of prisoners.”⁶⁸ Couched in paternalistic words, Alverstone’s decision condoned a practice that was particularly harsh and traumatic. Barbara Green argues that, in authorizing the “treatment” of forcible feeding, Government “[brought] together as official acts the invasion and control of the rebellious female body.”⁶⁹ But the stakes in terms of gender politics were high, and both sides were willing to take serious risks. As Mulvey-Roberts observes, “Since food and the body are areas that fall within the control of women, these become symbols for the failure to exert control elsewhere.”⁷⁰ As prison officials faced larger numbers of recalcitrant suffragettes, the struggle for political power played out on suffragettes’ bodies, and forcible feeding became methodical, gruesome, and increasingly dangerous.

Mulvey-Roberts observes the “paradoxical relationship” between female victimhood and empowerment in this moment,⁷¹ yet the suffragettes embraced this contradiction as a further strategy. While the Government’s choice to resort to forcible

⁶⁸ *Leigh v. Gladstone* ((1919) 26 TLR 139), 140, in Williams, 286-287.

⁶⁹ Barbara Green, *Spectacular Confessions: Autobiography, Performative Activism, and the Sites of Suffrage 1905-1938*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), 71.

⁷⁰ Marie Mulvey-Roberts, “Militancy, Masochism or Martyrdom?: The Public and Private Prisons of Constance Lytton,” in *Votes for Women*, eds. June Purvis and Sandra Stanley Holton (London: Routledge, 2000), 170. [e-resource] <http://troy.lib.sfu.ca/record=b4586078~S1a>.

⁷¹ Mulvey-Roberts, 159.

feeding may have initially been an unwelcome side effect of the WSPU's decision to hunger-strike until given political prisoner status, the suffragettes turned this harsh regime to their own advantage by portraying Government as failed patriarchs. In the *Times*, Emmeline Pankhurst defended the hunger striking of the suffragettes as "this last protest of the human spirit [which] the Government thinks to batter down by inflicting upon the bodies of these women the horrible outrage of the gag and feeding tube."⁷² And when the Cat and Mouse Act was passed, suffragettes incorporated it into their repertoire with hunger-striking, using the measure to get out of prison for brief periods of activism, and manoeuvring around the legislation to re-assert control of their own bodies.

Indeed, Government members had expected their initial attempts to regulate suffragette bodies to work quickly and effectively; so they were poorly prepared to respond to a campaign that portrayed them as irresponsible, vicious manhood, over-reaching their power over poor defenceless womanhood. As John Mercer writes:

The caption to [the] famous Cat and Mouse poster, showing a lifeless suffragette hanging from the mouth of a giant cat, left no doubt over the WSPU's placement of guilt in the campaign: 'The Liberal cat. Electors vote against him! Keep the Liberal out!' Similarly, the two posters depicting a suffragette being forcibly fed in her prison cell were captioned 'The modern inquisition. Treatment of political prisoners under a Liberal government' (1910) and 'Torturing women in prison. Vote against the government' (1909).⁷³

As Carol Smart has argued, there can be agency even in women's subordination by men. "[T]he subject, Woman, is not merely subjugated..." Smart writes. "Woman is not

⁷² Emmeline Pankhurst, Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, Mabel Tuke, and Christabel Pankhurst, "To the Editor of the Times," *The Times*, Wednesday, 29 Sep, 1909; pg. 10; Issue 39077; col D.

⁷³ Mercer, 475.

merely a category, she is also a subjective positioning within which there is room for manoeuvre.”⁷⁴ In the Cat and Mouse Act episode, suffragettes used their subjugation to their advantage by revealing that elite men were irresponsible caretakers of suffragette bodies. The suffragettes had already been using their actual bodies as spectacle to stimulate interest in and support for women’s enfranchisement. As Barbara Green notes, “[B]oth the artistic production of pageants, marches, posters, and banners, and the subversive strategies of rock-throwing and female interruptions of male speech and male space depended on the female body for persuasive force.”⁷⁵ Suffragette Lady Constance Lytton actually carved a suffrage message on her body, etching the words “Votes for Women” from her chest up to her face. “Her literal attempt to write the body,” argues Mulvey-Roberts, “was a political act that turned protest and protester into one.”⁷⁶ But it is apparent that suffrage bodies spoke most compellingly to the wider public when men who upheld hegemonic masculinity intervened to control them in the guise of benign patriarchy.

As details of forcible feeding leaked out in press reports and memoirs, more and more people began to question the Government’s actions. Constance Lytton wrote a graphic account of her forcible feeding in Walton Gaol. Sylvia Pankhurst went public with her story of being forcibly fed, both in the press and in a later memoir. In the latter, she wrote, “My account of forcible feeding created a sensation; the *Daily Mail* called it

⁷⁴ Smart, 7-8.

⁷⁵ Barbara Green, “Spectacular Confessions: How it Feels to Be Forcibly Fed,” *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 13, no. 3 (1993); 71.

⁷⁶ Mulvey-Roberts, 171.

'unbearable torment,' Bernard Shaw, 'a denial of life everlasting.'"⁷⁷ She described an occasion when she was released from prison and went directly to the steps of Parliament to continue her agitation for the vote:

I was meanwhile in prison, anticipating a stubborn struggle with Asquith. I looked death in the face, deciding to take the risk [to continue hunger-striking for the cause]. I was released on June 18th, and was driven immediately to the House of Commons, where I lay on the steps of the little door near the Strangers' Entrance to continue my strike. The police were about to remove me, when Keir Hardie came out with Asquith's promise to receive our deputation in two days' time.⁷⁸

Pankhurst's tactic created a physical spectacle with her emaciated and weakened body on Parliament's steps, and discursively in the press and in her own book.

Emily Wilding Davison, the suffragettes' first martyr, also used her body as a site of demonstration against not only gendered exclusion from the franchise but the physical dangers to which suffragettes were being exposed by "irresponsible" Government. Distressed at the practice of forcible feeding, she jumped from the top banister of an iron staircase at Holloway Gaol, surviving the fall. Two months after the Cat and Mouse Act was passed, however, she threw herself in front of the king's horse on Derby Day, 4 June 1913, to protest for votes for women, having sewn the WSPU colours into the lining of her coat. She died as a result of her injuries. Although many members of the WSPU disapproved of Davison's sensational demonstrations, her death elicited a great deal of publicity and sympathy for the suffragettes. Her funeral procession—a ritualized display

⁷⁷ Cited in E. Sylvia Pankhurst, 126.

⁷⁸ Pankhurst, 147.

of the oppressed body—drew an enormous number of supporters to the cause. Lytton and Pankhurst's accounts and Davison's physical exhibitions are fraught with frustration, but they illustrate how the suffragettes turned the tide against Parliamentary opposition to enfranchisement as they re-asserted control over the rhetoric surrounding their bodies.

The suffragettes were wielding a double-edged sword in appealing to gendered sensibilities about the treatment of their bodies while demanding equal rights. Liberal MP John Bryce had pointed out this contradiction when he spoke in Parliament in July 1910:

It is perfectly clear, from the history of the agitation which we have seen during the last few years, that women must make up their minds either to sacrifice not only their ideals but the chivalrous indulgence which has been the protection of their weakness. They cannot have it both ways. If they descend into the political arena they must be content to be soiled with its dust and to endure, without a murmur, the rough usage to which the male gladiator is accustomed.⁷⁹

But even this rationale buckled as Government's treatment of women's bodies became more physically invasive and was, in some cases, understood in terms of sexual assault.

The first significant episode that can be understood within this conceptual framework was "Black Friday", 18 November 1910, when WSPU members and up to 300 other female supporters attended a meeting of the House of Commons. Police were brought in to patrol the event on this day, and although Home Secretary Winston Churchill later claimed that he had instructed them not to arrest the women immediately, he had ordered the police, with any outbreak of unrest, "to have these women removed

⁷⁹ *Hansard*, 19 Parl. Deb. H.C. (1910) 41-150, 71-74.

from the scene of disorder as soon as was lawfully possible.”⁸⁰ According to Harold Smith, “It appeared to witnesses as well as the victims that the police had intentionally attempted to subject the women to sexual humiliation in a public setting to teach them a lesson. Some complained that policemen seized their breasts, and deliberately twisted them in a painful manner.”⁸¹ According to a report subsequently submitted by the Parliamentary Conciliation Committee for Woman Suffrage to the Home Office, “When a female demonstrator objected to a policeman grabbing her by the hip, he replied: ‘Oh, my old dear, I can grip you wherever I like today.’”⁸² These unruly women were not only handled physically and arrested during this episode, but were also assaulted in a specifically gendered way. As Connell argues, “[M]any members of the privileged group use violence to sustain their dominance. Intimidation of women ranges across the spectrum from wolf-whistling in the street... to rape.”⁸³ Suffragettes had clearly experienced a range of violence and sexual intimidation by policemen on this occasion. The police actions of Black Friday demonstrated that paternalistic masculinity need not extend to women who did not behave as the established gender order prescribed. Indeed, in the gender cosmology of the period, there were respectable women who deserved men’s protection and disreputable women who did not. The suffragettes had obviously fallen into the category of that “other” woman.

