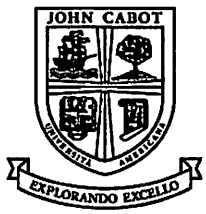
# The British Gendered Experience of the First World War

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# The British Gendered Experience of the First World War

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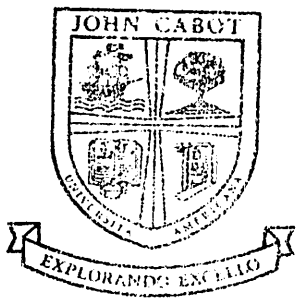


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Spring 2011

**Abstract**

The objective of this thesis was to explore the significant role gender played in shaping the British experience of the First World War (1914-1918). To explore the role of gender, a wide range of scholarship was utilized, including the leading theories on both gender and the war system. The author also examined primary sources such as wartime propaganda pieces, recruitment campaigns and British domestic legislation, which revealed how deeply imbued gender roles had become in the justification of the war. This thesis additionally established that gender shaped the general war experience for both men and women in very different and often contradictory ways. Furthermore, as gender is reciprocal, this work demonstrated how the effects of the masculine experience had direct effects on the feminine, and vice versa. The temporary role reversal that occurred during the war in which women grew emboldened and men seemingly more effeminate was examined, as was the crisis of masculinity that resulted.

The principle conclusion of this work was that as gender is socially constructed, it is a fluid concept and thus is able to be re-conceptualized. Furthermore, while the First World War served to solidify gender roles, it also paradoxically created an environment for these roles to be challenged. Men were able to redefine masculinity to fit wartime needs due to the gendered solidarity that existed as a result of their shared war experience. The same was not true for women, however, and the traditional female roles remained intact due to both the lack of this gendered solidarity and the backlash women suffered as a result of the wartime male anxiety. What the British gendered experience of the First World War served to reveal was how gender could be both challenged and reasserted as well as gender's role in both unifying and dividing society.

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# 1 Introduction

*"Gender, then, provides a way to decode meaning and to understand the complex connections among various forms of human interaction"*

*Joan Wallach Scott*

The importance of gender in the construction of human identity is not a revolutionary discovery. Gender roles have long been explored by numerous scholars in a variety of fields as diverse as sociology, psychology, anthropology, and history. Gender's significance in shaping the war experience has also been explored by more recent scholars who have examined how gender roles were utilized in motivating participation in the war effort as well as in resuming stability in the war's wake. Yet there remains a missing link between our conceptions of gender as a culturally constructed concept and our understanding of gender roles within the context of war. This gap in scholarship that exists in both gender studies and history leaves much to be desired in regards to the significant role of gender plays in both in shaping and being shaped by the war system.

The fact that gender is culturally created is assumed in this paper, yet this is not to suggest that this stance is universally agreed upon. There are some scholars that subscribe to the idea of biological gender theory and who would seek to argue that gender is related to one's natural traits and thus is defined because of one's biological sex. These biological theorists argue that chromosomal and hormonal

differences are the sole determinants in constructing gender (Sammons). Yet I reject this view as short sighted for failing to take into account the massive transformative power cultures wield in both creating and shaping identities and perceptions. I strongly concur with the stance of Joshua Goldstein, one of the foremost scholars on the interrelation between gender roles and the war system, who argues that biological factors are arbitrary. What matters more is how cultures perceive the importance of biological differences rather than the differences themselves (Goldstein 2001). Thus while gender roles are often ascribed due to biological differences such as physical strength and reproductive abilities, gender is not an inherent categorization but rather a culturally constructed feature. An important distinction must be made between one's sex, which is biologically related, and one's gender, which is culturally constructed. And while sex has an essential role in shaping conceptions of gender, it is not the only element involved in gender's construction.

The actual construction of gender is a complex process that involves a host of social, cultural, and biological factors. While biological traits may provide the foundation for ways of thinking about gender, society gives gender roles their meaning and shapes both men and women to conform to these gender roles from an early age. Through learned behavior fostered through childhood gender segregation, family hierarchies, and eventually labor division (Caspary 1993, Marini 1990), different social roles, abilities and traits are ascribed to each gender. Different thinking patterns and worldviews are also fostered by this process. Eventually, these differences become signifiers of inequalities as societies inherently

favor one role over the other. The division of labor further serves to affect each sex's ability to access resources and coupled with society's preference, the favored gender is put into the dominant position, garnering them power and status (Marini 1990). Once achieved, this dominant status is protected as the societal norm, and becomes so imbued into the fabric of the culture that any disruption to the conceptions of gender also signifies a challenge to the stability of the culture itself.

In understanding gender to be culturally created, it is vital to also consider that as such, gender remains a fluid and changeable concept. If a culture can define gender roles, a culture can also redefine them. While this will not be an easy task to accomplish because of deep seated traditional ideals and a resistance to change, as the First World War experience will show, it is not an impossible task. The example of the First World War reveals how gender roles were re-conceptualized due to the intense and revolutionary experience of total war. As gender roles were utilized in setting the foundation for war, their fluidity also created a remarkable upset of social norms and stability and became a point of contention both during and after the war. As Goldstein argues, in war gender's construction and deconstruction become an additional front in which both sides become pitted against each other (Goldstein 2001). The First World War remains a prime example of this secondary "gendered war," and through examining the war experience we can trace how both the masculine and the feminine interacted and shaped each other. Thus while the war established distinct roles for each gender to assume, it paradoxically created the climate for these roles to be challenged (Simontan 2007). Amongst females, the changes made to their position were to be treated with resistance and resentment,

and as such, were not to be sustained. Yet amongst males, a small yet significant change would be made regarding the emphasis of specific heroic masculine ideals over others, a change that would be supported by a solidarity fostered by a shared war experience.

The gendered experience of the First World War is a complex topic that scholars may never reach a consensus on. There is still much work to be done in studying the gendered history of both the First World War, as well as subsequent wars. We are still in need of more multifaceted views, similar to Goldstein's *War and Gender,* that examine the profound interrelation of gender and the war system. The path historians must now take is a multidisciplinary one that incorporates theories on both gender and war to acquire an enhanced awareness of the historical importance of gender construction. Only through understanding how traditional gender roles were formed can we attempt to gain a fuller understanding of their impact in shaping the war experience, and only through exploring the many ways gender roles can be utilized in the context of war can we acquire a more comprehensive understanding of the ways gender is constructed and for what purpose. Through my own research, I seek to demonstrate how gender roles were one of the most significant factors in the construction and perception of the First World War experience for both men and women. While gender is one of many contributing factors to understanding the First World War, it is an essential one and it is only through evaluating the various parts that made up the experience of the First World War that we can ever attempt to understand the entire war experience. Furthermore, it is my hope that by exploring how gender has shaped the war

experience of the past, it will lead to a better understanding of the implications of the gendered war experiences of the future.

# 2 The Gendered War

*"The darkest hour of all is creeping nigh"*

*Vera Brittain- The German Ward*

On August 4th, 1914, Great Britain declared war on Germany, joining with France and Russia and entering into the First World War. While at first reluctant to enter into a continental conflict, intervention soon became the only option to protect both British self interests and the balance of power within Europe. Yet, with the intervention of Britain, what began as a local conflict was quickly launched into a European, and eventually, global war. The British government had initially contended that the conflict would destroy the financial structure of Europe, and therefore would not be sustained for long; only Lord Kitchener had the foresight to predict an extensive conflict and thus sought to prepare Britain's military forces accordingly (Herwig 1997). However, entering into the conflict with this grave misconception about the war's duration greatly affected the conception of the war itself, resulting in an eventual widespread disillusionment amongst British society and deeply affecting the British war experience. What shaped the general war experience even more than this disillusionment, however, was the means through which the war was constructed within a gendered context.

The gendered lens through which the war was both presented and perceived had one of the most significant impacts on shaping the general war experience within British society. Popularly held conceptions about gender were utilized in recruiting campaigns,

in propaganda images, and in the justification for fighting the war itself. These gender roles, which served as the foundation of the war, would shape the general war experience for both men and women in very different and often contradictory ways. Where men dealt with an internal struggle to redefine concepts of masculinity that were now challenged by the war, women were vilified for their efforts that were perceived as disrupting traditional ideas of femininity. Yet while the First World War provided many opportunities for women to enter into realms that were once associated with the masculine, the outcome of the war would only serve to maintain these traditional gender roles.

As gender roles became linked to the justification for fighting the war, both the government and individuals alike sought to preserve them at all costs. What began as an attempt to emphasize the positive attributes of each gender through recruiting campaigns and propaganda images would eventually evolve into an invasive condemnation of anything perceived to deviate from these traditional gender roles. The gendered basis of the war would thus create a hostile social environment in which preserving traditional gender roles became synonymous with preserving the justification for war. Furthermore, the unrealistic expectations of the war, and the disillusionment it spurred, resulted in a further reinforcement of the gendered justification of the war as an attempt to grasp at any source of possible stability. As many aspects of the war were proving to be nearly unbearable, to lose the basis of the war would signify that these struggles had been for nothing. Thus, the nation held even tighter to the traditional conceptions of gender, and thereby, of the war.

**The Rape of Belgium**

The German invasion of Belgium in 1914 was one of the key factors that propelled Britain into the war, becoming the chief justification for Britain's participation, and thus is an integral part in understanding the British war experience. Great Britain was motivated to defend Belgium by a number of factors. Firstly, Britain was staunchly opposed to the acquisition of any independent, sovereign European nation by force, which Prime Minister Herbert H. Asquith further maintained by stating Britain was "fighting to vindicate the principle that small nationalities are not to be crushed, in defiance of international good faith, by the arbitrary will of a strong and overmastering power" (p 4 Brendon). Secondly, Britain also felt a special responsibility to intervene as they had pledged since 1839 to protect Belgium's independence. And finally, British society was thoroughly appalled at the brutal treatment inflicted upon the neutral Belgium by the Germans. This brutal treatment would in fact only increase after British intervention, and during the German occupation, the death rates amongst Belgians rose by almost 160% (Brendon 2000). Yet while Belgium played a strong role in gaining British participation, it was of course not the only cause for war and there were many other factors that facilitated British intervention into the First World War. It was, however, the defense of the neutral Belgium that was presented to society as the sole cause for war.

Belgium soon came to have a symbolic importance for Great Britain and would eventually serve to represent the entire justification for the war as a whole. Representations of Belgium depicted the nation in a position of weakness, synonymous with ideas held about femininity and which were soon translated into a direct association

of Belgium with the female gender. With the war justified as a defense of neutral Belgium, the attribution of a female gender associated the cause of the war with the larger concept of the war as the defense of womanhood. And just as Belgium became synonymous with the abused female, Germany became vilified as the abusers. The concept of the "rape of Belgium" further spread this idea of feminization and became the dominant imagery utilized by not only Britain but nearly all of the Allied propaganda (Aulich 2007). In fact, propaganda involving Belgium was the most effective and vivid of all of the Allied propaganda, generally emphasizing German atrocities inflicted on defenseless women and children (Grayzel 2002).

Yet even with the extreme violence occurring in Belgium, Great Britain's propaganda still exaggerated the atrocities (Brendon 2000). Alleged eyewitness accounts circulated throughout Britain in what was known as the Bryce Report, presented examples of German war crimes, including the rape and mutilation of women and children. Deeply exaggerated accounts of the bayoneting of children and of nuns hanging from bell towers became embroiled amongst the factual testimonies, and rumors of which spread rapidly amongst British society. (Brendon 2000). "Atrocity literature" was also widely distributed that contained stories highlighting the vulnerability of women as well as the wider implications of rape on both a woman's family and nation (Grayzel 2002). The story of British nurse Edith Cavell was one often exaggerated account that spread throughout not only Britain but many of the Allied countries as well. Cavell, who was executed in 1915 for assisting Allied soldiers escape from Belgium, became utilized as a symbol of German brutality towards women and British propaganda turned her into a martyr figure in much of its propaganda imagery (Grayzel 2002).

