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World War I and its Lasting Political, Emotional, and Educational Effects on Women

by

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A Thesis
Submitted to the Honors College of
The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment
of Honors Requirements

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ABSTRACT

This thesis navigates the political, emotional, and educational effects of World War I on middle- and upper-class British Women. Through this research, it becomes evident that the war created an opportunity for women to achieve suffrage through their political participation. Similarly, this thesis shows how the war emotionally impacted the wealthier women of Great Britain as they fulfilled different jobs for their emotional benefit as well as the wholistic benefit of society. Lastly, this research demonstrates the lasting educational impacts the war had on the women of the time, particularly as it relates to the university level. The information discussed in this research is based on the analysis of documents that show the political involvement of Women during the period of the Great War as well as the writings produced throughout this time. Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth* is a key memoir that reveals personal testimony from a woman active in this period and encounters many of the subjects covered in this research. Primary sources found through the British Newspaper Archives were also used to demonstrate first-hand accounts of the experiences of Women as a result of the war.

Keywords: World War I, Women, Education, Emotion, Suffrage, Impact

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to all of my friends and family that made me laugh during the writing process. This includes the members of Eagle Catholic, my Praypals, my parents, and Alpha Chi Omega Sorority. The coffee shop trips, writing dates, and trips to Target were what fueled the production of this research. I want to especially thank MaryHelen Cecilia Sherman who helped me remain grounded and focused as I did this year of reading and writing. Without her friendship I do not think I would have been able get this thesis done nearly as calmly.

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List of Abbreviations

V.A.D.	Voluntary Aid Detachment
W.A.A.C.	Women's Army Auxillary Corps
WSPU	Women's Social and Political Union
WWI	World War I

Introduction

World War I was a tumultuous time for all those who lived through the various trials it produced during the years 1914-1918. However, the experiences of women often fail to receive the proper acknowledgement when compared to research done on men. This lack of recognition extends over to the experience of the women of Great Britain in the upper- and middle-classes. The Great War, as it was called, provoked change in the lives of the women who lived during that four-year period and beyond. This is evident through the changes in politics, education, the workplace, and familial obligations. A deeper analysis of the already existing research as well as primary sources produced during this time shows a more complete understanding of the lives of the privileged British Women who served in various capacities during the war. While women were traditionally expected to be docile and domestic, the onslaught of the war required the adoption of traditionally masculine features that strayed away from excess emotion and passivity. I have chosen to focus my research on upper- and middle-class women because of the greater autonomy they had to enter into the changes caused by the war and freely participate in the British war effort. Although working class women also participated in the war effort, I did not focus on them because they had an obligation to work regardless of the war in order to support themselves and their families rather than to evoke change.

There are several components that make up the change British women saw as a result of the Great War. The first point I will be discussing is suffrage. When evaluating the suffrage movement during World War I, there are a few sources that begin to unpack the history. In the monograph, *The Militant Suffrage Movement: Citizenship and Resistance in Britain, 1860-1930* by Laura E. Nym Mayhall, there is an analysis of the

tactics used by suffragists prior to the war when there was unjust punishment for protests in the suffrage movement and a failure of proper representation for those associated with those demonstrations.¹ Similarly, this monograph discusses the difficulty that women had in advocating for suffrage in the Great War time period.² Nym Mayhall uses these ideas to explain the process and trials women faced in gaining suffrage in Britain while starting from the prewar period to the completion of granting suffrage to women in the lower classes of Great Britain.

Another monograph that aided in the discussion of the women's suffrage movement was *Suffrage Discourse in Britain During the First World War* by Angela K. Smith. This source discusses once more the "militant" methods that women used prior to the war in an effort to gain suffrage.³ Smith also discusses the ways women served in the workforce in order to convey the role women were playing in the aid of the war effort, and makes the assertion that complacency was not viable for women with the war ever-present.⁴ Additionally, Smith discusses the requirements that women had to meet in order to vote in the initial stages of granting suffrage, which mostly applied to only middle- and upper-class women.⁵ Smith, similarly to Nym Mayhall, discusses many historical events that took place in order for women to receive suffrage, and placing these two sources in conversation with each other gives those studying the history of this era a clearer picture of the fight for suffrage when combined with primary source documents.