⁸⁰ Marlow, 130.

⁸¹ A. Rosen, *Rise Up, Women! The Militant Campaign of the Women’s Social and Political Union 1903-1914* (Routledge, 1974) in Smith, 49. Rosen recounts that witnesses believed that the police meant intentionally to abuse the women to teach them a lesson.

⁸² Smith, 49.

⁸³ Connell, *Masculinities*, 83.

In the discourses created by suffragettes and MPs, medical practitioners, and suffrage supporters in the press, forcible feeding was sometimes associated with sexual assault—at times, more subtly; at others, quite clearly. The perception of forcible feeding as a symbolic rape had been a prevalent theme in suffragettes' own press articles and editorials, personal writings, and letters to the newspapers ever since the measure had been sanctioned in September 1909. Ian Miller writes, "At worst, accounts of forcible-feeding held implications that acts of instrumental rape were being undertaken."⁸⁴ Just as speculum examinations were equated with "instrumental rape" in the case of the CDA, Miller argues that the use of the feeding tube was its equivalent in forcible feeding of suffragettes. Harold L. Smith detects phallic imagery in Mary Richardson's account of being forcibly fed, in which she wrote, "[The doctor] knelt by my head and took the long tube in his hand and, little by little, forced the stiff nozzle at the end of the tube up my nostril."⁸⁵

June Purvis also chronicles the suffragettes' impressions of forcible feeding as being rape-like. Purvis writes, "For many of these women, the worst feature of prison life was the 'public' violation of their bodies when being forcibly fed... Nell Hall spoke of the 'frightful indignity' of it all. For Sylvia Pankhurst, the sense of degradation endured was worse than the pain."⁸⁶ After Pankhurst went to the press with her description of being forcibly fed, some MPs expressed their aversion to forcible feeding, describing it as an "outrage." Purvis, Ian Miller and Kim Stevenson explain that victims of sexual violence

⁸⁴ Miller, 368.

⁸⁵ Mary R. Richardson, *Laugh a Defiance* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1953), 84, in Smith.

⁸⁶ Purvis, "Deeds, Not Words," in Purvis and Holton, 148.

tended to use common euphemisms like “violation” and “outrage” rather than “rape” in their accounts.⁸⁷ Stevenson argues, “‘Outrage’ was used as a euphemism to alert readers [of newspaper articles] of the sexual severity of an offence, i.e. that penetration occurred, more than one offender was involved, [and] the violation was brutal.”⁸⁸ It is significant that suffragettes and opponents of forcible feeding chose to use this well-known sexually connotative and graphic language to describe how women, and many men, viewed this treatment as an experience similar to sexual assault.

While most cases of forcible feeding were painful and invasive, and many sufferers of the process experienced it as a form of sexual violence, there were some cases that were even more distressing and very closely resembled a rape episode. This happened particularly in Perth Prison, Scotland, where prison medical officers forcibly fed female suffragettes anally and even vaginally up to almost a year after the Cat and Mouse Act was passed. Frances Gordon, an inmate in July 1914, had tubes pushed

⁸⁷ Purvis, “Deeds, Not Words,” in Purvis and Holton, 148. Outrage was a common euphemism for rape, and was recognized as such by MPs, who themselves used the term in Parliament when discussing sexual assaults. For a few examples, see Hansard: 72 Parl. Deb. H.C. (1899) 1335-6 to refer to the rape of a woman by soldiers in Rangoon, Parl. Deb. H.C. (1870) 1628 to refer to the speculum examination of a woman under the CDA, and Parl. Deb. H.C. (1906) 1052-3 to refer to rape of a woman by attackers in the Transvaal. Ian Miller also writes about forcible feeding being compared to rape, and discusses physicians’ apparent unconcern about patients’ welfare. Miller, 333-372. See also Kim Stevenson, “‘Ingenuities of the Female Mind’: Legal and Public Perceptions of Sexual Violence in Victorian England, 1850-1890,” in *Everyday Violence in Britain, 1850-1950: Gender and Class*, edited by Shani D’Cruze (Essex: Pearson Education Limited, 2000), 89-103—Stevenson illustrates how the press and court reports used phrases like “outrage,” “the act,” and “injuries” were used as euphemisms for sexual assault.

⁸⁸ Kim Stevenson, “Unearthing the Realities of Rape,” *Liverpool Law Review* 28 (2007): 413.

into her bowels.⁸⁹ Fanny Parker, aka Janet Arthur, wrote to *The Suffragette* in August 1914, describing her experience with forcible feeding:

Thursday morning, 16th July... the three wardresses appeared again. One of them said that if I did not resist, she would send the others away and do what she had come to do as gently and as decently as possible. I consented. This was another attempt to feed by the rectum, and was done in a cruel way, causing me great pain. She returned some time later and said she had 'something else' to do. I took it to be another attempt to feed me in the same way, but it proved to be a grosser and more indecent outrage, which could have been done for no other purpose than torture. It was followed by soreness, which lasted for several days.⁹⁰

Parker's use of the phrase "grosser and more indecent outrage" and the evidence of injury to her genital region in a doctor's examination a few days later strongly suggest that she had been "forcibly fed" through the vagina.⁹¹ The currency of the above descriptions of forcible feeding, as well as actual references in Parliament to this "outrageous" and "derogatory" act, suggest that most MPs (at least those who attended Parliamentary sessions or read the newspapers) must have known that suffragettes were experiencing forcible feeding as a form of sexual violence. However, a majority of MPs still entrenched forcible feeding by voting in support of the Cat and Mouse Act. The intensity of this intervention suggests that the threat to hegemonic masculinity must have been profound.

⁸⁹ Purvis, "Deeds, Not Words," in Purvis and Holton, 149.

⁹⁰ Janet Arthur, "Another Prison Infamy," In *Votes for Women*, edited by June Purvis and Sandra Stanley Holton. New York: Routledge, 2000. Originally published in *Votes for Women*, 7 August 1914.

⁹¹ Leah Leneman, *A guid cause: the women's suffrage movement in Scotland* (Aberdeen, Aberdeen University Press, 1991), Quoted in Purvis, "Deeds, Not Words," 149.

Theories on rape can help us understand why MPs gave legislative approval to the use of this method of bodily control over women as a means to uphold hegemonic masculinity. Connell describes the gendered power relations that underscore sexual assault, observing that rape is motivated by “feelings of entitlement, justifications and the intention to establish control.”⁹² The gendered struggle over political entitlement and the right to exercise control are pervasive in the Cat and Mouse Act episode. Carine M. Mardorossian argues that a new feminist theory of rape is required that takes into account the victim’s own experience of sexual violence, as well as the context of the episode. Further, Mardorossian writes:

Making women’s behavior and identity the site of rape prevention only mirrors the dominant culture’s proclivity to see rape as women’s problem, both in the sense of a problem that women should solve and one that they caused.... The responsibility of the rapist is seen as inherently linked to the victim’s behavior and as a result often gets erased.⁹³

Thus rapists may underplay and even re-assign their responsibility for rape, in much the same way that MPs and prison medical officials shifted the blame for the forcible feeding of suffragettes. These women need not endure the procedure, authority argued, if they would simply stop behaving irrationally and eat. The prison doctor who forcibly fed Constance Lytton several times pleaded with her to change her behaviour so he could stop forcibly feeding her: “I do beg of you—not as a prison doctor, but as a man—to give

⁹² Connell, “On Hegemonic Masculinity and Violence,” 94

⁹³ Carine M. Mardorossian. “Toward a New Feminist Theory of Rape,” *Signs* 27, No. 3 (Spring 2002), 756.

over. You are a delicate woman, you are not fit for this sort of thing.”⁹⁴ Yet he continued to forcibly feed her because she refused to eat.

Even constitutional suffragists such as Ray Strachey blamed the women of the WSPU for their traumatic prison experiences and denounced hunger-striking as a political strategy. She argued:

Forcible feeding was tried in vain... the prisoners struggled so violently against it that the process became actually dangerous, and the prison officials were obliged to let them starve till they came to the edge of physical collapse, and then to let them go... [S]cores of suffragettes adopted it... The officials tried everything they could think of in vain.⁹⁵

Timothy Healey of the Irish Parliament Party stated that the suffragettes, through their hunger-striking, “have subjected themselves to a punishment far greater than if they had served the entire month or six weeks to which they have been sentenced.”⁹⁶ Liberal MP

MacCallum Scott also blamed the suffragettes for the forcible feeding that they were subjected to:

The present state of affairs is one which we cannot contemplate with satisfaction. It is horrible. I can use no word to describe the horror which I at present feel, horror amounting to revulsion, at the present state of affairs. These women are forcibly fed. They violently resist being forcibly fed. That is not a penalty imposed upon them by the Home Secretary; that is an increase of punishment and of penalty which they impose upon themselves. It is painful. It is horrible. It is revolting to them. But it is not less revolting to the instincts and feelings of the prison officials, who have to prevent them committing suicide, to the Home Secretary, whose duty it

⁹⁴ Lytton, in Christensen-Nelson, 143.