The British-Belgium propaganda also served as somewhat of a catalyst in provoking an emotional and often virulent reaction towards German atrocities, giving anti-German feelings that had been building throughout years of economic competition an excuse to emerge (Herwig 1997). Alongside the emotional appeal came the conception of "Hun Kultur," a barbaric German culture characterized by a lack of morality and the abuse of women. British propaganda, much like propaganda of the other Allied powers, presented this "Hun Kultur" as an opponent to be defeated as a means of motivating men to protect their women and their nation. The barbaric Hun was also an image conjured up to target the women who may have held their men back from fighting. British propaganda efforts issued a direct warning to these women that by holding their men back, they put both themselves and their nation at risk of the maltreatment of the Huns (Grayzel 2002). Thus, the idea of a German barbarian aggressor violating a defenseless woman became a theme significant on both the individual level and the national one; not only would the barbaric Germans rape and exploit the women of Britain, they would also give the same treatment to the nation of Britain as a whole.

As the war progressed, however, much of the sympathy towards Belgium waned as Britons became increasingly concerned with their own immediate wellbeing. Where refugees were once accepted gladly into British homes, the worsening conditions of the war created a much less empathetic environment. Yet as the magnitude of the "rape of Belgium" gradually diminished, the imagery that represented it remained a dominant theme throughout the war. Most important amongst this imagery was the conception of the war as a defense of womanhood. The gendered Belgium had a profound impact in

shaping the justification of the war and ensuring the resilience of gender roles, and as such representing a key element of the British gendered war experience.

**The Myth of War Enthusiasm**

The general perception of the First World War amongst British society was shaped not only by Belgian imagery, but also by a representation of widespread war enthusiasm amongst British society. While the war was initially met in Britain with a general acceptance, with few initially opposing the conflict, the British government capitalized on select examples of enthusiasm and presented it as a seemingly universal trend in order to manufacture support. Photographs were distributed portraying large crowds of support, giving the assumption that throughout Britain masses were rallying around the cause. Yet this was not the case and the government utilized examples such as this to both gain and sustain support for the war. This myth of war enthusiasm created in many of the belligerent nations during the initial phase of the war shaped public opinion to such an extent that there is still this misconception about the period today, with many still believing there to have been a large enthusiastic war movement. Yet this thinking only acts to romanticize the period and just as the opposition to the war was marginal, so too was the enthusiasm (Herwig 1997). Furthermore, the enthusiasm that was present was neither universal nor sustainable. The presence of enthusiasm, or "war euphoria," was in fact quite prominent amongst middle-class professionals and students, yet it was nearly entirely absent amongst the working classes. The fact that many men from the working classes did enlist reflects a conception of national duty rather than enthusiasm for the cause. Furthermore, there were complex and varying motives for this war enthusiasm; while some were motivated out of patriotism, others saw war enthusiasm

as a revolt against the liberal values of peace (Herwig 1997). Those that were generally enthused at the start of the war very seldom maintained that enthusiasm for long. With the war proving to be a much longer conflict than initially believed, coupled with the deteriorating home front conditions and realization of the horrors of warfare, demands for peace greatly increased. These peace movements were generally organized by women's movements, yet while some women's groups opposed the war on pacifist grounds, both women and men participated in the enthusiasm of the initial phase of the war as well (DiCaprio 2001), challenging the traditional gender role of women as peacemakers.

What was more prevalent amongst British society at the onset of the war, rather than peace or war movements, was the general acceptance of the long awaited conflict and a sense of the war as the fulfillment of one's patriotic duty. War had long been looming over Europe leading up to 1914, and any minor crisis was seen as a possible trigger to a widespread conflict. Thus the threat of war was an ever present tension amidst British society and now that it had finally arrived, many Britons, as well as other Europeans, greeted the conflict with relief (Herwig 1997). Both men and women had developed the mindset for war and were accustomed to the idea, and furthermore most men were increasingly anxious to prove their masculinity by fighting (Deborah Simonton 2007). In fact, rather than a fear of war as one might expect, there was an even greater fear that the government may declare neutrality, an idea equated by many to treachery in which inaction was seen as a betrayal of British national ideals. Vera Brittain, a British feminist and nurse, wrote in her diary on August 3rd, the day before Britain declared war, that "the great fear now is that our bungling government will declare England's neutrality" (p 397 DiCaprio). She further denoted this inaction as an "inglorious safety"

(Brittain 1914) and attacked the possibility of neutrality as cowardice. While Brittain was initially supportive of Great Britain's entry into the war and left Oxford in 1915 to work as a nurse in the Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD), her views about the war would drastically change after she became a firsthand witness to the horrors of the combat, to which she lost both her brother and fiancé.

This manufactured idea of widespread war enthusiasm had the desired result of producing consent for the war and yet also had the additional benefit of creating a sense of national unity. As the enthusiasm was presented as universal, social and political differences became obscured and this sense of national unity resulted in a strengthening of the domestic political situation within Britain, at least temporarily (Grayzel 2002). Great Britain at this time was dealing with internal turmoil resulting from an increasingly radical suffrage movement, known as the suffragettes. The suffragettes, led by Emmeline Pankhurst, operated with militant and often terroristic tactics hoping to force the issue of women's suffrage on British society. The pressing "Irish question" alongside uprisings of workers movements would only further complicate and increasingly tense situation. With the war, these issues became secondary concerns and "sunk into the background beside these momentous issues" (Brittain 1914) as society united behind the cause of the war. Many suffragists and suffragettes alike actually supported the war as they saw it as an opportunity to gain recognition for women's contributions and as an avenue to eventually secure the vote (Thebaud 1996). This unity also translated in politics and the Conservative, Labour, and Irish parties made a temporary truce at the outbreak of war (Brendon 2000).

The domestic benefits of the war were addressed in British General Sir William Birdwood's remarks: "what a real piece of luck this war has been as regards to Ireland- just averted a civil war and then once it is over we may all be tired of fighting" (Herwig 1997). Birdwood expressed his hope that this national unity brought about by the First World War would be sustained after, yet this was not to be the case. In fact, due to worsening conditions within Britain during the war, these tensions began flaring up quite rapidly with many seeing the war as a tool to be utilized in achieving their goals (Grayzel 2002). By 1916, Britain faced the Easter Rising that sought to take advantage of Britain's weakening position and to establish an independent Ireland. The situation of 1916 was further compounded by the introduction of conscription into British society. The crisis continued to escalate until the resignation of Prime Minister Asquith and the appointment of Lloyd George who brought a new vigor to the nation and won the support of many of the people (Brendon 2000). Yet with the domestic crises of 1916, the British government was now aware that the war effort was entirely dependent on public support, and thus increasingly sought to both create and shape the public opinion of the war.

**Recruitment Campaigns, Propaganda and the Portrayal of Gender Roles**

With the realization that the war enthusiasm was unsustainable and that the public opinion of the war must be constantly manufactured, the British government turned to recruitment campaigns and propaganda imagery to achieve this goal. The propaganda that was utilized in the beginning to validate the cause for war was now turned to directly recruit men, and eventually women, into the war effort. As Britain had the smallest army amongst the great powers of Europe, and was made up of professional volunteers until 1916, their recruitment campaigns were much more vital to the war effort than in other

nations (Heyman 2002). This realization of the importance of public support for the war may have been the motivation for the British government turning towards private industries to produce their propaganda. Britain's Parliamentary Recruiting Committee (PRC) delegated the majority of the responsibility of propaganda production to various agencies and printing houses, involving 36 print companies in the war effort. The propaganda posters produced by these companies often took more risks with their images than elsewhere in Europe, such as portraits of German soldiers dragging defenseless young girls through the streets to presumably rape them(Aulich 2007). This wartime propaganda served a variety of functions from recruitment into the war effort to encouraging the purchases of war bonds. War imagery was not just reserved to propaganda posters; it was present in a host of areas such as film, theatre, literature, and the press. Yet amongst all of the various uses of propaganda, traditional gender roles were utilized and exploited to deliver the messages.

The gendered propaganda selected key aspects of both masculinity and femininity that would both display traits that the government sought to cultivate as well as motivate them into action. These images were often simplistic and played upon previously held, generally positive, conceptions of gender (Grayzel 2002). By utilizing the favorable elements of each gender, these posters were able to suggest an element of duty and that to fail to take up the call was in some way an embarrassment to one's very (wo)manhood. While these posters selected the attributes of each gender to emphasize, they did not present any new ideas within them as they were only effective means of persuasion if they played upon previously held conceptions. Thus these posters are in fact a reflection of contemporary held ideas and can be used to gain an understanding into the general

perceptions of gender held at the time. There are, of course, limitations to using these posters to understand past gender roles as they were commissioned to serve a specific purpose. Furthermore, the images were often simplistic and exaggerated, and generally only emphasized the positive attributes of gender that related to the war effort (Grayzel 2002). Nonetheless, the fact that these images were effective in achieving their goals, as shown in the widespread participation in the war effort, signifies that they had some sort of resonance with their audience.

The first utilization of this gendered propaganda was the presentation of the "rape of Belgium." The imagery was greatly exaggerated to gain public support for the war and emphasized the vulnerability of women and brutality of the Germans. As this effort had great success in garnering support for the war, artists utilized the same themes, such as the defense of the feminine, in successive works. The female victim of war was a common image used to encourage the audience to identify with her and thus be spurred into action to avoid a similar fate for oneself or a loved one (Aulich 2007). The homeland became likened to both the front and to womanhood, and its defense was presented as the essence of the war (Grayzel 2002). In the famous British war poster "Women of Britain Say Go!" the use of both visual and verbal imagery linked the women with the home front, both urging the soldiers on to their defense (Grayzel 2002). The nation of Great Britain itself took on a female gender in its depiction, likened to both the female warrior Britannia and to a comforting mother. This idea of the gendered nation is in fact not unique to Great Britain, and similar female representations are found in France and Italy as well. Traditional female embodied themes of liberty, justice and victory further utilized female imagery to validate the cause and essence of the war. Allegorical

and historical images of powerful women were also depicted in many of the posters to inspire women to emulate their examples. The use of the image of Joan of Arc was an interesting example as she is traditionally a French symbol and an enemy of the British. In a 1915 poster, the message is given that "Joan of Arc saved France" and the women of Britain must now do the same, by purchasing war savings certificates (Aulich 2007). These evocations of strong women served to inspire British women to feel they had the power to save their country and encouraged many to buy war bonds.

Wartime propaganda images portrayed themes of the war utilizing a wide range of conceptions of gender, although generally these posters emphasized the positive aspects of gender they wished to promote. For men, these included the masculine ideals of strength, fitness, loyalty and duty. The war was posed as a liberating experience and a challenge to prove their masculinity. For women, supportive and maternal roles were emphasized as well as purity and morality (Aulich 2007). Women also became representative of fortitude in the face of suffering as a means to either inspire or shame men (Simonton 2007). After all, if the women could endure, then the men were surely capable as well.

While these posters began as a means of motivating men into the defense of womanhood, as the home front became perceived as increasingly vital and inherently linked to the war, these propaganda posters began targeting women themselves. The government used these gendered images to recruit women into a variety of tasks from preserving food to joining into the new women's armed forces. Furthermore, due to the still existent Victorian gender roles of separate spheres, in which the public sphere was deemed the domain of men, and the private that of women, the home front was viewed as

a woman's responsibility to preserve (Thebaud 1996). As women at the beginning of the war believed there was nothing they could do to help aid the war effort, the British government sought to combat this misconception with widespread recruiting campaigns to empower women into action and suggesting they were directly responsible for the war's outcome (Grayzel 2002).

There was also imagery presenting to women the idea of a shared burden as evident in slogans such as "the woman behind the man behind the gun" in which women were seen for the first time as important, if not vital, to the war effort. Furthermore, on top of their shared responsibility in the war effort, women were also given the additional burden of sustaining the nation's and men's morale by remaining cheerful, virtuous and feminine throughout the duration of the war (Grayzel 2002). An edition of Britain's Evening Star is evident of this by stating that "if the men of our country offer in many cases not only themselves but their future prospects and their careers, it is not too much to expect that the women who have bid God-speed to those they love with a cheery word and a smile should take the fortunes of war with an equally serene and calm confidence" (1914).

As with Belgium, propaganda posters targeting women also served to inspire women to utilize their own "powers of persuasion" in recruiting their men to fight (Grayzel 2002). Emotional appeals were made, suggesting to women that their men were fighting to protect them from unspeakable horrors. Many women heeded the call to action and this recruitment movement reached its zenith under the controversial White Feather Campaign in which women shamed men into fighting by presenting them with a white feather, a traditional symbol of cowardice. Yet this campaign sparked staunch

criticism, much of which focused on the audacity of women to act so unfeminine and bold as to challenge men in public. Furthermore, these women often mistakenly targeted wounded veterans of the war, further spurring more criticism of their actions. While the women who engaged in the White Feather Campaign attempted to shame men into fighting, it was eventually they who were made to feel ashamed of their own actions for acting outside of traditional gender lines (Grayzel 2002). What propaganda posters had hoped to encourage were private acts of persuasion, with women utilizing their feminine powers of seduction to motivate men to fight; the fact that they were reacted to with such extreme criticism reflected that traditional gender roles in place before the war were still very much in place (Grayzel 2002). And although the White Feather Campaign became a widespread movement that spread throughout the British Empire, the challenge it posed to traditional conceptions of gender ensured that it not only failed, but also backfired against its participants.

The White Feather Campaign reveals a case in which a campaign to garner participation failed, however this was an exception to the norm and the majority of the propaganda images utilizing gender roles were successful in accomplishing their various goals. This success was due to the wide range of images produced and the different aspects of gender that were emphasized for achieving different aims. Women were both the image and the target of much of the propaganda posters used in garnering war support as they were seen as responsible for sustaining the home front. Men were presented with images of vulnerable women to play upon traditional roles of men as the protector of females. These images targeting women often reflected women back to themselves but in roles that were aiding the nation and the war effort, generally utilizing the symbol of the

munitions worker (Aulich 2007). Yet these images also served to reflect the government's own vision as while women were depicted as occupying masculine roles, they still maintained their cheerfulness and femininity in the depictions.

These unrealistic portrayals would prove untrue, however, once women entered into the workforce. Furthermore, those images that sought to empower women and had presented the idea of an equal, shared burden were to be countered by the government's condemnation of women, especially working class women, for becoming emboldened and overly-confident. While the burden was presented as shared, ideas of equality were not sustained with equal amounts of appreciation. And yet despite the British government being responsible for actively promoting changes in women's position and recruiting them into the war effort, the alleged loss of femininity and assumptions of equality would become areas of increasing hostility and tension for British society.

# 3 Women as Internal Enemies: British Expressions of Hostility, Anxiety and Gender Roles

*"Ev'ry body's doing, Something for the War, Girls are doing things, They've never done before, Go as 'bus conductors, Drive a car or van, All the world is topsy-turvy, Since the War began"*

"Sing a Song of War-Time" by Nina MacDonald 1918

The First World War quickly became the first truly total war and thus would have immense impacts on all areas of daily life. In nearly all of the belligerent powers, the home front not only ceased to be perceived as a separate entity from war, but was viewed as a valuable second front in aiding the war effort. With this incorporation of the home front into the war effort, women too were mobilized. Yet this incorporation would not be met with much gratitude and as women became involved in what were largely deemed masculine roles, their inclusion instead produced a remarkable and widespread hostility. This resentment was expressed in a variety of manners and generally targeted the alleged changes in feminine behavior as evidence of a loss of morality. A growing anxiety over these perceived challenges to traditional gender roles resulted in the vilification of women on two contradictory lines, both the masculine and the feminine. Women were thus criticized for the negative characteristics of both sexes while generally being associated with little of the positive. Within both stereotypes was a strong focus on

morality, often related to women's sexuality. This emphasis was related to a desire to preserve a moral homeland and family structure for soldiers to return to. The extreme measures taken to secure this morality and to preserve women's honor also served to highlight a link between morality and morale (Grayzel 2002) and reveal the deeper anxieties concerned with what the war was truly being fought for. Great Britain proves to be an exemplary model for illustrating this resentment between the sexes, as it had perhaps the most repressive and inclusive system targeting women's behavior. Yet while Britain's system is the most extreme example, the vilification of women and general anger towards their behavior was a central feature of the majority of European societies that participated in the First World War (Grayzel 2002). The result of this hostility was to both reconfirm conventional ideas of gender and cement these gender roles into society. Thus while women were seemingly able to challenge these traditional gender roles by their contributions and participation in the war effort of the First World War, the resulting hostility ensured that by the end of the war these gender roles remained firmly intact.

**Women in the Workplace**

Perhaps the largest amount of hostility towards women was garnered as a result of their entrance into the workplace to assume both the jobs and the roles of the male workers deployed to the front. As it became clear that women were needed to replace the male workers who had been lost to the armed services, women filled the ranks and were employed "on a scale neither seen before the war nor sustained afterwards" (p 27 Grayzel). While women had worked outside the home before the outbreak of war, with over 32% of British women participating in the labor force, they had never been

mobilized to this extent nor taken part in the new types of work they now engaged in (Heyman 2002). Within the first year of the war, the number of British women employed had increased by 400,000 (Grayzel 2002). By the end of the war, the amount of women workers increased by more than 50% of pre-war levels, with 700,000 women directly replacing male workers (Higonnet 1987). Whereas women generally worked in domestic service and textile factories before the war, they now were introduced to a wide variety of work previously inaccessible to them. As the men had been mobilized for war, women assumed the positions they previously held which ranged from bus and train conductors to civil servants such as postal workers and even police officers. With the war, there were also new industries formed specifically to fill the needs of the war effort. One million women were mobilized into munitions factories alone (Goldstein 2001), representing a major shift in both female employment levels and industry.

These new women workers posed a direct challenge to previously male dominated industries and their presence became more and more resented as the war went on. Yet while being the targets of perpetual resentment was a common feature of British women's war experience, this does not signify that their general war experiences were the same. There has been the unfortunate mistake of studying women during the First World War as a largely coherent group. However this view ignores the complexities and variances amongst women's war experience, when in fact "women's wartime lives were as varied as men's; they were influenced by class, age, marital status, trade, geographical area" (p 150 Braybon). Middle class employment was one of the chief new features of the changes in employment, alongside wives of soldiers, who found the separation allowances allotted by the government to be inadequate (Grayzel 2002). Furthermore,

there was a variety of motivations for British women entering the workforce; while some worked for patriotic reasons, many more worked out of economic necessity (Grayzel 2002).

Motivation greatly shaped women's war experience, as those women who worked due to patriotism, normally those of the upper and middle classes, had a greater flexibility in selecting what field to work in and were generally exempt from many of the harsh working conditions of the lower classes (Grayzel 2002). For example, many upper and middle class women became nurses during the war, a position that while exposing women to unimaginable horrors, served to confirm traditional gender roles by emphasizing their alleged "natural" nurturing and mothering roles (Grayzel 2002). Female nurses were also kept subservient to male doctors and as such there was little challenge to male dominance. As nursing was generally voluntary employment, some women sought to serve as doctors, though most of these women faced an incredible amount of hostility and were often not allowed to serve on the front lines. Many of these women were instead relegated to areas of lesser importance, such as non-European nations, though even this was uncommon as few women had access to the required medical training to even be eligible (Grayzel 2002). Nurses on the other hand were idealized and revered for their patriotism instead of vilified like so many other female occupied positions. It was not until after the war that nurses began facing hostility as society soon grew concerned that their intimate contact with men's bodies may have morally corrupted them (Grayzel 2002).

Upper class women did not face as significant amounts of hostility as those of the lower classes, although they were still susceptible to anti-female sentiment that plagued

all women workers during this time. As upper class women usually assumed roles that worked within traditional conceptions of femininity, such as nursing, they were not as large of a threat to the male workforce. Working class women, however, were generally the ones to replace male workers and thus faced the majority of this resentment and were seen as the largest threat to masculinity. As a majority of these women were previously employed before the war began, often working long hours in areas deemed "women's work" such as domestic service or the textile industry, it was feared that they would refuse to leave these new jobs that offered higher wages, fewer hours, and better working conditions (Grayzel 2002). For these women, their chief motivation to enter into the war effort was financial rather than patriotic, and they found that their wages were "at first livable and later lucrative" (p 384 Goldstein). As working class women were motivated by economic gains, they often faced criticism for being opportunistic, and in extreme cases, were accused of being war profiteers. Notably, these criticisms overlooked the complexity of many working class women's experience. For instance, it was, and to an extent still is, largely ignored that these same women faced a severe period of unemployment in the early years of the war as people began releasing their domestic servants due to economic hardships and many peacetime jobs were downsized to allow for the shift to wartime production (Heyman 2002).

The textile factories that employed a majority of these women were also hit hard by the war as people began to stop purchasing fashionable clothing and sought to just make due with the bare necessities. This shift away from materialism to a more economical approach is reflected in the motto "Do Without It", expressed by Lady Randolph Churchill, mother to Winston Churchill, in her 1915 *Women's War Work.* In

this work, she expresses her gratitude that women have moved away from luxuries and have been able to sacrifice for the war effort. While she acknowledges that "the face of daily existence has altered in many directions" (Churchill 1915), her commendation, and almost surprise, that women were able to overcome their appetite for luxury goods suggests that society's traditional gender roles remained very much intact. In her account, where women were small minded before, they now have gained self control and she expressed her pride and gratitude that women were able to prove society wrong by acting outside their alleged nature to support a greater good.

Women still continued to fill the ranks of men who had left to serve, despite this initial budding hostility and in 1916, when conscription was introduced, the demand for female workers reached a new height (Grayzel 2002). While at the beginning of the war only a small number of women who volunteered for war service were given employment, with this drastic increase of men sent to the armed services, female labor became viewed as indispensible to the war effort and the government began campaigns to actively seek women's participation in the workforce. As not everyone was entirely convinced of women's ability to take up this burden, the British government sent "Dilution Officers" armed with photos and testimonials aiming to prove that women were capable workers (Braybon 1998). However, as the urgency of acquiring female labor was realized, these fears were either disregarded or ignored allow for women's entrance into the workforce. Yet "these arrangements, although effective in boosting the war effort, almost everywhere were cast as temporary" (p 384 Goldstein) and as such, few women received extensive training or the protection of labor regulations (Heyman 2002). The criticism that many women would be unable to match male skill and productivity levels became

somewhat of a self-fulfilling prophecy as they were not given the training that would enable this to happen. Despite these obstacles, however, women still were able to make contributions to the war effort and succeeded in maintaining society with the absence of men.

**A System of Inequality: Gender Politics and Wage Labor**

After the initial recruitment of women into the workforce came the concern over the issue of wages. While paying women the same wages as men was far too radical for the time, paying them less would result in undercutting male labor and as such, a compromise was found that involved paying women the same for piece work but less for hourly wages (Braybon 1998). However this still resulted in women being a cheaper option than men which both enraged male labor unions and raised male fears about being replaced by women. This fear of being rendered useless created what Lady Churchill described as a "gnawing anxiety" over the possible "pinch of unemployment" (Churchill 1915) and served to garner a remarkable amount of criticism of female participation in the labor force. This hostility was expressed in a variety of ways, but focused primarily on perceived changes in women's behavior and morality. While often contradictory in nature, this resentment utilized pre-existing gender stereotypes to criticize women, which served to reinforce traditional gender roles into society.

Gender politics in the workplace was one of the earlier manifestations of this hostility, and women were often subject to sabotage and sexual harassment in efforts to keep them subordinate to male workers. As they had received little to no training, women in factories often depended on men's strength, skill or knowledge to complete tasks and males utilized this power to demand parts of women's salary for the so-called

"privilege" (Heyman 2002). Male anxiety soon spread outside of the workplace and some industries even sought to keep female workers out completely to avoid the possible disruptions to production posed by a female presence. The London Post Office is one such area that sought to ban female mail sorters on the grounds that they needed separate bathrooms, chairs for their weak stamina, and that they were not able to work long or late hours (Braybon 1998).

**Changes to Feminine Appearances and Behaviors**

Women were further exposed to a remarkable amount of hostility targeting, paradoxically, both their alleged feminine nature and the seemingly masculine changes to their appearance and behavior. Much of war work required alterations to what was typically a feminine appearance; while long hair was a sign of feminine beauty, it was often too dangerous to have around machines (Goldstein 2001). Furthermore, females were exposed to many chemicals and toxins that served to roughen their physical appearance. Working with TNT had devastating effects for many women as the chemicals involved dyed their skin yellow. They became known as the "canary girls" and were severely mocked for this "stigma" that represented their dedication to their country (Grayzel 2002). These outward changes to women's appearance provoked strong reactions as it was perceived as a change to what was traditionally viewed as feminine. Ads for beauty products highlighted this anxiety over maintaining both beauty and femininity while working in a "man's world," claiming that the loss of beauty was avoidable, by using their product (Goldstein 2001). Masculine dress was also a sign of changes in femininity as women began dressing in a seemingly masculine fashion, both out of choice and as required by their professions. Women in uniform, such as postal

workers and conductors, were also criticized for losing their femininity by dressing in too masculine a manner (Grayzel 2002).