⁹⁵ Ray Strachey in June Purvis, “Emmeline Pankhurst (1858-1928) and Votes for Women,” in *Votes for Women*, ed. June Purvis and Sandra Stanley Holton (London: Routledge, 2000), 104.

⁹⁶ *Hansard*, 52 Parl. Deb. H.C. (1913) 182.

is to administer the law, and to this House and the public, who know that these things are done.⁹⁷

Even though MacCallum Scott was so clearly disgusted by forcible feeding, he still excused the practice because of the behaviour of the suffragettes, and even sympathized with the doctors who were forced to punish the women in this way.

However, historian Ian Miller does not believe that medical professionals should be pitied for their brutal treatment of the suffragettes: “The physical encounter between the body and the medical technology appears bereft of sympathy and medical value. There exists no hint at compassion or the compassionate traditions of the traditional patient–doctor relationship.”⁹⁸ To Miller, the actions of the patient should not be used to shift the blame for the doctors’ cruel behaviour. Yet Scott, Miller, and other commentators have missed a central element of this struggle: that suffragettes did embrace these experiences, as unpleasant as they were, as a means to an end. It was this very violence against their bodies that helped their cause to gain traction.

As Connell has argued, “Violence is part of a system of domination, but it is at the same time a measure of its imperfection. A thoroughly legitimate hierarchy would have less need to intimidate.”⁹⁹ This statement echoes one of the primary arguments of suffragettes and women’s suffrage supporters: if women were not denied the vote and held in subordination through violence—or the threat of it—then they would not be forced to hunger strike, and men would not be faced with the “necessity” of forcibly feeding

⁹⁷ *Hansard*, 51 Parl. Deb. H.C. (1913) 461.

⁹⁸ Miller, 365-6.

⁹⁹ Connell, *Masculinities*, 84.

them. Labour MP David Mason acknowledged this tension when he stated in the Commons:

I submit you should go to the root of the cause which creates these martyrs. I think it is self-evident that the cause is that there is a denial of justice to those women, and that until you face that manfully and straightforwardly, and look into the cause of their injustice and of their distrust and of their distress, you will never be able to remedy the situation. Therefore I say that there is and can be only one remedy, and that is to grant the franchise to them.¹⁰⁰

While men who opposed the suffragettes and upheld these violent methods of domination were using patriarchal ideology as justification for the extreme measures they devised to control the suffragettes, the very requirement for repressive measures undermined the legitimacy of that ideology.

Smart states that by the late nineteenth century, woman had been constructed legally, medically, and socially as “a fundamentally problematic and unruly body... Women were thus constructed as both powerful and powerless... as dangerous but in need of protection.”¹⁰¹ MPs who debated the Cat and Mouse Act conceived of suffragettes in just such diametric opposition. McKenna’s *Prisoners (Temporary Discharge for Ill-Health) Act* succeeded in making suffragettes’ activities in prison and out on licence essentially new offences for which the women could be punished for their own protection. In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Michel Foucault discusses how the criminal justice system is used to create a concept of delinquency that satisfies hegemonic power’s ends. While vandalism, arson, and bombing were

¹⁰⁰ *Hansard*, 51 Parl. Deb. H.C. (1913) 453.

¹⁰¹ Smart, 8.

illegal in this historical moment, hunger-striking initially was not. The system of hegemonic masculinity therefore had to find a way to defuse the power of this protest.

Foucault describes how prison officials employ three techniques or methods of control, each of which has its counterpart in an aspect of the Cat and Mouse Act. The first technique relates to the scale of control: the body must be worked individually, using a “subtle coercion... at the level of the mechanism itself.”¹⁰² Although the suffragettes were part of a collective organization and were often arrested together, they were housed in separate cells and forcibly fed as individuals, as prison medical officers moved from cell to cell, “treating” one woman after another. Authorities also released women on license individually and often targeted them for surveillance on an individual basis. The second method observed by Foucault is that the object (or target) of control must be the “internal organization”—the very activities and movements —of the body.¹⁰³ The act of forcible feeding was itself a direct intervention in the workings of the suffragettes’ bodies. It was also a way for prison officials to assert dominance over life by forcing the women to take sustenance so that they would not die and become martyrs for their cause. While Emily Wilding Davison’s use of her body as a site of protest was spectacular, a much more common manifestation of suffragette’s insertion of their bodies in the debate was hunger-striking. Temporary release licences also illustrate the first and second methods noted, for they bound suffragettes to conditions that restricted where they could go, whom they could see, and what they could do. The third technique identified by Foucault relates to the modality of the control, which must be an

¹⁰² Foucault, *Discipline*, 137.

¹⁰³ Foucault, *Discipline*, 137.

“uninterrupted, constant coercion, supervising the processes of the activity rather than its result.”¹⁰⁴ The Cat and Mouse Act made specific provisions for continuous coercion and supervision: suffragettes’ temporary release licences could be revoked at any time, and they could be rearrested if they did not follow the conditions prohibiting suffrage activities. Indeed, the Cat and Mouse Act actually extended the duration of surveillance, as the time spent on release was added to the length of the sentence. As in Foucault’s schema, the Cat and Mouse Act aimed to control suffragette bodies, containing clauses that supervised the *processes* of forcible feeding, granting licenses, and re-arresting suffragettes.

Further, although Foucault’s theory applies to prison in general, the suffragettes were never conceived of as regular prisoners. The Cat and Mouse Act was not devised to regulate arson, vandalism, and other forms of criminal delinquency—although current law could have been applied in those cases. However, in the debates surrounding the legislation and in its practical application, it is clear that the Act was conceived to stop the suffragettes from hunger-striking—in essence, to regulate women who demanded Parliamentary enfranchisement by deploying their bodies in a way that threatened masculine control.

The Cat and Mouse Act was designed to appear paternalistic in nature, creating criteria for temporary convalescent licences that were based on the state of the suffragettes’ bodies—such as weakness, illness, and emaciation. But it was also intended to defuse the suffragettes’ political strategy of gaining public sympathy over the

¹⁰⁴ Foucault, *Discipline*, 137.

brutality of forcible feeding and therefore to disempower them. In practice, the Act's licences held suffragettes in a state of suspended incarceration by placing restrictions on them while outside of prison. Suffragettes' mobility and very actions were proscribed by the conditions of temporary licence. Furthermore, the Cat and Mouse Act also entrenched the especially brutal method of forcible feeding as punishment for the suffragettes' politically-motivated crimes. The legislation intended to assume complete control over the suffragettes, from the very locations they could situate themselves to the innermost workings of their bodies. And yet, the suffragettes were able to subvert this control by defusing its political efficacy and creating a counter-narrative of failed patriarchy.

3. Chapter Three—Multiple Masculinities

The preceding chapter has shown how MPs and male authorities used political oppression, the criminal justice system, and physical force to constrain the suffragettes' ability to campaign for the vote, as well as to control their very bodies and punish them for their unruly behaviour. The suffragettes' attacks upon hegemonic masculinity created an environment in which Government and male authorities felt forced to take increasingly physical measures of control to assert the legitimacy of their political power. While public opinion called into question Government's supposedly paternalistic and altruistic motives, the hegemonic system provided channels through which the dominant power structure attempted to re-assert its authority. However, within Parliament, other masculinities asserted themselves, threatening to unbalance power relations and compelling even further efforts by men in the hegemonic position to shore up their authority. This chapter will analyze discourses surrounding the Cat and Mouse Act to show how these other masculinities manifested themselves and how Home Secretary McKenna and his supporters influenced MPs to support the *Prisoners (Temporary Discharge for Ill-Health) Act*, ultimately re-enforcing hegemonic masculinity, at least in the short term.