While alterations in physical appearance and dress were criticized for shifting away from ideals of femininity, changes in women's behavior garnered the most criticism. As the war was seen as having caused the "collapse of those established traditional distinctions that had restrained women" (p 384 Goldstein), the anxiety over what women would now do with this freedom was expressed by targeting shifts in feminine behavior. Many working class women became perceived as taking on male vices and losing their feminine morality by being exposed to greater freedom as well as the corrupting influences found in the workplace. The female factory worker was stereotyped as " a bawdy creature, drinking, smoking, cursing, and satisfying her sexual urges as if she were a man" (p 223 Heyman). While this view was previously held regarding working class women, the war both heightened it and made its implications worse; as these women were indulging themselves, the men were on the battlefront, sacrificing their lives for them. Furthermore, those who disapproved of women's high wages accused female workers of laziness, drunkenness, and debauchery, claiming that such vices directly resulted from the corrupting influences of their new wealth and their frivolous and extravagant feminine nature (Braybon 1998). The female munitions worker came under the most criticism as unlike other female professions, such as nurses, they could not claim pacifism, a trait associated with feminine nature (Goldstein 2001). They were thus perceived as war profiteers who desired the war to continue as long as possible and who took their generous earnings to spend on frivolities instead of investing them into the war effort. Rumors spread that any prosperous female worker made her money

from selling sexual favors, a so-called "extra shift" (Heyman 2002). Critics saw women's war efforts as merely "escape routes from the constraints of the private family" (p 384 Goldstein) and they claimed that women found their new work an exciting, and even erotic experience. As the war waged on, "male rage against the war turn(ed) against the female who apparently reaps its benefits (p 395 Goldstein) through both lucrative war wages and a greater sense of independence.

The escalating tension over the effects of war work on women was reflected in a 1917 article, published in *The Bulletin.* While focusing on the women workers in Glasgow, the commentary seeks to use this example to speak to a broader audience about the universal dangers female work poses to society. This article claims that "war work is coarsening our young womanhood" and observes the degeneration in women's speech and conduct that has resulted. Even changes in dress are noticed, as the article warns that "the masculine dress has a psychological effect on the susceptible." While admitting that men too have become coarse, they are excused for their behavior due to "the excitement of fighting, the dirtiness of the killing job, the divorce from the ordinary decencies of life". Women on the other hand are criticized for getting carried away by ideas of "being engaged in a great adventure" and that they have foolishly "been taught to regard themselves as such-the indispensible aides of the men at the guns." The article further claims that women are paradoxically both being "pampered" and "coarsened" by their war work and warns that there are dangerous repercussions that will result. Without the community taking action to counteract the coarsening influences of war work on women, they very well may be "bound for the gutter when the war is over" (*The Bulletin* 1917), representing both economic and moral ruin.

This article highlights the anxiety over changes to women's behavior, appearance, and femininity. It also shows the devaluation of women's contributions. Women are criticized for viewing themselves as indispensible to the war effort, despite the fact that propaganda images to recruit women portrayed the same message. While this idea was useful in getting women into the war effort, they were now criticized for believing it to be true. Furthermore, men were excused for any changes to their behavior or appearance due to the severe conditions involved with fighting the war. Women's war work had now been devaluated and relegated into a so called pampering. In a response to this article, printed in *The Bulletin* four days later, Miss Cecile Walton, a British artist, attacks the view that femininity has been coarsened by war work. Walton claims that "on the contrary, it is elevating it" and further states that such an article gives "the community an entirely wrong impression" of women's contributions. She argues that women "have set an example to the country of steadiness under great stress" and goes as far as saying that "the women of Great Britain have saved the country" (Walton 1917). While her claims greatly exaggerate women's war contributions, it is done to temper the massive amount of devaluation and resentment that they faced. She claims that this article, as well as others, is one of the contributing factors that garner such misplaced hostility, signifying that women were well aware that their efforts were being minimized, yet continued to participate in the war effort regardless.

Alongside criticism over changes in behavior and appearance was the claim that female workers were neglecting their primary duty of womanhood, that of bearing and raising children. War work was deemed as a distracting influence from the responsibilities of family life and there was an assumption that women had a vital second

role in managing the home, despite any war contributions they provided (Grayzel 2002). This "double burden" required that if women decided to work, they must ensure that their family duties did not suffer from it; as such, absenteeism became a problem in many workplaces as women attempted to do two full time jobs (Goldstein 2001). Women were criticized for neglecting important tasks of housekeeping and caring for dependents by entering into the workforce, and "governments looked with increasing unease at the role women were playing" (p 223 Heyman); ironically, it was often the government that put women into the workplace in the first place. Women's role in affecting men's morale became stressed and they were reminded that their domestic roles were to be placed above all else by many campaigns launched by the government. These campaigns reminded women that their men would return eventually and that it was their duty to preserve both the family and the home for their return (Higonnet 1987).

Female participation in war work that was deemed slightly dangerous further raised the irrational fear that women may be jeopardizing their reproductive capabilities (Grayzel 2002). British society was continually concerned with the amounting death toll due to the war as well as the declining birth rates (*Annual Report of the Registrar General for England & Wales, for Scotland, for Ireland, and for Northern Ireland* 1914-1919) and now, with the possibility of the irreparable damage to women's ability to procreate, there was a great anxiety over the nation's future. These anxieties over the nation's future were also expressed through institutions such as social welfare programs and maternity centers that aimed to protect pregnant women in the hopes of raising the birthrate; however these institutions also served to increase further government intervention into the private lives of women (Heyman 2002).

An advertisement in a 1918 edition of *The Woman Worker* reflects how this anxiety was expressed in daily life; attempting to advertise Glaxco Infant Formula, this ad serves to demonstrate how women's roles as mothers were socially emphasized yet seemingly neglected by female workers. The advertisement remarks on the necessity to protect the children, which women have apparently forgotten about being too preoccupied with their work. The ad further states that children are "the supreme care of womanhood" and that to ignore them is to be "blind and reckless of the consequences of the future," (*The Woman Worker* 1918), warning women that by working they have neglected their feminine duty as a mother. This ad represents a general anxiety over changes in gender roles and a concern with the future, both directly related to the development of a female labor force.

The growing anxiety over the nation's future as well as the new female workforce was evident in society's efforts to both correct women's moral behavior and to safeguard their health. In regards to the concern over female worker's morality and health, two new positions were vital in safeguarding the women engaged in wartime factory work: factory inspectors and welfare supervisors. While the position of factory inspector had existed since the 1800's, with the introduction of females into the workplace their role in protecting the safety and treatment of workers became more focused on issues regarding women. Welfare supervisors on the other hand, were created by the Ministry of Munitions in 1915 as a direct response to the growing female labor force. The newly created welfare department had the responsibility of ensuring production by maintaining a healthy and efficient workforce. While these welfare supervisors were responsible for providing first aid and for governing the restrooms and

canteens, they also served as moral guardians and managed petty disputes (Grayzel 2002). This position was highly resented by many female workers as it served to divide women against each other, generally along class lines as the majority of these welfare supervisors were upper or middle class, married women (Grayzel 2002). These tensions were exacerbated by the welfare supervisor's ability to fire or punish violators of the new moral rules. While they generally served to organize appropriate social activities for female workers to engage in, many of these welfare supervisors instead operated like a police force, that although often run by women, instituted a "paternalistic safeguard" (Grayzel 2002) by monitoring the behavior of women workers during the war. It is significant to note that it was only these middle and upper class women who were trusted with this great responsibility, a responsibility that would be somewhat acknowledged by the end of the war with legislation opening up new positions and opportunities for these women.

Intervention into the private, moral lives of women was not restricted to only female workers, however, and many women were targeted for perceived immorality in their personal lives. Extramarital affairs were one such area targeted, as Britain's concern with the decreasing birthrate was compounded by a rising illegitimacy rate (*Annual Report of the Registrar General for England & Wales, for Scotland, for Ireland, and for Northern Ireland* 1914-1919). This surge of illegitimate children, doubling from 4.2% of all births in 1914 to 8.3% in 1917, was seen as a sign of moral decay. "War babies," or the offspring of men who had enlisted and the girls who were swept up with fervor, were suspected to exist in large number and there was a great fear over a host of other social problems that would result due to these illegitimate children (Grayzel 2001).

As illegitimacy was linked to immorality, these illegitimate children could serve to lower the moral standards of the entire nation. Sexual deviancy was seen as just as large a threat as illegitimacy, and it was viewed as a direct challenge to socially accepted behavior and morality. It was further linked to both perversity and, in extreme cases, treason (Grayzel 2001). While the war allowed for greater sexual experimentation, there was no acceptance for this radical behavior and accusations of deviancy, usually focusing on female homosexuality, created scandal that was dealt with harshly, such as in the case of actress and dancer Maud Allan. In what has become referred to as the Pemberton Billing Scandal, Allan was accused of being a lesbian, against which she virulently defended herself in a libel lawsuit. In losing the suit, however, her career suffered immensely, reflecting how lesbianism, or any other deviation from the norm, was reacted to harshly (Grayzel 2001).

This obsession with preserving morality went even further, however, and anxiety over changes in gender roles and moral behavior permeated into all areas of society. This hostility was related to the fear that the war upset traditional family structures and gender roles with the removal of men to war and the replacement of the "rational" male head of household with the "irrational" female (Grayzel 2002). With the men's absence, women gained direct control of income and the household for the first time and British society feared the radical and possible permanent effects on the family structure that would result from women taking over this new role (Braybon 1998). Both women and the family structure were linked with moral behavior due to traditionally held conceptions of women as ethical and moral guardians. As such, any alterations to women resulted in raising the fears about alterations to morality as well. Morality was also deeply connected with the

morale of the armed forces, and anyone who acted to corrupt the moral homeland the war was fought to preserve became deemed an internal enemy. Furthermore, as gender had become linked to the justification of the war itself, the morality of the cause itself was seemingly threatened. This internal enemy would, if allowed, act to delegitimize the cause of the war and thus had to be prevented. The anxiety over preserving a moral homeland soon actively targeted women, both in surveillance and legislation (Grayzel 2002).

The legislation targeting women sought to both "maintain gender continuity and facilitate the return to traditional roles after the war" (p 389 Goldstein); however soon it became a way to target women and make them the scapegoats for the general anxiety felt by all during the war (Heyman 2002). As women in Britain were more active in the public realm than in other belligerent nations, with the strongest suffrage movement and the most radical branch of suffragettes, they were identified as internal enemies over all other groups of people. While nearly all nations involved identified scapegoats within their society, it was thus women who became the chief target of Great Britain. Moral battles on the home front all focused on women as possible internal enemy and whose defeat would allow for "complete victory" in the war (Grayzel 1999). This persecution of female behavior and morality was due to the fact that victory now relied on both the preservation of the army as well as the conduct of civilians. The anxieties over the war served to place increased significance on women's behavior, shown in the intensified attention paid, as it was seen as a direct relation to morality, and therefore morale (Grayzel 1999). As morale was now seen as being able to be influenced by noncombatants, the moral behavior of women became viewed as a "potentially

imperiling" force that needed to be governed (Grayzel 1999). Immoral women were perceived as destroying everything men were dying to protect, and as such, government intervention became the only way to preserve the moral fiber of the homeland.

Much of the concern over the behavior of women focused on soldiers' wives, who received separation allowances from the government. While early in the war, soldier's wives were glorified for their loyalty and steadfastness, as tensions heightened on the home front, they came to be vilified (Heyman 2002). There was an increasing fear that soldiers' wives would use their government funding to buy alcohol to drown their sorrows (Grayzel 2001). Furthermore, soldiers' wives were often declared social parasites who desired the war to continue as long as possible to enjoy the benefits they received from it (Heyman 2002). Due to these concerns, war wives were placed under special scrutiny to deem whether they were morally worthy of receiving these special government benefits. It was stated that "the dependents of soldiers should receive their allowances, after proper investigation, as a favour and not as a right" (*The English Review* 1914). Already in the early phase of the war, the Army Council issued a memorandum relaying their "desire to have the assistance of the police in the measures which are being taken to provide for the withholding of separation allowances payable to wives or dependents of soldiers in the event of serious misconduct on the part of the recipient" (*The English Review* 1914). A response to this scrutiny was published in 1914, in *The English Review*, that criticized the government for placing soldiers' wives under police surveillance to monitor their morality. This response claims it is the nation's duty to provide for the soldier's dependents out of gratitude for those fighting. The article mocks the obsession with morality at whatever the cost, stating "we must make our

soldiers and their dependents moral if we starve them to death in the process" (*The English Review* 1914). This response demonstrates that not everyone subscribed to this idea of morality at all costs, and that some saw the hypocrisy in it.