Hegemonic masculinity is essentially the most accepted and powerful incarnation of masculinity in a historical context marked by patriarchal ideology: a system of gender relations that supports the domination of men over women. In Edwardian Britain, a key embodiment of hegemonic masculinity was the powerful, male political elite. Theirs

were the most powerful voices in the debates over women's enfranchisement. Anti-suffrage MPs argued publicly with suffragettes and their supporters using patriarchal language when defending the age-old tradition of an all-male Parliament. These discursive tactics echoed longstanding strategies to distance "woman" from the political sphere. From the period of the Enlightenment onwards, women and men had been asymmetrically positioned in relation to rational humanity. Manhood was situated closer to this ideal, while womanhood was considered as emotional and nearer to nature, and thus irrational and further away.¹⁰⁵

But such thinking was shared by more than powerful political elites. In 1909, for example, author and Edmund Burke biographer T. Dundas Pillans wrote that the idea of women's suffrage had for the last thirty or forty years been a "theme for ridicule, and commonly dismissed with amused contempt."¹⁰⁶ Pillans singled out the suffragettes, saying that they had unfortunately thrust their cause upon the public by their notorious actions. He bemoaned that "emotions and political hysteria" had taken over people's views on the suffragettes, and he further feared that there was "a danger that this tremendous innovation—of giving women the vote—may be conceded for the sake of peace and quiet."¹⁰⁷ H.B. Samuels, editor of the anarchist press *The Commonwealth*, published a pamphlet in 1910 stating, "It is a fallacy to suppose that women can [understand politics] as well as men.... Women are unfit for public work... they are ignorant of and uninterested in National and Imperial questions, and to a great extent

¹⁰⁵ Denise Riley, *'Am I That Name?' Feminism and the Category of Women in History* (London: Macmillan, 1988).

¹⁰⁶ Christensen-Nelson, 51.

¹⁰⁷ Christensen-Nelson, 51.

ignorant even of municipal affairs and local matters.”¹⁰⁸ These comments illustrate that the system of hegemonic masculinity in Edwardian Britain relied upon not only the subordination of women but also the compliance of other masculinities with less power but a vested interest in maintaining patriarchy. According to R.W. Connell, most men were relegated to subordinate, complicit, or marginalized masculinities and were pressured or coerced to uphold the system of hegemonic masculinity’s power.

Connell’s concept of subordinate masculinity encompasses men who are within the hierarchical structure of hegemonic masculinity and will conform to the demands of the hegemonic group, yet are in some way not qualified to belong to the super-ordinate position. Complicit masculinity also supports the patriarchal order that reinforces hegemonic masculinity, even though it may be sympathetic to women’s issues. Although men in this category may act against their own principles to go along with the more powerful members of the group, there is a masculinist advantage in their complicity. As Connell explains, “The number of men rigorously practising the hegemonic pattern in its entirety may be quite small. Yet the majority of men gain from its hegemony, since they benefit from the patriarchal dividend, the advantage men in general gain from the subordination of women.”¹⁰⁹ It was because of this “patriarchal dividend” that McKenna and his followers were able to exploit subordinate masculinity and pressure complicit masculinity within Parliament itself in order to generate support for the Cat and Mouse Act.

¹⁰⁸ H.B. Samuels, “Woman Suffrage: Its Dangers and Delusions [London: Published by the Author (1910)], in Christensen-Nelson, 53.

¹⁰⁹ Connell, *Masculinities*, 79.

Men in the position of hegemonic masculinity may relegate certain other masculinities to a marginalized position, one that commands no power or respect and which is outside of the hegemonic structure. Yet, as Connell writes, “Marginaliz[ed masculinity] is always relative to the *authorization* of the hegemonic masculinity of the dominant group”¹¹⁰ because it has been positioned there by that dominant group. When McKenna and his followers faced MPs and male suffrage supporters who renounced the Cat and Mouse Act, they attempted to bring these men back within the cosmology of hegemonic masculinity by refashioning them as subordinate or complicit. These other masculinities could mostly be marshalled towards the reinforcement of hegemonic masculinity because the gendered power stakes were high. Yet, some MPs would not allow themselves to be drawn back into the system; rather, they deployed their own rhetorical strategies against the Cat and Mouse Act and its supporters. However, men who refused to participate in the patriarchal dividend embraced a subversive masculinity, one that envisioned a greater equality between women and men.

Home Secretary Reginald McKenna was the embodiment of patriarchal authority in the Cat and Mouse Act debates; he had his own personal power to uphold, but he also strove to maintain the system of hegemonic masculinity. McKenna was a Liberal Cabinet Minister who had previously been First Lord of the Admiralty, in charge of Britain’s navies.¹¹¹ In his introductory remarks to the Bill, McKenna said of the suffragettes: “Those prisoners have declared war on society, and part of their campaign

¹¹⁰ Connell, *Masculinities*, 80-81.

¹¹¹ Interestingly, the previous Home Secretary was Winston Churchill, who switched places with McKenna to become First Lord of the Admiralty when McKenna left the position. Both of these positions were charged with protection of the nation, from without and from within.

is to carry on war... against all Governments which are responsible to a House of Commons elected by men."¹¹² Clearly, McKenna was setting the scene for hegemonic masculinity under siege as he sought his colleagues' consent for the extraordinary measure he was suggesting. As Connell has argued,

'Hegemonic masculinity' is a concept which may function in a number of ways in analyses of violence. Used with awareness of historical context—and not as a catch-all formula—it may help explain the cultural embedding and specific shape of violence in communities where physical aggression is expected or admired among men.¹¹³

By appealing to the House of Commons as if defending the nation, and all of society, from internal attack, McKenna counted upon his fellow MPs' complicity in upholding his proposed violent method of dealing with the suffragettes.

When McKenna introduced this line of argument in the House of Commons, he was already expecting support from most of his fellow MPs, fuelled by their frustration with the suffragettes. At the same time, McKenna anticipated dissent from pro-suffrage and pro-feminist MPs. Thus he had entered Parliament armed with arguments that his Cat and Mouse Act would be the only acceptable, and humane, solution to the suffragette hunger-striking problem. McKenna presented three other ways of dealing with the suffragettes that, in his eyes, were blatantly unsuitable: one, to release each hunger-striking prisoner altogether; two, to keep the prisoner in prison and continue with forcible feeding; or three, to put food in the cell and, if the prisoner refused to eat it, let

¹¹² *Hansard*, 51 Parl. Deb. H.C. (1913) 406.

¹¹³ Connell, "On Hegemonic Masculinity and Violence," 93.

her die.¹¹⁴ While many MPs expressed distress at the aggressive techniques that police had employed in accosting suffragettes and disgust with forcible feeding in prison, Parliament was not prepared to shy away from violence when it was necessary to defend the safety of the nation and the public. Clearly, though, the nation and public were perceived as male-centred.

McKenna brought the persona and authority of a war admiral into the Commons. His speeches and responses during the Cat and Mouse Act debates are replete with references to his own importance and the power of his position in Government. He reminded other MPs frequently that the “responsibility rests on the Home Secretary of advising the release of any prisoner, and I have that power already.”¹¹⁵ McKenna was actually asking for *more* authority in the current crisis: “I ask the House to give me power to use the alternative of release without remission of sentence,” he stated.¹¹⁶ This increased power, however, included permission for the Home Secretary to sanction forcible feeding, and the entrenchment of this practice into law. McKenna held so tightly to his own power that he even ignored a request from King George V to soften his stance. McKenna had received a message from the monarch via his private secretary, Lord Stamfordham, who wrote, “His Majesty cannot help feeling that there is something shocking, if not almost cruel, in [forcible feeding].... The King asks whether, in your Temporary Discharge of Prisoners Bill, it would not be possible to abolish force-

¹¹⁴ *Hansard*, 51 Parl. Deb. H.C. (1913) 406.

¹¹⁵ *Hansard*, 51 Parl. Deb. H.C. (1913) 1102.

¹¹⁶ *Hansard*, 51 Parl. Deb. H.C. (1913) 404.

feeding.”¹¹⁷ But the Government held more power than the monarchy, and the Commons had just succeeded in shifting the balance in Parliament with the limiting of the Lord’s power in 1911. Instead of acquiescing to the king’s request, a confident McKenna pushed the Bill forward and actually urged legislative sanction for the forcible feeding of suffragettes.

As seen in the preceding chapter, the Home Secretary had faced a difficult task in justifying the use of forcible feeding on suffragettes since its introduction in 1909. To counter the outcry over the brutality of the method, the Home Office displayed concern for the women’s health, and portrayed hunger-strikers as foolish and irrational women who were only hurting themselves. Advocates for forcible feeding claimed that the suffragettes actually caused the only danger in the procedure by their “hysterical” resistance. Proponents continued to assert that they had the suffragettes’ best interest at heart. In fact, McKenna stated that he wanted to “warn hon. Members against attaching too much credence to the accounts which are being given as to the terrible tortures which are endured in prison under the system of forcible feeding” when they considered his Bill.¹¹⁸

The voice of hegemonic masculinity was subtly couched in the language of paternalism and pragmatism when McKenna spoke on forcible feeding in May of 1912. McKenna clung to the assertion that forcible feeding was a legitimate and benign treatment to save the suffragettes’ lives. He stated, “The law is clearly laid down in the case of *Leigh v. Gladstone*, and the process of forcible feeding is a matter of ordinary

¹¹⁷ H. Nicholson, *King George V and His Reign* (London: Constable, 1952), 212, in Williams, 295.