While the concern with morality targeted a range of behaviors, the chief focus was on controlling women's sexuality, which was seen as a potentially corrupting, immoral force. Sexually promiscuous women were deemed to be the largest threat to the morality of the nation and little distinction was made between the actions of prostitutes and those of sexually active women (Grayzel 2002). The criticism over these sexually loose women identified the drastic changes to women's appearance and behavior as a sign that they had become emboldened and masculine, and images of women in short skirts, taking up male vices such as drinking and smoking were common representations of women. While drinking and smoking were seen as dangers in themselves, they were also linked to further immoral behaviors and sexual relations (Grayzel 2002). It is not clear, however, if it was the freedoms offered by the removal of men due to the war that changed these women, or if these changes were already underway in society, such as the 19$^{th}$ century emergence of the "New Woman" (Grayzel 2002). Furthermore, it is increasingly difficult to evaluate if moral standards declined or if sexual activity increased (Grayzel 1998). All that is observable is the increase in attention paid to women's sexuality and the anxiety it produced. Whether or not these changes were a result of the war, there still existed a deep concern that peacetime would not cure what were perceived to be new behaviors and thus the government made active attempts to reform them (Grayzel 2002).

The focus on morality and sexuality was a chief motivating force in the introduction of legislation seeking to govern female behavior; however, there was also a deep concern over the very real threat of the spread of venereal disease as a result this promiscuity. Throughout history, the spread of debilitating diseases have taken a collective toll on armies (Goldstein 2001) and as such, the threat venereal diseases posed was taken very seriously by military commanders and governments alike. As venereal disease spreads most rapidly when the army stays in one position rather than when it is mobile, the First World War's shift to static battles greatly increased venereal disease rate amongst soldiers (Goldstein 2001). New government sponsored campaigns were launched to highlight the threat venereal disease posed and there was a strong response to immorality within British legislation. The National Council of Public Morals (NCPM) and the National Council for Combating Venereal Diseases (NCCVD) were created to educate the public on the dangers of venereal disease, and the Royal Commission of Venereal Diseases (RCVD) claimed that legislation was the only way to fight such diseases (Grayzel 1998).

**Defense of the Realm Act**

The first of the new measures targeting immorality was introduced in 1914 at the start of the war, with the creation of the Defense of the Realm Act (DORA). Under the DORA, civil liberties were curbed to protect the troops and sustain the war effort. As such, women's behavior could be regulated under the pretense of protecting the soldiers and many females assumed to be prostitutes were to be prosecuted for being out after dark or for loitering around military bases in attempts to solicit soldiers (Grayzel 1998). In November 1914, the first use of DORA regulations was implemented through an order

issued in the town of Cardiff to ban "certain women" from being allowed out between the hours of 7pm and 8am. The first five women who were arrested and pled guilty received a detention sentence for 62 days; however within the next month more women charged with the same "crime" received 56 days of hard labor (Grayzel 1998). This sentencing provoked an outcry by many who challenged the law on the grounds that it should be equally applied to everyone and not merely target some women. Furthermore, critics claimed that these regulations were a return to the failed and repealed Contagious Diseases Act of 1864 as it targeted women as the sole cause of the spread of venereal diseases (Grayzel 1998).

Colonel East, who was responsible for the prosecution of the Cardiff women, claimed he was acting in the best interest of his soldiers as he feared both women's corrupting influence and the dangers of venereal disease. East was not alone in his fears, and many commanders began warning or restricting their soldiers to protect them from the seductive powers of women. Soldiers in Kitchener's Army received warnings to avoid women completely, which highlighted the increasing concern over the vulnerability of the troops, not to traditional weaponry but to domestic forces (Grayzel 1998). There was further debate over the unrealistic idea of whether or not to ban soldiers from using the brothels in France that were perceived to be dangerously full of disease ridden prostitutes. However, while men were warned about the dangers of venereal disease, the main targets of disciplinary action were women, which set up the double standard of men as the innocent victims of venereal disease spread by immoral women (Grayzel 2001). And while there was some attempt to prohibit men from venturing into known immoral

areas, the chief course of action was to restrict the access to these dangerous women by governing the behavior of the women themselves.

In 1915, under the DORA, a new set of regulations was introduced that directly targeted young women for soliciting soldiers. In November of the same year, twenty women between the ages of 18 and 25 were charged with "frequenting Waterloo-Road for immoral purposes" and a magistrate ordered them to be detained indefinitely "for their own safety" (Grayzel 1998). Under this ruling, it was implied that soldiers needed protection from these girls as much as the girls needed protection from themselves. The patriotic fervor that many young women expressed through hero-worship was not exempt from these regulations, and this so called "khaki-fever" was heavily criticized for inducing young girls to act both naively and immorally out of misplaced gratitude (Heyman 2002). Critics further claimed that even innocent flirting could have dangerous potential and warned that women "were too often swept off their feet by unrestrained emotion" (p 79 Grayzel 1998). Women were thus supposed to view the male soldier as all that was desirable, but not act upon this desire (Grayzel 1998).

While these young women were mainly from the lower classes, there were fears that their aggressive sexuality and immorality would spread up through the class ranks and thus the remedy was to create a women's police patrol (Heyman 2002). This female police force's aim, similar to that of the middle class factory welfare supervisors, was to act as a steadying influence on impressionable young women and they served to enforce "middle class moral standards in public places" (p 173 Heyman). Some of their efforts did pay off in that they got many girls to join the Girl Guides, the moral sister organization to the Boy Scouts, nearly doubling their membership from 40,000 to 70,000

(Heyman 2002); however the continuance of DORA regulations signified that the anxiety over women's immorality persisted, if not worsened. While implementing a female police force "reflected society's efforts to limit the impact of the war,...their new role, paradoxically, also reflected the degree to which the war was bringing about change" (p 218 Heyman).

In 1916, Regulation 13A was implemented under the DORA that gave local governments the power to expel prostitutes from specific areas, still under the pretense of protecting the troops from these women's influence. When in 1917, it appeared that these measures had done little to curb the spread of venereal disease, several conferences were held in London to discuss solutions for women's immoral behavior. The Bishop of London presided, signifying a strong religious aspect to this immorality. Louise Crighton, the head of the National Union of Women, claimed that society must take public action by fighting prostitution and drunkenness, as well as preventing future girls from indulging in these vices. With mounting pressure, the government passed the 1917 Criminal Law Amendment Bill which raised the age of consent from sixteen to eighteen and enacted penalties such as hard labor for knowingly spreading disease. However, Clause 3 of the bill stated that girls under the age of eighteen who loiter in the hopes of soliciting soldiers may be detained by the court, in lieu of punishment, until they reach the age of nineteen (Grayzel 1998).

The Criminal Law Amendment Bill, and more specifically Clause 3, provoked a tremendous level of outrage, the largest amongst feminist groups who claimed this bill was punitive and reinforced the double standard that only women were responsible for immoral behavior and the spread of venereal diseases (Grayzel 2002). Leading suffragist

A. Maude Royden remarked on this double standard in her 1917 work, Duty of Knowledge, stating that "if men are infected by women, the women themselves must, in the first instance, have been infected by men" (Grayzel 1998). Dr. Mary Scharlieb, who had written "The Hidden Scourge" in 1916, emphasized that maternal responsibility and education were the only way to combat venereal disease's spread and criticized state control and the condemnation of sufferers. She further warned that by focusing solely on morality the government was putting the entire British community at risk (Grayzel 1998). Due to this increased opposition, the government eventually withdrew this provision; however its failure led to a new DORA provision that was seen as a direct reintroduction of the Contagious Disease Act of 1867: Regulation 35 C. Under this regulation, police were able to regulate the behaviors of anyone deemed a threat to men's health, and were able to prevent anyone from residing in certain areas that would put them in proximity to military camps. The regulation specifically avoided using the terms "women" or "prostitutes," but still served to target them (Grayzel 1998).

The ambiguous Regulation 35C was followed by the March 1918 DORA Regulation 40D. This regulation was passed as a result of increasing internal pressure, brought about by the American troops' arrival in Great Britain and the US government's anxiety over the corrupting influences of some British women and the fear for their moral safety (Grayzel 1998). An article published by an American journalist, Edward Bok, which appeared in the 1918 *Ladies Home Journal*, expressed both outrage over the immorality he experienced in London as well as his deep concern for American soldier's wellbeing. Bok claimed to have witnessed not only prostitutes, but seemingly ordinary young women soliciting American soldiers on the street as commonplace. He called for

immediate government action as he believed that British women's immorality would defeat all efforts done on US home soil to protect the troops, and if this continued, he advocated the removal of all American troops for their own safety. Ironically, while measures were passed to attempt to ensure a moral homeland and to remove access to these women, this attack on British immorality served to create "an emotive defense" despite the fact that many agreed with Bok's position (Grayzel 1998). This debate between the United States and Great Britain reflected the anxiety "that war had altered the relationship between the sexes" (p 77 Grayzel 1998) and revealed how these changes "could send shock waves through the entire society" (p 77 Grayzel 1998).

In response to the rising tensions, this newly created Regulation 40D now allowed for any woman with venereal disease to be prosecuted and subjected to invasive medical examinations after merely being accused; women needed only to be charged in order to be held for a minimum of a week (Regulation 40D 1918). With the exclusion of men from this regulation, 40D served to confirm the double standard that had only been hinted at before, that women were considered the sole cause of the spread of venereal disease, as well as highlighted the anxiety over preserving the strength of the armed forces. Introduced in March of 1918, by October there were 203 prosecutions under Regulation 40 D and 101 convictions, and to be ignorant of having the disease was not accepted as a defense. And as doctors warned that the most dangerous carriers of venereal disease were actually unregulated women, such as single young girls and married adulterous women, Regulation 40D did little to distinguish from "amateur girls," the term that referred to girls who were willing to have sex with any man in uniform, and prostitutes (Grayzel 2001). Massive amounts of criticism emerged almost immediately as a result of

this bill that claimed that prostitution was ignored when it was dangerous to girls, and is only a concern when it affects males negatively. It was further argued that this measure failed to fix the greater issue of "amateur girls" and prostitutions, and this regulation was merely a masking solution (Grayzel 2001). This legislation instead "tainted the public roles of all women" (p 83 Grayzel 1998) and made it difficult to distinguish between prostitutes and asexually active women. However, despite the massive amounts of criticism by a wide variety of people, it did little to affect policy and Regulation 40D was not abolished until the war's end (Grayzel 1998).

What these various debates regarding women's behavior served to reveal was a general expression of anxiety over the disruption to traditional gender roles that both formed the basis of society and were utilized in justifying the cause for war. The resentment of women was both a result of a deep "fear (women) would displace male workers and also because they had more important tasks as wives and mothers" (p 28 Grayzel). If women were suddenly perceived as capable, competent, and without need for male support, the very cause for fighting the war would unravel. The women needed to maintain the traditional roles of mother and wife and remain in positions of weakness to validate the male originated cause for war. The focus on women's morality and sexuality as the chief concern for this anxiety reflected the need to preserve the homeland as an ideal place for soldiers to return to as the main basis of the war was to defend this homeland and the women and children living there.

Notably, this hostility that targeted women greatly belittled the dangers and harsh conditions women faced and overcame in their participation in the war effort and in the sacrifices they made on the home front. While women's contributions would be vital to

securing the home front and maintaining the very structure of society, their efforts were undervalued and met with resentment and bitterness instead of the appreciation they deserved. The disruption to male lives by joining the army was paralleled by the disruption to women's in joining the war effort and women in combatant nations all faced similar challenges and nearly all expressed "anxiety about men and children, economic difficulties and social upheavals" (p 50 Grayzel 2001). For many, however, it was easier to view women as internal enemies and a dangerous threat than to acknowledge the shift in gender roles their participation in the work place had created and the idea of equality that was suggested.