¹¹⁸ *Hansard*, 51 Parl. Deb. H.C. (1913) 405.

medical practice carried out daily in hundreds of cases in asylums, and in a smaller number of cases in hospitals, prisons, or private practice.”¹¹⁹ However, McKenna’s statement was misleading. The law established in *Leigh v. Gladstone* stated only that it was not an assault to forcibly feed a suffragette prisoner when necessary to save a prisoner’s life; it did *not* sanction the practice as a required or necessary method for dealing with hunger-striking *political* prisoners. The linkage of the suffragettes’ hunger-striking with the irrational was clear. McCurdy challenged the Commons to recognize the reality of forcible feeding:

We cannot disguise from ourselves the fact, now we have had details placed before us through the medical Press of the country and through other channels, that there is no doubt that the view taken by the medical profession some three or four years ago [that forcible feeding is an acceptable necessity] for persons in lunatic asylums [does not stand] when forcible feeding is... applied to persons in full possession of their mental and physical faculties and against their will. Forcible feeding is just as much in essence a torture as flogging.¹²⁰

As McCurdy states, the method McKenna described as occurring in hundreds of cases was that which had been fine-tuned by asylum doctors and was practiced upon generally sedated patients—a very different process from the intense struggle between inexperienced prison medical officers and determined, indignant, and frightened suffragettes. As McCurdy asserted his opinion, he challenged the paternalistic justifications for the method and embraced a subversive masculinity in face of patriarchy’s hegemony in Parliament.

¹¹⁹ *Hansard*, 38 Parl. Deb. H.C. (1912) 1563.

¹²⁰ *Hansard*, 30 Parl. Deb. H.C. (1912) 1563.

As forcible feeding to protect “irrational” suffragettes was one of the key factors in the enactment of the Cat and Mouse Act, one of the strongest examples of complicity in this episode came from the medical professionals who forcibly fed suffragettes in prison and amassed arguments for McKenna’s use in the debates. Indeed, within Parliament and outside of it, the voices of these men were elemental in creating discourse that supported this significant component of the Act. Soon after Marion Wallace Dunlop’s 1909 “success” in hunger-striking, then Home Secretary Herbert Gladstone instituted forcible feeding as a counter-response, instructing medical officers to forcibly feed the prisoners who would not take food.¹²¹ In an exchange in the House of Commons on 27 September 1909, Keir Hardie described forcible feeding to Charles Masterman, the Parliamentary Secretary and Under-Secretary for the Home Department: “The tube is inserted into the stomach and food pumped into it—horrible outrage, beastly outrage.” Masterman dismissed Keir Hardie’s concerns, replying, “It is entirely similar to the treatment usually applied... There are no special regulations on this matter beyond the general necessity and the duty of those in charge of prisoners to prevent the prisoners committing the felony of suicide.”¹²² Two days later, a hospital surgeon wrote to *The Times* in support of Masterman’s opinion, additionally declaring, “If deliberate resistance is offered... the method must be carried out with such measures of restraint as are necessary.”¹²³

¹²¹ *Hansard*, 11 Parl. Deb. H.C. 924.

¹²² *Hansard*, 11 Parl. Deb. H.C. 924.

¹²³ F.R.C.P., “To the Editor of the Times,” *The Times*, 29 September, 1909; 10; Issue 39077; col D.

Not all medical men agreed. Hospital surgeon C. Mansell-Moulin protested in his letter to the editor against Masterman's dismissal of the brutality of the forcible feeding technique practiced upon the suffragettes. "There is not a man in the United Kingdom—except those men in the House of Commons who cheered on Mr. Masterson—who does not feel absolutely sick at [Keir Hardie's] revolting description."¹²⁴ Mansell-Moulin was also co-author of an open letter in the *Times*, calling on Londoners to write to their MPs to stop forcible feeding. Mansell-Moulin provided additional disturbing images of prisoners who were "held down by force, flung on the floor, tied to chairs and iron bedsteads... while the tube was forced up the nostrils."¹²⁵ This graphic description of women struggling against forced entry of the feeding tube into their bodies is found repeatedly in descriptions of forcible feeding by prisoners. Mansell-Moulin, while outside of Parliament, used the broader press to insert subversive masculinity's voice into the debate on forcible feeding.

In October of 1909, a month after forcible feeding had been adopted, Dr. Forbes Ross sent a letter to Parliament stating that forcible feeding was not safe and was "an act of brutality beyond human endurance."¹²⁶ When Keir Hardie questioned then Home Secretary Herbert Gladstone whether he had even read Dr. Ross's medical opinion remonstrating against the procedure, Gladstone admitted he had not. Gladstone hedged: "I am advised that it can only refer to a method of feeding employed when

¹²⁴ C. Mansell-Moulin, "To the Editor of the Times," *The Times*, 29 Sep, 1909; 10; Issue 39077; col D. Mansell-Moulin was a member of the Men's League for Women's Suffrage and had operated on Emily Wilding Davison before she died of her injuries from throwing herself in front of the king's horse.

¹²⁵ "Doctor's Report on Forcible Feeding," *The Times*, 10 December, 1913; 4; Issue 40391; col F.

¹²⁶ *Hansard*, 11 Parl. Deb. H.C. (1909) 1999.

feeding by the stomach is impossible; and that it has no bearing on the methods of feeding adopted at Birmingham.”¹²⁷ Gladstone stated that forcible feeding was not dangerous. Most of the public, however, did not believe him. Furthermore, the Prime Minister himself knew that this method was unsafe, for he had recently received a petition from 116 medical practitioners that urgently protested against the forcible feeding of suffragette prisoners. “This method of feeding,” they wrote, “is attended with the gravest risks, and in our opinion this action is unwise and inhumane.”¹²⁸

Nonetheless, as Geddes argues, the medical profession in general was complicit in upholding the hegemony masculinity of the patriarchal Government because male doctors did not exert a greater effort to educate Parliament and the public about the dangers of the method. The medical practitioners who did write to Parliament or the press were a small percentage of the profession as a whole. Geddes writes:

The available evidence suggests that the medical profession as a whole acted as though forcible feeding was a political rather than a medical problem, and ignored the fact that doctors were being used as political instruments in the struggle between Home Office and suffragettes, administering punishment under the guise of humane medical intervention.¹²⁹

Thus it is very likely that individual prison medical officers may have been mere political tools, carrying out their duties as ordered by the Home Office. But a broader silence by the male medical profession as a whole strongly suggests that they were caught up in the gendered politics of maintaining hegemonic masculinity.

¹²⁷ *Hansard*, 11 Parl. Deb. H.C. (1909) 1999.

¹²⁸ Marlow, 96-97

¹²⁹ Geddes, 81.

Suffragettes themselves were astute about the complicity of judges, policemen, medical officers, and even MPs in helping McKenna and Government to uphold a patriarchal authority that would not recognize women's right to protest for the vote. Constance Lytton wrote about a dream-like vision she had experienced after being forcibly fed:

I saw... the poor little doctor and the [Prison] Governor and all that had helped to torture these women in prison, but they were nothing compared to the men in the Cabinet who wielded their force over them. There [in Parliament] were the upholders of vice and the men who supported the thousand injustices to women, some knowingly and some unconscious of the harm and cruelty entailed.¹³⁰

Lytton's account unmistakably confirms the concept of complicit masculinity; whether willingly or not, medical officers and MPs participated in the forcible feeding of suffragettes and contributed to the reinforcement of hegemonic masculinity. However, complicity within the House of Commons was especially complex because the vote on the Prisoners (Temporary Discharge for Ill-Health) Bill was whipped, meaning that MPs of the majority Liberal Party would face discipline if they did not attend and vote for the measure; Liberal MPs could thus only thwart the Bill by amending it away from its original form.

Some MPs who opposed McKenna and the Cat and Mouse Act did so because of their interest in maintaining the integrity of Parliamentary protocol, but not necessarily to uphold the patriarchal and paternalistic ideals of the current Government. The Bill that Home Secretary McKenna laid on the table on 25 March 1913 bore the brief description:

¹³⁰ Lytton, in Christenson-Nelson, 276.

“To provide for the temporary discharge of prisoners whose further detention in prison is undesirable on account of the condition of their health.”¹³¹ It was the responsibility of interested MPs to read the Bill and to acquaint themselves with the details of the Bill contained within. Yet Government likely assumed that many Members would not read the Bill, but would vote based on party lines and alliances, or assumptions about the proposed legislation, or that they would acquiesce to the Whip. This same *pro forma* tabling occurred in cases of individual licences that the Home Secretary imposed on suffragettes. The Rt. Hon. Atherley-Jones, a constitutional lawyer and Liberal left-winger, spoke of his concern that MPs did not read these tabled documents with due care:

[T]he Home Secretary will be able to interfere with the liberty of the subject in any way that he pleases. So far as I can see, he can impose any conditions he likes. The Home Secretary says that he will lay the rules on the Table of the House. Some young Members of the House may think that a very solemn proceeding, which will enable us to exercise effective control, but the right hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that that the laying of the Orders of that kind on the Table amounts to nothing more than a mediaeval ceremony.¹³²

Atherley-Jones was against the Cat and Mouse Act; he was a women’s suffrage supporter but repeatedly declared in the Commons that he was not discussing the Bill in light of women’s suffrage. Rather, Atherley-Jones was determined to oppose the Bill in terms of its deviation from constitutionally-sanctioned penal legislation. Atherley-Jones was concerned that inexperienced MPs would unwittingly bestow McKenna with too much power if they misunderstood the nature of the Bill.