While women challenged conventional ideas of female behavior by their participation in the war effort, they were unable to break free of the traditional gender roles so firmly rooted in society. The resentment garnered as a result of female participation in the work force as well as changes to their behavior and appearance utilized the conventional perceptions of women and in its criticism, it sought to "maintain gender continuity and facilitate the return to traditional roles after the war" (p 389 Goldstein). The fear that women would not return to their traditional roles as mothers and wives created a harsher backlash to women's contribution. Women were always considered to be in supporting positions, as shown in such slogans as "the woman behind the man behind the gun" (Grayzel 2001). Their efforts were viewed as auxiliary and were not as valued as their male counterparts, reflected in drastically lower wages as well as the refusal of labor unions to include them under their protection. Women in the workplace were claimed to have lost their femininity and they became associated with the negative qualities of conventional ideas of both females and males, however were not

connected with any of the favorable traits. Yet, in this fervent reaction, a weakness in the position of men is revealed; the contradictory representations of women in both weak and supporting roles, as well as being depicted as having supreme control over men's morale and the power to seduce them into immoral behavior serves to signify the unacknowledged power of women.

# 4 The Crisis of Masculinity

*"The man who really endured the War at its worse was everlastingly differentiated from everyone but his fellow soldiers"*

*Siegfried Sassoon*

The masculine experience of the First World War is one that has received little attention from scholars, especially in comparison to the massive focus on the female experience. Yet gender is reciprocal and the war time experiences of women are inherently linked to those of men, and vice versa. The First World War created an environment in which societal norms and gender relations were temporarily challenged, and as women allegedly were emboldened by their experiences, men grew seemingly more effeminate. While this role reversal would be short-lived, within the context of the war it was cause for much anxiety. Issues such as the psychological strength and physical wellbeing of men were amongst the chief areas of concern as they challenged traditional masculine ideals of stoicism and strength. Shellshock and disfigurement were introduced on a massive scale due to the war's intensely brutal nature, and became commonplace by the end of the war. The war experience, marked by both physical and mental trauma, was generally a uniform one amongst those who served and as such, fostered a gendered solidarity amongst men. This solidarity, along with the shared experiences of the war, was a strong enough force to allow for a re-conceptualization of masculinity in response to the wartime needs, prizing camaraderie over self-control and stoicism. Yet while ideals of masculinity were redefined, the same did not occur for

women. The growing fears of the changes amongst women were further intensified by this wartime crisis of masculinity and postwar, this would result in a subjugation of the feminine in attempts to defend the masculine. Thus the temporary crisis of masculinity would produce both a re-conceptualization and a reassertion of the masculine which would play a highly significant role in shaping both genders' experience of the First World War.

As with previous wars, the First World War greatly utilized traditional concepts of masculinity to encourage participation, emphasizing the masculine warrior ideal and posing the battlefront as the ultimate test of masculinity. The masculine gender roles such as father, husband, provider, and warrior were merged together and the war was presented as a way to fulfill each role (Goldstein 2001). By serving in the war, men were protecting not only their nation but also their family. Just as the home front became associated with the feminine, the battlefront was the realm of the masculine and men were increasingly motivated to fight to fulfill their manly duty of protecting and defending the feminine. Women were encouraged to refuse men's attentions if they remained at home in order to goad them into war, emphasizing the masculine role of warrior by claiming that a real man would be at the front (Goldstein 2001). As such, many men were initially eager to participate in order to fulfill their assumed gendered responsibilities and prove themselves worthy men.

This eagerness to fight, however, would quickly turn to ambivalence and eventually resentment as the war waged on as few men were prepared for the harsh realities of the war. The First World War was unlike any war that preceded it and developments such as trench warfare, poisonous gas, and new forms of artillery created a

new, brutal way of fighting and resulted in massive injury and death tolls. Furthermore, the misperception that the war would be brief coupled with the unprecedented physical and psychological trauma of the war to create a widespread disillusionment that resulted in many questioning both the cause of the war itself and their reasons for continued participation (Heyman 2002). The new challenges produced by the traumatic experience of the First World War would serve to produce increasing anxiety over how to incorporate the physical and psychological damages into traditional ideals of masculinity.

**Physical Disfigurement: The Body's Role in Shaping Gender**

The physical trauma wreaked by the First World War was one of the most difficult elements of the war to process due to both its immense scale as well as the inadequacy of medical care available. The male body was immensely important in the construction of the masculine identity and disability was "the antithesis of the masculine ideal, representing a loss of economic independence, mobility, and symbolised (sic) life as a dependent invalid" (p 529 Gagen). Thus, disability was viewed as the ultimate emasculation and fear of battle was related as much to being maimed as it was to death. In fact, "a fear of something being worse than death was a recurrent theme" (p 529 Gagen) amongst soldiers, with many actually preferring death to life as an invalid.

The massive magnification of war injuries during the First World War made this fear of disability a reality. The First World War was the first war that had higher casualties from battle rather than disease, and new forms of artillery and weaponry led to more effective dismemberment, with an unprecedented severity of

mutilation (Bourke 1996). Over 31% of British soldiers were injured over the course of the war and as a result of this massive number of wounded and the unpreparedness of British medical units, medical help was often delayed for hours (Bourke 1996). The lack of penicillin and inability to maintain cleanliness due to the nature of trench-warfare led to a prevalence of gangrene, resulting in the number of amputations to be undertaken on a scale never seen before, or since (Bourke 1996).

The carnage of the First World War would result in a massive influx of the disabled into British society and would serve to affect not just the war wounded, but the entire civilian disabled population. Although war injuries would eventually become perceived as effeminate and a source of pity, combat wounds were initially perceived as a source of pride that set soldiers apart from other disabled persons (Gagen 2007). Masculine ideals were emphasized in the recovery process and injured men were expected to bear their pain stoically and with a heroic cheerfulness and "those that deviated were thought of as cowardly or childlike" (p 530 Gagen). The rhetoric used to differentiate the war wounded from the disabled civilian population reflected the initial hierarchy of disablement in which soldiers were distinguished as mutilated or "unnaturally abnormal" while civilians were described as disabled and "naturally abnormal" (Bourke 1996). There also was a great change made in the conception of war related disabilities during this time in which responsibility for soldier's care shifted from an individual responsibility to a collective. It now became the duty of the nation to care for these war wounded, and as such soldiers were given preference for the limited economic resources available for the disabled (Bourke 1996).

Advancements were made regarding the treatment of the disabled, such as investments into the creation of more functional and aesthetically pleasing artificial limbs, that would eventually serve to benefit all disabled, however this would be a largely delayed benefit. These new technologies produced were extremely expensive and as Britain would not provide artificial limbs to civilians until after the Second World War, most of the civilian population was forced to continue using peg legs or hooks. Amputee Michael McAleer expressed his frustration at the inequality between soldiers and civilian disabled by stating "had I been disabled...in the war I should not only have had artificial limbs provided but I would have had a good pension" (p 49 Bourke). Furthermore, Emanuel Miller alleged that "many soldiers felt that the wound and its discomforts were worthy of greater compensation than were injuries of peace" (p 45 Bourke).

Yet while the war limited available resources for the disabled and created a hierarchy that prized wounded soldiers over civilians, this was to be short lived. Already by the 1920's, the respect and special status the war maimed received had ended (Bourke 1996). This return to prewar ideas regarding disablement was a result of both the economic crisis following the war as well as the increasing desire to forget the traumatic experience of the First World War. The injured soldiers remained a constant reminder of the war, and reminded many of the experiences they wished to forget, resulting in a loss of the widespread sympathy they enjoyed in the immediate postwar years (Bourke 1996). Furthermore, with the increasing economic problems, less funding was available for the entire disabled population and there was less and less reason to hire disabled veterans, who were prone to

injury and thus a liability (Bourke 1996). As the economic crisis produced widespread unemployment amongst the entire British population, more sympathy was given to those unemployed veterans of the war who were still capable of work than the war injured, who were increasingly perceived as childlike. Thus, in less than a decade, the war maimed had become no different than the disabled civilian population. Yet while physical disfigurement and amputation became an area that challenged conceptions of masculinity and often reduced veterans into dependents, with some entirely reliant on caregivers, who were generally female, there was still a vast difference between those with physical wounds and those suffering from psychological traumas.

**From Hysteria to Shellshock: The Psychological Trauma of the War**

Soldiers suffering from psychological trauma as a result of the First World War experience were treated markedly different from those suffering from physical wounds. While amputees and the war maimed were objects of pity, they were still viewed as having made a heroic sacrifice for their nation. Furthermore, to be wounded meant one was declared fit enough to fight and be sent to the front lines. Psychological related injuries, on the other hand, were seen as an internal defect that existed prewar and were merely intensified by the war experience (Bourke 1996). Thus, while injuries were still seen as patriotic, psychological trauma was generally perceived as cowardly, feminine, and weak. Amongst the psychological traumas of the First World War, none was as devastating, widespread, or problematic as shellshock. What is generally thought of today as Post-Traumatic

Stress Disorder, or PTSD, shellshock was introduced into British society on a massive scale during the First World War. Within British forces, there were 80,000 soldiers reported to be suffering from shell shock, representing 1/7th of all disability discharges (Goldstein 2001). Due to the stigma associated with shellshock that dissuaded many from coming forward, as well as the large number mistakenly executed for charges of malingering and cowardice, this number may in fact have been much higher. Already by 1917, an estimated 1/4th of British forces were deemed unfit to serve because of psychological stress (Winter 2006).

The actual term "shellshock" was introduced by psychiatrist Charles Myers in 1915, describing the condition as simply "a set of disabling injuries suffered by men at the front" (p 52 Winter). He would later rework his definition to include "various nervous symptoms being exhibited by soldiers that had no obvious physical cause" (p 198 Meyer), however both definitions remained incredibly broad and vague. Varying definitions continued to arise throughout the war, ranging from theories that shellshock was a result of physical damage, a sort of concussion from exposure to artillery fire, to a form of memory repression to combat fatigue, or "an unavoidable wearing out of one of the components of the military machine" (p 43 Winter). These numerous competing definitions represented a lack of understanding of the condition itself, but were also in response to the multiple symptoms exhibited. Symptoms of shellshock ranged from muscle spasms and tremors, to insomnia, nightmares, and outbursts of violence. In extreme cases, paralysis and muteness were also present. Due to the variances amongst symptoms, numerous forms of treatment were introduced that coincided with the variety of

definitions of shellshock that existed. The most common treatments involved rest, isolation, sedative drugs and electrotherapy, however few yielded lasting results. Furthermore, many definitions often came into conflict with one another and as doctors were unable to reach a consensus amongst themselves, every case was not treated the same way, even within the same army.

Complicating the issue of competing definitions was the inability to determine who was suffering from shellshock and who was attempting to malinger or evade duty. As such, the common treatments of electric shock and cigarette burns were used not only to attempt to fix the part of the brain believed to be suffering, but also to deter those who sought to fake their symptoms (Goldstein 2001). Any official recognition of psychological trauma as a war injury would have entitled sufferers to benefits and compensation (Winter 2006). Furthermore, there was a fear that if shellshock was made an accepted condition, it would become merely an approved way to escape from service at on the frontlines. Despite the numerous medical definitions revolving around shellshock, the massive number of malingerers led many in the military to continue to look upon victims of shellshock with mistrust (Goldstein 2001). As such, military leaders recommended that pensions be denied to victims of shellshock with the implication that it was a falsified condition and a result of cowardice. A distinction was made, however, between malingers, who consciously pretended to have a disease and those with shellshock, who were deemed "unconscious malingerers" as having actually convinced themselves they had the condition (Bourke 1996).

Within the military, the initial reaction to shellshock was a severe one. As it was seen as safer to execute one man than let him poison the minds of others and destroy morale, execution became deemed as an acceptable punishment for those deemed cowards (Bourke 1996). Thus, numerous soldiers suffering from shellshock fell victim to this policy and were amongst the more than 300 men executed for either malingering or cowardice (Bourke 2001). However, by 1917 there was an increasing number of cases in which respectable soldiers and officers were suffering from shellshock as well, and thus the treatment of the condition began to change. To continue with the policy of executing sufferers of shellshock would be to destroy not only morale, but also to deplete Britain's forces during a time of manpower shortages. Due to the increasing need to treat the men afflicted in order to return them to the front, previously dismissed methods of treating shellshock were returned to, more notably that of psychoanalysis. What was discovered was that "psychoanalytic techniques, called on often as a last resort, proved to be surprisingly effective" (p 138 Roshwald). Once shellshock began being viewed as treatable, psychologists became an essential element of the war effort in order to prevent the continued loss of man power (Heyman 2002). Of the cases treated, psychoanalysis resulted in 90% of patients being declared cured; however this number is deeply exaggerated as many men were treated in an "assembly line treatment" fashion that declared them as healthy just to send them back to the front (Winter 2006). Yet while the initial focus would be primarily on returning men to the battlefront rather than truly curing them of their condition, the advances made during this period would eventually result in new ways of thinking about and

treating nervous disorders and would result in psychoanalysis gaining international standing and acceptance.

**Gender Roles Redefined: The Re-Conceptualization of Masculinity**

While shellshock was extremely problematic to the logistics of fighting the war, nowhere was it more damaging than to conceptualizations of masculinity. The symptoms of shellshock were in stark contrast to masculine traits of stoicism and self control as "to be masculine was to be unemotional, in control of one's passions" (p 197 Meyer). Furthermore, psychological disorders were still generally related to hysteria, deemed a female disorder (Goldstein 2001). Thus there was a great fear that the war was actually effeminizing men due to the numerous men returning home physically and mentally incapacitated, though not actually "wounded". Doctor's treating the condition continued to emphasize self control as a method of controlling symptoms, however their diagnoses often implied the men suffering were inadequate soldiers for not being able to master their symptoms or were cowardly for succumbing to them. The implication that men suffering from shellshock were not in control of their bodies or were cowards challenged the ultimate masculine ideal of the stoic warrior and turned shellshock into a great social stigma. Yet while the stigma associated with shellshock created a societal alienation of those suffering, soldiers found the much needed support from their comrades who could empathize with their situation.

Living in trenches for extended periods of time, there was no physical or mental escape from the trauma of war and many men's psyches began to falter

under such extreme conditions. As such, even those who were not afflicted with shellshock understood the condition as many had encountered similar fears and experiences themselves. As a young British private stated, that while "most of us were scared stiff...there was nothing in this experience to be ashamed of, because it happened to all of us, and it didn't make a difference whether you were an officer or an enlisted man" (p 74 Heyman). The unifying experience of the war resulted in a remarkable gendered solidarity in which men banded together to ensure that shellshock did not tarnish the heroic ideals of masculinity. Soldiers began emphasizing ideals of comradeship as the ultimate heroic ideal. They identified men who remained at home as the real cowards rather than those men suffering from shellshock. Thus, while not adding new conceptions of masculinity but merely shifting the "emphasis on what qualities were needed to make the ideal heroic man," soldiers redefined masculinity to ensure that "one could be a man if one remained loyal to one's comrades, even in face of the subconscious betrayal of body or mind" (p 208 Meyer). This re-conceptualization of masculinity allowed for men to not be emasculated by shellshock related symptoms as well as general experiences of emotion or fear. Instead, by experiencing emotion or fear and remaining loyal to their comrades, they now demonstrated the ultimate masculine ideal.

Yet while men were able to re-conceptualize definitions of masculinity, this did not relieve the general anxiety that has been referred to as the "crisis of masculinity." Their wartime experiences, involving both physical and psychological trauma, revealed how fragile masculinity actually was (Goldstein 2001). Furthermore, the changes occurring amongst women during this time only

exacerbated this anxiety. As women had demonstrated they were capable of carrying on in men's absence, there was a great fear amongst soldiers of returning home and not being needed. Thus, women became the focus of this anxiety. Images of evil women occupied men's thoughts constantly, in which there was the fear of women's infidelity and as well as the fear that as women had become so changed during the war, the men would no longer recognize their own wives when they returned home (Thebaud 1996).

Men further believed that as women were exaggerating their own importance within the war effort, they were somehow also diminishing men's. There existed the idea that there was not enough acknowledgement to go around and any recognition of women's efforts would by default subtract from men's. There were also gendered implications to recognizing women's contributions as by acknowledging these contributions as vital to the war effort, it would also suggest they were as equally capable as men. Furthermore, accepting the changes in women's condition would be acknowledging the lessening importance of men and would take away from the male sacrifices made during the war. The challenge women posed to men was viewed as a direct threat to the traditional gender relations and as such, would result in a reassertion of masculinity in the immediate postwar years.

Yet while women served to challenge masculinity and acted as a focus for male anxiety, they were also essential in rebuilding the masculine identity of the men returning home. As many men had "returned to a primitive state of total helplessness" (p 34 Thebaud) due to their experiences in the war, women were

expected to nurture them as they rebuilt their masculinity. This masculine need for nurturing created a "sexual and maternal" contradiction however, as men expected their women to reinforce their masculinity but also take on mothering roles (Roper 2007). This desire for motherly relationships also explains the surge of "sick bed romances" and marriages in the immediate aftermath of the war (Roper 2007). Both the war experience and the crisis of masculinity created amongst men a great need to be recognized for their efforts and women served as both witnesses and nurturers of the soldier's masculinity (Goldstein 2001). Thus even though women remained in their traditional supporting roles after the war, they were still actively rebuilding their men.

The crisis of masculinity that occurred both during and in the wake of the First World War was immensely important in shaping the gendered experience of the war. The crisis also revealed how deeply intertwined gender roles are as a crisis amongst the masculine inevitably shapes how the feminine is perceived and treated. And while these traditional gender roles were firmly rooted in the foundation and experiences of the First World War, the crisis of masculinity shows how the war would also serve to radically transform these roles. The uniform experience amongst those who served allowed for a new emphasis to be placed on masculine ideals that created a new masculine identity. At the same time, the crisis of masculinity resulted in a severe anxiety over this preserving and asserting this masculine identity. As this anxiety was not fully processed, it would remain a powerful force in shaping both men and women's postwar experiences.

# 5 The Partial Victory: Divergent Experiences of the War

*"People told us the war was over. That was a laugh. We ourselves are the war: Its flame burns strongly in us. It envelops our whole being and fascinates us with the enticing urge to destroy. We obeyed...and marched onto the battlefields of the postwar world just as we had gone into battle on the western front"*

*Friedrich Wilhelm Heinz, 1919*

The First World War came to an end with an Allied victory announced on November 11th, 1918. Great Britain now faced not only the enormous task of demobilizing its troops, unprecedented in both size and distance, but also that of restoring social order and domestic stability within the nation. While the war had temporarily unified the nation in its initial phase, it eventually proved to be an extremely divisive force amongst British society, especially in regards to gender. Male anxiety over gender roles that emerged during the war was still present in the aftermath and was further increased by fears of returning to a home that was unrecognizable and in which men were no longer needed. This anxiety, which had manifested itself in hostility towards women, greatly shaped how postwar Britain demobilized and regained domestic stability. Female gender roles which were challenged during the war would thus see a stunning reversal of the fluidity they once enjoyed and a return to traditional conceptions of gender became posed as one of the chief means of achieving prewar normalcy. While women's contributions to

the war faced an immense backlash and a stronger cementation of gendered conceptions of femininity than what had existed in the prewar period, the re-conceptualization of aspects of masculinity remained intact. The success of the male challenges to gender roles and the failures of women's efforts can be contributed to many factors, chief amongst them divergent experiences of the war and class loyalties, yet what remains clear is that in this gendered war in which both men and women worked to challenge traditional concepts of gender, it was the men who were victorious.

**The Return Home and the Return to Normalcy**

The large scale demobilization of Great Britain's troops began almost immediately after the war's end, yet was greatly complicated by the stagnating economy the ensued in the aftermath of the war. Attempting to both combat this economic crisis and transform the economy into one that could function in peace time, Britain sought to avoid further complicating the situation by sending massive amounts of men home to an unprepared society, which would result in widespread unemployment. As such, the British government decided to employ the policy of gradual demobilization that would release men from the military who could contribute to the economic revival (p 261 Heyman 2002). Thus all men deemed economically "useful" would be returned so that their industrial skills and capabilities could be utilized in rebuilding society. Under this system, top priority was given to coal miners, seen as essential in rebuilding the economy, with the lowest given to soldiers working in supply and transport divisions as their labor was

deemed necessary in supporting the military occupying forces stationed within Germany. While preference was given to married men, those who had been heroic in action, and those who had served the longest, this only applied amongst those soldiers deemed economically useful (Heyman 2002).

This policy of demobilization soon proved to be extremely time-consuming, however, as the government was forced to separate millions of men into different categories of usefulness. Furthermore, the policy was also strongly criticized by the men themselves who deemed it to be an unfair system in which those men who were sent to the front last, because their industrial skills were needed in Britain's wartime economy, were to be sent home first (Heyman 2002). Reactions against this policy began almost immediately with incidents of vandalism of leave-trains, massive demonstrations and numerous threats of strikes. Due to this increasing pressure, Great Britain was forced to change its policy to give demobilization preference to men who had served at the front the longest. While around 900,000 men were still needed to remain as the occupying force in Germany, Great Britain demobilized the remaining 2.6 million men at a rapid pace. Yet while the government returned nearly 10,000 men a day, the entire process still took a year to complete (Heyman 2002).

The men who were returned home received both a discharge payment and demobilization bonus, and were also given unemployment benefits should they not immediately find work. The majority of the men who were demobilized in 1919 did not need these benefits though as they found an ample amount of jobs awaiting them (Heyman 2002). However these positions were now readily available only

because of the dismissal of the women workers who had previously occupied them. As the end of the war was approaching, women occupying previously male-held jobs had been summarily dismissed to make room for the men's return (Heyman 2002). While these dismissals were protested against virulently, such as with the women munitions workers' demonstrations in London and Glasgow, there was little effect as the end of the war had both drastically decreased the need for these industries as well as brought the return of men available to fill the positions still needed. Women continued to lose their jobs and by 1921, the amount of women in the labor force had been so drastically reduced that it was 2% less than the prewar levels of 1911 (Grayzel 2002).

As women workers were seen as taking away jobs from not just men, but heroic veterans of war, hostility towards women was also a prevalent aspect of postwar society. In 1919 Britain had experienced a brief post war boom, however this came to a quick end in 1920 as the economy began to stagnate and unemployment drastically increased. The economic difficulties now facing Britain created an environment of increasing tension, resulting in an intensification of the wartime male anxiety as well as hostility towards women. As priority for all jobs was given to men, women found it increasingly difficult to find alternative work. They also faced an environment in which there was little sympathy for the unemployment and economic difficulties facing women in the postwar era. Postwar job training offered to train workers for the new skills required in the modernizing industrial sphere also excluded women, ensuring that they would lack the skills needed to be eligible for the jobs they desired (Heyman 2002).

The jobs that did remain open to women in postwar Britain were either in domestic service or textile factories, the same industries that women generally worked in before the war. Yet while there was much employment to be found in these sectors, there was a widespread resistance against going back to these positions. Domestic service especially was refused, with women equating it to a form of servitude (Grayzel 2002). Furthermore, both domestic service and textile industries had drastically lower wages than what women had become accustomed to during the war, and the postwar economic crisis only worsened wages. This refusal to work in industries deemed demeaning to women reflects the new attitudes women had gained from their war experience in regards to their own worth. Even amongst those women who did return to domestic service, this new attitude was reflected, with many refusing to live with the families or working in large households in order to maintain the independence they had experienced with the war (Heyman 2002).

As women began refusing available jobs, however, unemployment benefits were immediately taken away from them. Numerous appeals against repeal of benefits were made, yet none were successful, sending the message to women that they could not expect the same kind of work or wages that they enjoyed during the war (Grayzel 2002). Furthermore, women were harshly criticized in the press for taking "a holiday at the national expense" (p 228 Heyman). The majority of the criticism was similar to that faced during the war, identifying women as self indulgent and working out of luxury. Any evidence of male unemployment would only further increase this hostility, and women workers were vilified for "stealing"

jobs from men. What this criticism failed to take into account, however, was that the devastation brought by the war had left many widows, or injured men who were unable to support their families. Thus, while the government supported these individuals to an extent, for many women work was far from a luxury and was in fact an economic necessity (Grayzel 2002). That this criticism of women workers utilized the same negative stereotypes towards women in the postwar period signified that their war contributions had not changed women's status in society or affected British conceptions of gender roles.