¹³¹ *Hansard*, 50 Parl. Deb. H.C. (1913) 1489.

¹³² *Hansard*, 50 Parl. Deb. H.C. (1913) 431-432.

MPs who voted for the Cat and Mouse Act against their consciences or voted against amendments under pressure from McKenna illustrate Connell's concept of complicit masculinities. John Tosh also recognizes this process whereby other masculinities rally in support of patriarchy:

[O]ne neglected explanation for patriarchy's successful survival and adaptation is the solidarity of men in upholding it—in not 'rocking the boat.'... From this perspective, the dominant forms of masculinity are those which marshal men with very different interests behind the defence of patriarchy.¹³³

Even some Members of the House of Lords expressed reluctance to pass the Prisoners (Temporary Discharge for Ill-Health) Bill to law but ultimately did so. Viscount Haldane, who moved the second reading of the Bill in the Lords, stated, "I confess that I do so with a sense of regret that it should be necessary."¹³⁴ The Marquess of Salisbury similarly admitted, "[I]t is with considerable reluctance that those of us who sit on this side of the House assent to [put the Bill through all its stages at the present sitting]."¹³⁵ The Lords represented a strong manifestation of patriarchal masculinity, but since the *Parliament Act* 1911, they had had their powers clipped by Commons.¹³⁶ Even so, the members of the House of Lords were not bound by any Whip and could have delayed the Bill's progress for up to a year, by which time the emergency would have passed. Yet the Lords did not hold up the Bill, thus increasing the Home Secretary's power over

¹³³ Tosh, "What Should Historians Do With Masculinity?," 191.

¹³⁴ *Hansard*, 14 Parl. Deb. H.L. (1913) 319.

¹³⁵ *Hansard*, 14 Parl. Deb. H.L. (1913) 322.

¹³⁶ In the *Parliament Act* 1911, the House of Lords lost its ability to reject or veto a Bill that had passed through two readings of Commons. The most the Lords could do was to delay a Bill by waiting for one year to reject it. After that time, or if the Lords rejected the Bill, it would automatically be passed to the monarch and by declared into law. *Parliament Act, 1911, 1 & 2 Geo. 5, c.13.*

suffragette prisoners and entrenching forcible feeding—a further example of complicit masculinity.

The debates over the Cat and Mouse Act do not allow for MPs to be neatly categorized in terms of complicit, marginalized, or subordinate masculinities. As Connell has asserted, these categories are meant to adapt to the historical context and inform thoughts on masculinity, not prescribe them. Nonetheless, at the time of the Cat and Mouse Act debates, there was a noticeable attempt by the most powerful MPs to position other MPs in these terms. As a bastion of male privilege, Parliament may have seemed monolithic, but British MPs came from various class backgrounds and different political parties, especially with the introduction of the Labour Party in 1903—a party that would become a key supporter of women’s suffrage (although not always of suffragettes’ strategies). The Labour Party as a whole had embraced a subversive masculinity because of its support of women’s suffrage and its challenge to the class system by representing working-class men. But in the House of Commons, Liberal and Conservative MPs attempted to relegate Labour MPs to subordinate or marginalized positions on the basis of class and their relatively short tenure in Parliament.

Furthermore, any individual might shift through different articulations of masculinity within a particular episode. The instance of women’s suffrage supporter and Labour MP George Lansbury helps us understand how a constellation of masculinities can be articulated by even one individual in a given contest. As a Labour backbencher, Lansbury exemplified subordinate masculinity in Parliament. According to early Labour historian Paul Thompson, the women’s suffrage movement found a champion in Lansbury even more than in the Labour Party as a whole. Indeed, Lansbury became so distressed by the Labour Party’s ineffectiveness in Parliament on the issue of women’s

enfranchisement that he made the “extraordinary decision to resign from Parliament and fight a bye-election as an independent socialist and on the issue of votes for women.”¹³⁷ His bid was unsuccessful, however, and he thus removed himself from the political machinery that provided the most power to effect change. Thus, while Lansbury may have originally been in a subordinate position as a Labour MP, and have taken a subversive stance in his intense support of women’s suffrage in the Commons, he was ultimately relegated to marginalized masculinity outside of Parliament for the next ten years. Yet in this situation he also illustrated subversive masculinity, for he continued to work towards women’s suffrage and was charged with sedition and imprisoned. In an ultimate manifestation of marginalized masculinity, he hunger-struck and was released under the Cat and Mouse Act—just like the irrational women whose case he had embraced.

Because of the nature of British Parliament, most MPs who were not Cabinet Ministers of Government or significant leaders of Opposition would have been considered subordinate, especially when the Party Whip was applied. However, not all MPs gave up their individuality so easily, thus inviting an exploration into an alternate, subversive masculinity operating within the corridors of hegemonic power.

¹³⁷ Paul Thompson, *Socialists, Liberals and Labour: The Struggle for London 1885-1914* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), 230.

3.1. Subversive Masculinity in Parliament

Men who advocated women's participation in national politics challenged the nature of power as it benefitted masculinity. They threatened to shake up the time-honoured traditions of patriarchy and paternalism in politics. In her article "The Political Platform and the Language of Support for Women's Suffrage—1890-1920," Carolyn Spring shows us how men's support for the women's vote could also manifest itself in opposition to Government and to hegemonic masculinity.

The advocacy of women's suffrage did offer men a platform on which to express a contradiction between the dominant notions of masculinity and individuals' reluctance to pursue that notion. Oratorical attempts to renovate masculinity embedded in a critique of the state not only functioned to promote a public distance from the hegemonic ideologies of manliness but also operated to re-establish men's self-affirmation.¹³⁸

A pro-feminist and pro-suffragette masculinity was an expression of such self-affirmation in Parliament. One of the earliest such displays of subversive masculinity in support of the women's suffrage question was by John Stuart Mill. Mill had been elected as a Liberal MP in 1865, and he presented the first petition on women's suffrage to the House of Commons in June 1866, becoming known as "The Man Who Wants Girls in Parliament."¹³⁹ Despite such advocates as Mill, not all MPs would so readily espouse the cause of women's suffrage. Thus, this early manifestation of subversive masculinity

¹³⁸ Carolyn Spring, "The Political Platform and the Language of Support for Women's Suffrage, 1890-1920," in John and Eustance, 171.

¹³⁹ Fulford, 41-53.

found little traction, and the issue of the women's vote did not make any headway during Mill's time in Parliament.

In 1913, subversive masculinities tried to derail McKenna's Bill by discrediting McKenna and diminishing the power of his position. Some opponents of the Cat and Mouse Act called McKenna and his supporters hypocrites who were not responding in a calm and rational manner to the protests of the suffragettes. Charles Roberts stated in the Commons, "What I feel is that we had better try to continue the patient administration of the law without hysterical violence [such as forcible feeding], and without any sensational measures, such as the proclamation of meetings [that would declare suffrage meetings illegal] which has been suggested."¹⁴⁰ Intriguingly, Roberts was using language about hysteria and irrationality—concepts that were usually gendered feminine—against hegemonic masculinity. Liberal MP Viscount Wolmer did not believe that the Cat and Mouse Act would have any effect upon the criminal activities of the suffragettes, and he called the Bill "a sort of bullying process."¹⁴¹ Wolmer then moved an amendment suggesting that it would be better for a judge to decide the fate of hunger-striking suffragettes than McKenna. Wolmer stated, "This Bill would place the Home Secretary in a very invidious position" because the suffragettes were so blatantly targeting him and he was therefore unable to remain objective in dealing with them.¹⁴² There followed a long and protracted exchange in which several MPs took up the argument that McKenna was too close to the matter, going further to dismiss the

¹⁴⁰ *Hansard*, 51 Parl. Deb. H.C. (1913) 441.

¹⁴¹ *Hansard*, 50 Parl. Deb. H.C. (1913). 456.

¹⁴² *Hansard*, 51 Parl. Deb. H.C. (1913) 1097.

authority of the Home Secretary's position. Lord Robert Cecil said, "There is no machinery to enable the Secretary of State to consider [an application for temporary release]."¹⁴³ McKenna replied that there was machinery, that such decisions had always been within the purview of the Home Secretary, and that there was no reason why a judge should make any better decisions than the Home Secretary made.