Not all women desired to remain in the workforce, however, and many sought an immediate return to the home and the domestic sphere. The traumatic experience faced by both men and women during the war made both sexes seek to resume any amount of normalcy as possible. Furthermore, without the pretext of the war, many women did not see a reason to continue making sacrifices. There now was a rush to return to private life and post war marriages in Britain surged (Thebaud 1996). Furthermore, the aim to restore the traditional family and gender stratified labor market was expressed both by men and some women. At the same time as the criticism of women workers, there was also a coinciding great praise bestowed upon housewives and mothers who resumed their traditional gender roles once the war had ended (Thebaud 1996). This glorification of the wife and mother was meant to encourage more women to return home in order to diffuse the situation that was escalating because of the women remaining in the workforce. This glorification of the woman in the supporting role was further reflected in memorials of the war itself. Monuments and memorials "flattered male virility and

highlighted the noncombatant role of women" (p 73 Thebaud), with imagery of the grieving mother becoming central in commemoration of the First World War. As commemoration shaped the way the war was remembered, the fact that traditional gender roles were cemented in them would result in a false remembrance of women's roles as well.

Despite these efforts to return to traditional gender roles from before the war, the effects of the war on reshaping both genders could not be ignored. The war had a great psychological effect on both men and women, as well as on society's perception of gender. With the massive loss of men, there was a lower birth rate which caused anxiety over the future. Furthermore, there was also a rise in divorces due to the psychological traumas of the war (Thebaud 1996). The emotional distance that the war inflicted between men and women was due largely in part to the fact that each had such differing experiences of the war. Whereas men felt largely dejected by the traumas they faced that challenged ideas of masculinity, women were seemingly emboldened by their experiences. This emboldening was seen as more of a risk with the large absence of men and there was a great fear of women encroaching on the male sphere. The reassertion of gender became viewed as necessary to maintaining postwar domestic stability, and the reassertion of the masculine through the subjugation of women became seen as the way to achieve this.

**Illusory Emancipation**

This period of the First World War was not an entirely negative experience for British women, however, and many of both the war and postwar developments actually served to benefit women. Women's life expectancy actually rose during the war, especially amongst the working class, as standards of living greatly increased (Thebaud 1996). This increase in living conditions, as well as Great Britain's ability to ensure food supplies and avoid shortages through rationing proved vital in winning the war. In other countries, especially Germany, food shortages led to domestic instability and eventually served to weaken the war effort. The success of Britain in preserving foodstuffs during the war has been attributed to the successful propaganda campaigns urging women to limit their consumption (Thebaud 1996). Food nutritional standards also improved during this period, which contributed to the improvement in the standards of living for women and children and that continued to increase until the flu epidemic of 1918 (p 134 Brendon 2000).

Improving health standards amongst women became a chief focus in postwar Britain as well, which was greatly motivated by social fears over the loss of nearly an entire generation in the war. As such, maternal and infant health became one of the chief concerns of the government, who now saw it as their responsibility to ensure the wellbeing of the next generation (Grayzel 2002). In 1918, the Maternal and Child Welfare Act was introduced that established clinics for needy and expectant mothers and their children. There was also funding provided to needy families with children, an aspect that feminists argued was not a real benefit as it was not a compensation for women's work in the home but rather a reward for

having children that kept women in traditional and subservient positions in the home (Grayzel 2002). The assistance offered to women during this period and the measures enacted such as the state support given to soldiers' dependents during the war and the assistance given to mothers and children after, were also important in laying the foundations for the development of the welfare state.

New legislation was also introduced in this period to benefit women economically. Measures such as the 1919 Sex Discrimination Act enabled women to enter into professions previously restricted to them, such as law and civil service. These changes did not always guarantee any real change, however, and the opportunities were not available to all women, with middle class women generally benefiting the most from these new positions (Grayzel 2002). The tertiary sector was also feminized during this period, with previously male dominated positions of banking, public service, and office work becoming viewed as the domain of females. Yet again, this only benefited middle class women, especially the women of the bourgeoisie, the so called "daughters of cultivated men" (p 70 Thebaud). These new positions made available to middle class women serve to reveal a small yet significant change in British mentality regarding women, one in which these women's authoritative roles undertaken during the war were seemingly acknowledged by this extension of responsibility.

It was the political gains that women made by the end of the First World War that were perhaps the most significant. By the spring of 1918, women had achieved partial suffrage with the passing of the Representation of the People Bill in 1917, approved by the House of Lords in 1918, that gave the vote to women over thirty

who were either land owners or the spouse of land owners. This partial victory excluded young women and made it so poor single women had no way of gaining suffrage (Heyman 2002). In contrast, all men with residency over twenty-one were able to vote as well as veterans over nineteen. This limitation of women's suffrage was done to ensure that male voters still outnumbered women in the wake of the massive casualties of the war, as many feared women would gain the majority if preventative measures were not taken (Heyman 2002). While it was reacted to by many of the suffragette movements, with feminist Millicent Garrett Fawcett acknowledging they had only achieved the "motherhood franchise," the majority of women viewed this as a compromise and expected to gain more (Grayzel 2002). As the nation was still at war, many believed it was better to compromise and that more reforms would follow once the war was won, yet this was not to be the case and it was not until 1928 that the age limit was lowered to twenty-one.

Britain's awarding of partial suffrage to landowning women over thirty is particularly significant in understanding the nature of women's alleged success in achieving the vote. While women across class lines were participants in the war effort, it was the young working class women who bore most of the brunt, working in the dangerous and hostile conditions of munitions factories. The fact these women were excluded reveals that suffrage was not a reward for wartime sacrifices, but rather a continuation of trends set into motion by the prewar actions of the suffragists. Before the war broke out, suffrage movements were rapidly expanding and posed at gaining women the vote. Yet their momentum was halted by the war (Grayzel 2002). After the war came to an end, Britain needed to restore domestic

stability, and with the fear of suffragettes terrorizing society again, they sought to avoid a renewal of the issue by granting women partial suffrage (Heyman 2002). The fact that the vote would not have been given without the gains made by the prewar suffragist movements is further reflected in the situation with France. While women workers in France and Britain did relatively the same work, French women did not secure the vote until 1944. The major difference between these two countries was that the suffrage movement was much stronger in Britain than it was in France (Grayzel 2002). Neither government viewed female participation in the war effort as something to reward, as it was voluntary and did not put their lives in as much danger. As they did not face the same dangers as a conscripted soldier, there was no reason to reward them with equal recognition (Grayzel 2002). Thus the vote was only achieved by the pre-war suffrage movements and the progress they made, with the war serving to not only halt their progress, but also diminish it by only extending partial suffrage.

Furthermore, the fact that British women had gained the right to vote did not signify political participation or power, and none of the fifteen British female candidates were elected in the parliamentary elections of the House of Commons in December 1918 (Thebaud 1996). Furthermore, there was strong opposition to women voting that resulted in the intensification of the wartime stereotypes of women as naïve, emotional and pacifist by nature. These stereotypes ignored the participation of women in war time industries, with some women serving on the front lines. Despite the numerous counterexamples women had provided during the war, traditional gender roles were still present, and now strengthened. Critics

claimed that these negative female traits would only be compounded by the lack of political experience and therefore women would favor a quick peace with Germany at the expense of Britain (Heyman 2002). Furthermore, there was a belief that women involved in politics would blur the gender lines even further than what had been done by the war (Heyman 2002). Although these arguments did not prevent some women from gaining the vote, they did become part of the public discourse and were instrumental in reinstating gender roles.

While there were several changes that occurred in Britain by the end of the war with the potential to benefit women, their execution made it so they were not made a reality for all women. The war experience for women was a complicated one, and to claim it as either a beneficiary or harmful period for women is to both generalize and simplify the complexities of the experience. The First World War often had contradictory effects for women, and gains for some women were losses for other (Grayzel 2002). Where women gained control of their finances, generally for the first time, as the war progressed this also caused women to become the targets of government intervention into their lives and scrutinized for alleged female traits of frivolous spending. While there were new job opportunities opened to women, they were not rewarded with equal wages and often faced hostile work environments, with most being dismissed at the end of the war. Those women who desired to return to the domestic sphere found that with the great casualty rates, their chances at becoming a wife and mother were greatly reduced. The political gains made were not matched by social and economic opportunities available. Where women got to experience a greater sense of independence during the war,

the backlash faced at the end of the war reverted many back to prewar statuses. Some women gained the right to vote, yet the fact that many did not created a greater class solidarity than a gendered one.

That this class divide remained so strong signified that there was little sense of shared experience or struggle to unite women on a gendered basis. While men had developed a strong sense of comradeship from their war experience, and in doing so were able to redefine certain aspects of masculinity that were challenged by the war, the same did not apply to women. The limited changes that women had made during the war were not able to be sustained, and post war society saw many more women losing economic and social status. Just as in prewar Britain, postwar society saw textile work as the chief industry women worked in, few married women participated in the labor force, and working class women still faced the brunt of the economic hardships. Motherhood was still viewed as the chief function of womanhood and thus everything else, including participation in the political and economic spheres was considered as a distraction. Yet while accelerating the rate the women entered into the public sphere, the war allowed women to forge new relationships with their nation (Grayzel 2002). Furthermore, those who participated in the war effort gained new skills that they did not have before the war, and when the Second World War arrived, women were able to be more easily and rapidly re-mobilized.

While suffrage has been identified as a reward for women's work, and thereby an acknowledgement of their sacrifice and worth, in reality the granting of suffrage was merely a continuation of trends that had already been put in action

before the war had interrupted them. This divergent war experience, between both men and women, as well as amongst women themselves, created many narratives of the First World War experience, making it impossible to generalize on a uniform gendered experience for either sex. Class remained just as large as a unifying, as well as divisive, force as gender. What remains clear is that these gendered issues, provoked or intensified by the First World War, were a dominant factor in shaping how the war was both perceived and experienced by all involved.

# 6 Conclusions

It has been alleged that the period of the First World War was a watershed that led to the emancipation of women from their traditional gender roles, however in reality, there was little dramatic social change. This assumption of emancipation is based on changes in employment patterns (Braybon 1998) that completely ignores the return to prewar levels once the war was finished (Heyman 2002). British women, through the war, "learned about new possibilities, such as high-wage work, social independence, birth control and promiscuity" (p 385 Goldstein) which would profoundly influence later feminist movements seeking a greater gender equality; however these new opportunities for women were short lived and "their overall economic and social status showed few, if any notable transformations," (p 5 Grayzel 2001). There is a further unfortunate tendency to study the female experience of the First World War as separate from the general war experience, yet this view ignores the fact that female participation in the First World War was greatly influenced by the male, and vice versa. Gender roles provided the foundations for the basis of the war and women's traditional roles played just as large of a role as men's in shaping conceptions about both the war and gender as a whole.

The gendered experience of the First World War, however, was by no means a uniform one, with divergent experiences existing amongst both men and women. Thus there was no true female or male perception of the war, and the experience of

the First World War was dictated more by class, location and type of work rather than a gendered solidarity. Yet despite the varying gendered experiences, the war did have many uniform effects on both men and women as the war served to shape the conceptions of traditional gender roles as a whole. Many of the war time developments affected both men and women's roles and statuses in British society, by either redefining core concepts of masculinity or cementing traditional female roles even firmer into society. Men were successful in this re-conceptualization of gender roles due to their shared traumatic experiences of the war that transcended class lines. Furthermore, as men were members of the dominant gender, they had a further ability to reshape and redefine their own gender roles. Yet women, for the most part, generally had widely varying experiences in regards to their contributions to the war effort that was highly dependent on age and class. This lack of shared experience and gender solidarity made it increasingly difficult for challenges to female gender roles to be sustained. Furthermore, by shaping female gender roles in recruiting campaigns and propaganda imagery, first highlighting the positive and then later criticizing the negative, the First World War served to reinforce the roles that women were serving to actively defy. The war work women engaged in created a widespread backlash and hostility towards their efforts, yet also highlighted issues of women's labor and suffrage. It also gave many women the opportunity to gain a greater sense of independence and confidence that would prove vital in finally securing an equal status in later decades.

The First World War served as a driving force in prompting re-conceptualizations of gender and set the stage for many of the various gender issues

to be brought to the fore. The reaction against women's perceived immorality paradoxically served to lead to a wider discussion of women's sexuality (Grayzel 2002). The crisis of masculinity allowed for a truly remarkable occurrence of men redefining gender to reflect contemporary concerns. Although little dramatic change was accomplished in the immediate aftermath of the war, the debates the war prompted would continue for decades after the conflict had subsided, and to an extent, still continue today. And while the gendered experience of the First World War brought up the question of male and female relationships and questioned their traditional roles in society, it left these questions to be answered by future generations.

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