As the MPs continued to debate the issue of legislative machinery to enable another authority to take the Home Secretary's position, McKenna became frustrated and asserted his authority. "It would be really straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel to insist on applying to a judge," he maintained, "when the Home Secretary now has the responsibility of advising the exercise of the Royal prerogative with regard to every prisoner in gaol."¹⁴⁴ When Viscount Wolmer finally withdrew his amendment, it was Conservative Sir Ellis Hume-Williams' turn to speak on his amendment concerning the conditions of the prisoners. Instead, Hume-Williams continued to bait McKenna by spontaneously inserting a clause that had nothing to do with his original amendment. Hume-Williams moved that it be the role of either the Secretary of State "or the governor of any prison"¹⁴⁵ to decide whether a prisoner should be temporarily released. The value of accessing the Cat and Mouse Act debates verbatim is that we are able to read such candid exchanges as these between men in Parliament, and to observe how various MPs continually attempted to subvert McKenna's authority, and his ability to press forward his Bill. These types of exchanges highlight the fractures within Parliament over

¹⁴³ *Hansard*, 51 Parl. Deb. H.C. (1913) 1091.

¹⁴⁴ *Hansard*, 51 Parl. Deb. H.C. (1913) 1101.

¹⁴⁵ *Hansard*, 51 Parl. Deb. H.C. (1913) 1107.

the proposed Bill and show that subversive masculinity persistently “rocked the boat” and challenged hegemonic masculinity.

Although these interactions clearly demonstrate McKenna struggling to reassert his authority in the face of challenges from subversive masculinity, often MPs who tried to assert their own brand of self-affirmed masculinity faced strong rebuttals as men who embodied hegemonic masculinity tried to re-position them in terms of subordinate masculinity. Charles McCurdy, a Liberal MP, bore the brunt of much subordinating language because of his sympathies with the suffragettes. As Connell explains:

Men’s interest in gender hierarchy, defined by the patriarchal dividend, is real and large, and cross-cut by relational interests shared with women.... Men who try to develop a politics in support of feminism... are not in for an easy ride. They are likely to be met with derision from many other men, and from some other women¹⁴⁶

When McCurdy rebutted McKenna’s opening argument that the suffragettes’ accounts about their treatment in prison were to be discredited, other MPs heckled him. McCurdy retorted, “I can supply hon. Members with the facts, but I can not supply them with the intelligence to understand them.”¹⁴⁷ This is quite a strong statement from a Member who had been in Parliament for only three years. McCurdy again brought the issue of the women’s vote to bear on the question at hand. He urged Members of Parliament, “to put themselves into a judicial frame of mind for once in regard to this suffrage question.”¹⁴⁸ McCurdy would not allow himself to be marshalled to support the system of hegemonic

¹⁴⁶ R. W. Connell, “Gender Politics for Men,” *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 17, no. 1/2 (1997), 65.

¹⁴⁷ *Hansard*, 51 Parl. Deb. H.C. (1913) 412.

¹⁴⁸ *Hansard*, 51 Parl. Deb. H.C. (1913) 412.

masculinity and continued to bring the suffragettes' political agenda to the attention of Parliament.

One of the key themes in suffragette rhetoric was that they had only initiated militancy because there was no other way that their voices could be heard in order to promote the women's vote. McCurdy used this reasoning in the House to explain the March 1913 onslaught of militancy by the suffragettes, which had led to more suffragettes being imprisoned, hunger-striking, and being forcibly fed. "It was only after all [the suffragettes'] peaceful methods had been persevered in for a number of years," McCurdy stated, "that this phenomenon of the hunger strike, with which we are now asked to deal by this Bill, made its appearance."¹⁴⁹ The Speaker interrupted dismissively, "I have been listening to the hon. Member very carefully, but I confess that I cannot see the relevancy of his remarks."¹⁵⁰ As McCurdy continued to press his point that Government had betrayed the suffragettes, he was jeered by Members who clearly did not want to hear the accusation that MPs themselves were to blame for the protests of the suffragettes and ultimately, forcible feeding. Given that McCurdy was a member of the party that was trying to pass the legislation, he is one of the strongest examples of subversive masculinity in this context.

Along with McCurdy, Keir Hardie, one of the key founders of the Independent Labour Party and later the Labour Party, was a strong suffragette supporter and one of the most vocal opponents of McKenna and the Cat and Mouse Act. Appalled by the intense emotional and physical turmoil that the suffragettes suffered at the hands of the

¹⁴⁹ *Hansard*, 51 Parl. Deb. H.C. (1913) 418.

¹⁵⁰ *Hansard*, 51 Parl. Deb. H.C. (1913) 419.

Government, Keir Hardie was their steadfast advocate in Parliament. In the early days of suffragette militancy, Keir Hardie had threatened to quit the Labour Party when it voted for adult suffrage (which did not include women) and against women's enfranchisement. "If it is necessary for me to separate myself from my life's work [in the Labour Party]," he stated at the 1906 Labour Party Conference, "I do so in order to remove the stigma resting upon our wives, mothers and sisters of being accounted unfit for citizenship."¹⁵¹ Keir Hardie's pro-suffrage stance differed from Lansbury's in that Hardie did not actually leave the Party. In fact, Hardie's emotional statement convinced the Labour Party to allow its members to vote by their conscience on the issue of the franchise, thus taking no official party line on the topic. Not only did Keir Hardie resist the yoke of subordination by men who upheld hegemonic masculinity, both Liberal and Conservative; he refused to be marginalized. Hardie was a consistent example of the self-affirmed, feminist man and of subversive masculinity.

Hardie opposed the Cat and Mouse Act not only because he believed in women's suffrage, but also because he felt certain that the suffragettes would never let this legislation deter them from their campaign. Hardie urged McKenna to be realistic about the likely efficacy of the Act:

The Home Secretary has had experience of the resisting power of these women when fighting against the rules in prison, where they have starved themselves literally to the point of death, and have fought... with all the strength they had left.... I ask the Home Secretary and the House whether [these women] are likely to be amenable to any rules or regulations which the Home Secretary may frame for their conduct outside whilst on licence. The Bill is a most futile attempt on the part of the Home Office to deal with what is admitted to be a very serious

¹⁵¹ E. Sylvia Pankhurst, 64.

difficulty, and I, for one, at least refuse to give the Home Secretary a blank cheque in regard to a matter of this kind.¹⁵²

This statement was an integral part of subversive masculinity's claims that McKenna and other anti-suffrage MPs were deliberately punishing the suffragettes for asking for the vote. Statements such as these were attempts to undermine anti-suffragette MPs' abilities to uphold their claim to responsible hegemonic masculinity.

Many people disagreed with the suffragettes' militant tactics, but the opposition that these women suffered from the Government gradually increased sympathy for the suffragettes and their cause. Some MPs argued that the suffragettes were heroic and determined in their protests. Although Viscount Wolmer disagreed with suffragette tactics, he admitted, "They are not criminals; they are simply politicians who are prepared to go all lengths to enforce their principles."¹⁵³ In March 1913, just before McKenna introduced the Cat and Mouse Act to Parliament, writer and local political figure George Bernard Shaw gave a speech on women's suffrage and the practice of forcible feeding. "I most seriously believe that women are hardier than men....," he claimed. "They have had to go through things in their daily lives that I would like to see any man go through with such fortitude."¹⁵⁴

Shaw accused Home Secretary McKenna and the present Government of being worse than medieval torturers. He also accused MPs of writing letters to the editor of the Daily Telegraph "half full of lies and half full of suggestions that women should be

¹⁵² *Hansard*, 51 Parl. Deb. H.C. (1913) 422.

¹⁵³ *Hansard*, 51 Parl. Deb. H.L. (1913) 458.

¹⁵⁴ George Bernard Shaw, "We Are Members of One Another," in Jorgensen-Earp, 301-303.

deliberately tortured in prison” and even of falsely signing the letters.¹⁵⁵ The MPs did all of this, he concluded, out of irritation, vanity, and fear of the suffragettes’ physically violent protests. In June 1913, Shaw wrote to *The Times*, accusing Asquith of having opposed women’s enfranchisement “explicitly on the ground that woman is not the female of the human species, but a distinct and inferior species, naturally disqualified from voting as a rabbit is disqualified from voting.”¹⁵⁶ Shaw was not just slinging mud; he was challenging the public to question its own irresponsibility in following a Prime Minister who made statements such as this. He stated, “It makes it difficult to vote for the Liberal Party and then look the women of one’s household in the face.”¹⁵⁷ Although operating outside of the institution of Parliament, Shaw was able to effectively challenge the authority of hegemonic masculinity because of the extent of his public and political reputation; Shaw is thus another example of my concept of subversive masculinity.

While the issue on the table was specifically the Prisoners (Temporary Discharge for Ill-Health) Bill and its usage in respect to hunger-striking prisoners, MPs time and again brought up the issue of the women’s vote during this debate. One oft-repeated question in the Parliamentary debates was whether the suffragettes had lost their chance to be heard due to their radical actions, or had even damaged the very possibility of a women’s vote altogether. Charles Roberts noted the irony: “[I]f the cause of Women Suffrage does not come to the success which it deserves to have, in my opinion, on its merits, it is just due to the hysterical, wrong-headed action of these women who have

¹⁵⁵ Shaw, in Jorgensen-Earp, 303.

¹⁵⁶ George Bernard Shaw, “Mrs. Pankhurst’s Treatment: Mr. Bernard Shaw on Government Methods,” *The Times*, 19 Jun 1913; 10; Issue 40242.

¹⁵⁷ Shaw, *The Times*.

lost their chance by losing their heads.”¹⁵⁸ Opponents of the Cat and Mouse Act, however, steadfastly maintained that the actions of the suffragettes had actually revitalized the debate on enfranchisement. In fact, Keir Hardie tried specifically to attach the issue of the vote to the Bill as it moved through the House of Commons, moving that “this House declines to proceed with [the Prisoners (Temporary Discharge for Ill-Health) Bill] until the Prime Minister redeems his pledge that the Government will make itself responsible for the further progress of any Women Suffrage measure.”¹⁵⁹ Hardie went on to urge MPs, whether they were for or against women suffrage and whether they supported militant suffragettes’ tactics or not, to vote for his amendment “as a protest against the breach of faith committed by the Government....”¹⁶⁰ This was a double-pronged attack on hegemonic masculinity, serving both to discredit the Government for its current policy on forcible feeding and to provide an entrée for further discussion of the suffrage question.

Subversive masculinity in the case of the Cat and Mouse Act debates was itself not always homogenous and uniformly motivated. Men in this category may have supported the vote but disliked suffragette tactics, as Roberts did, or may have championed the suffragettes as well as the women’s vote, like McCurdy and Keir Hardie. But they were alike in the profound threat they posed to hegemonic masculinity. Although the suffragettes’ media campaign posed the greatest danger to McKenna and hegemonic masculinity outside of Parliament, significant challenges to “politics-as-usual”

¹⁵⁸ *Hansard*, 55 Parl. Deb. H.C. (1913) 438.

¹⁵⁹ *Hansard*, 51 Parl. Deb. H.C. (1913) 420

¹⁶⁰ *Hansard*, 51 Parl. Deb. H.C. (1913) 420-421, 423-424.

came from within Parliament, and from the MPs' own actions. McKenna asserted his authority as Home Secretary, and through this power, asserted Parliament's hegemonic control over the suffragettes and those who supported them.

This episode was a moment in which men who embodied hegemonic masculinity rationalized invasive measures on women's bodies in order to deter suffragettes from the hunger-striking that had become an effective strategy for shoring up public sympathy for their cause, hence destabilizing masculine political power. When McKenna introduced the Cat and Mouse Act in Parliament, he immediately met resistance from several stalwart women's suffrage supporters. These MPs raised this discursive platform to a new level of intensity as they not only debated the issue of the women's vote, but also cast aspersions on the abilities of powerful political leaders and even their suitability for their political responsibilities. Political power was key in reinforcing hegemonic masculinity, but MPs who embodied a subversive masculinity were able to chip away at that power by subscribing to a pro-feminist and pro-suffrage masculinity that did not rely upon older notions of patriarchy and paternalism.

4. Conclusion

The militant and illegal actions of the suffragettes in the early twentieth century often led to their being discredited as hysterical women in the years that they campaigned for the vote. But even more troubling to many contemporaries who saw the damage the suffragettes did to property and witnessed the intensity of their physical protests was the suffragettes' insertion of their very bodies into the political arena. The Government of the day took extraordinary measures to regulate the suffragettes' unruly bodies, indicating how seriously they opposed the incursion of women's bodies in the domain of masculine power. In essence, Government was reinforcing a hegemonic culture that placed masculine power at the forefront of its political make-up. Barring women from the vote was a way for male Parliamentarians to enforce hegemonic masculinity through a specific form of institutionalized patriarchal authority. The danger that women's enfranchisement posed to that hegemony was keenly felt. In 1910, for example, MP John Bryce stated his concern in the House of Commons that the Parliamentary Franchise (Women) Bill, "will carry with it the transfer of the whole balance of power to women."¹⁶¹ However, patriarchy is based upon not only men's dominance over women but also elite men's dominance over subordinate men. And in the

¹⁶¹ *Hansard*, 19 Parl. Deb. H.C. (1910) 71-74.

interactions between MPs in Parliament—a supposed citadel of masculine power in Edwardian Britain—we can see that hegemonic masculinity had cracks.

The discourse surrounding the Cat and Mouse Act has demonstrated that masculinity is not homogeneous, even within a particular historical context. The most powerful men in Government expected to control the political and legal system of the nation, but they did not hold absolute power over even the members of their own Parliament, let alone over women who were supposedly subordinate to them. Thus, masculinity in this period should not be conceived as a uniform collective identity. The Cat and Mouse Act should not be viewed merely as a reactionary legislation to the protests of the suffragettes, nor should it be relegated to the niche historiography of the British women's suffrage movement. This legislation is a lens through which to examine the ways in which Members of Parliament articulated multiple forms of masculinity as they faced pressures from suffragists, engaged with the press, and debated amongst themselves about how to respond to the increasingly militant suffragettes.

Opponents to the legislation cast doubt on MPs' ability to look after the welfare of all Britons. Some MPs took up the defence of suffragettes' actions in Parliament, subverting McKenna's reliance on MPs' irritation over suffragette tactics to win support for the Bill. They asserted that Government's responses to the protests of the suffragettes exposed them as failed patriarchs—that Government's own actions showed that it did not uphold a time-honoured tradition of paternalism, of being calm and rational, of looking after the welfare of all British subjects. A number of these critics were merely suggesting a revised form of patriarchy and paternalism that made room for the women's vote. But a number of self-affirmed MPs opposed the Cat and Mouse Act and thus undermined hegemonic masculinity, establishing a new, pro-feminist and secure

masculinity—a subversive masculinity—in Parliament. These men, however, were not able to defeat the Prisoner's Temporary Discharge for Ill-Health Bill. With intensive orchestration by men who upheld hegemonic masculinity within Parliament, the Bill passed both Houses, and the Cat and Mouse Act was made into law on 25 April 1913. The suffragettes still protested violently, were arrested and imprisoned, hunger-struck, and were forcibly fed.

The Cat and Mouse Act is part of an ongoing historical debate on why women finally did win the vote in the United Kingdom. Suffragettes later argued that their militant actions before the war led to the reluctance of Government to continue to fight against their enfranchisement. Mainstream suffragists, and much women's suffrage scholarship, argue that it was constitutional methods that won the vote, pointing out as their evidence that even suffragettes adopted peaceful tactics during the war. The purpose of my work has been to introduce greater complexity to the question by showing that Parliament, although often presented in the literature as a homogeneous bastion of hegemonic masculinity, was itself torn over the issue of the vote—that women had never faced a unanimous opposition in Parliament. A question I would like to introduce to this debate is whether the subversive masculinity articulated during the Cat and Mouse Act incident left, as its legacy, a crack in the edifice of hegemonic masculinity. Perhaps, as the current literature suggests, men who upheld the system of hegemonic masculinity did simply throw up their hands in despair in 1918 and grant women's enfranchisement for pragmatic reasons. I would like to propose, instead, that there had been a shift in the balance of power to a new breed of self-affirmed men, with a new political and social agenda to uphold that included full political participation of women. And while men who embodied hegemonic masculinity were able to orchestrate the passing of the Cat and

Mouse Act in 1913, the fractures in that masculinity evidenced during those debates had cracked wider and become unmanageable by the end of the First World War.

At the beginning of the suffragettes' intense protesting and hunger-striking, poet and women's suffrage activist John Masefield declared that his own sex had been betrayed by dominant masculinity. Masefield called to other sympathetic men to "promote a new script of masculinity within the vacuum arising from the displacement of normative masculinities."¹⁶² Masefield said, "I blush for what our grandchildren will say of the men of my generation, [and of this dark age of masculinity].... They will say, "Were they sane in those days? Were they human beings? Were they not crazy or blinded?"¹⁶³ Masefield predicted a great change in masculinity, whereby men could espouse the women's suffrage cause without being relegated to a peripheral position within dominant understandings of masculinity. It is uncertain whether masculinity really had changed by 1918 to fully embrace pro-feminist men. However, the Cat and Mouse Act debates demonstrate that dominant notions of masculinity were being challenged by men who once would have been relegated to the periphery to which Masefield referred. The subversive masculinity at work within the Parliamentary system to defeat the Cat and Mouse Act, and thus undermine hegemonic masculinity, shows that at least some political men would stand by women's issues and would refuse to be subordinated to a patriarchal cause.

¹⁶² Spring, 171.

¹⁶³ Spring, 171.

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