¹ Laura E. Nym Mayhall, *The Militant Suffrage Movement : Citizenship and Resistance in Britain, 1860-1930*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 72,74.

² Nym Mayhall, *The Militant Suffrage*, 120.

³ Angela K. Smith, *Suffrage Discourse in Britain During the First World War*. (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge. 2016), 1.

⁴ Smith, *Suffrage Discourse in Britain During the First World War*, 4, 72-73.

⁵ Smith, *Suffrage Discourse in Britain During the First World War*, 131.

Susan R. Grayzel's research in *Women's Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood, and Politics in Britain and France During the First World War* does not explicitly revolve around the women's suffrage movement in Great Britain; however, it is a monograph that looks at many aspects of women's lives across Europe. This source gives a solid analysis of the social experiences of women in Great Britain during the war. The analysis of the social experiences was primarily done in discussing the role women in the workforce as well as the military.⁶ Grayzel also addresses mothers and their participation in activism.⁷ This participation by mothers provides room for a deeper analysis into the development of pacifism and ideas about motherhood which involves the role of women as direct opponents or advocates for the war. This monograph portrays the participation of women in politics, and it assists in showing the connection between social and political participation and suffrage in conjunction with the other two previously mentioned monographs by Nym Mayhall and Smith.

When analyzing the emotional implications of World War I, secondary research is more scarce, and primary source documentation is imperative. *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: the Great War in European Cultural History* by J.M. Winter, however, provides context for the influence of poetry and the changes it underwent as European societies as a whole navigated grief that appeared because of the war.⁸ *War Girls: The First Aid Nursing Yeomanry in the First World War* by Janet Lee provides necessary information like the definition of a V.A.D. as well as a poem by Jessie Pope that reveals

⁶ Susan R. Grayzel, *Women's Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood, and Politics in Britain and France During the First World War*. (Chapel Hill, N.C: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 192, 198, 201.

⁷ Grayzel, *Women's Identities at War*, 161.

⁸ J. M. Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: the Great War in European Cultural History* Cambridge. (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 204.

the mindset of some women during the war period.⁹ There is limited in-depth analysis of this topic, and the thoughts conveyed in this research are a unique contribution to the study of upper- and middle-class British women during the Great War period.

The education of British women during World War I also lacks significant research, however there were a few sources that aided in my analysis. “‘Go Home and Sit Still’: WWI and Women’s Colleges at Oxford,” by Emily Frisella, recounts the history of women’s education at Oxford University during World War I. Frisella follows the enrollment and rights of women at Oxford throughout the progression of the war.¹⁰ When combined with primary source newspapers and writings, the impact that these educational changes had beyond the war is clear.

I will be providing an analysis through my research that contributes to the historiography of this subject as there is little research on the lasting emotional implications the war had on the upper- and middle-class British women that served during the course of World War I. Similarly, present research lacks an analysis on the lasting impact of WWI on education. The combination of analyses between the political effects that impacted suffrage and the educational as well as emotional changes that occurred during the war reveals the lasting influence that World War I had on the lives of the upper and middle- class women of the time. As a result, the use of the aforementioned secondary sources in conjunction with primary sources that I have evaluated contributes a new perspective to any research that may already exist.

⁹ Janet Lee, *War Girls: The First Aid Nursing Yeomanry in the First World War*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), xiii, 1.

¹⁰ Emily Frisella, “‘Go Home and Sit Still’: WWI and Women’s Colleges at Oxford,” *The Isis*, Oxford University, March 2, 2015, <https://isismagazine.org.uk/2015/03/go-home-and-sit-still-wwi-and-womens-colleges-at-oxford/>.

My primary source analysis comes largely from Vera Brittain's memoir, *Testament of Youth* as well as articles taken from the British Newspaper Archive. I chose to use this memoir in my research because historians commonly use memoirs and other personal documents as a way to study the experiences of people, such as Vera Brittain, whose stories cannot be found in official government documents. I was able to refer back the experiences of a woman who lived many of the events and emotions that will be discussed later in this research by using the writings of Brittain in her memoir. Similarly, the use of newspaper articles that were published while the history documented here occurred demonstrates how the society acted in response to the events and subjects that will be discussed. The poetry of Jessie Pope is referenced several times as well in order to reveal another first-hand perspective of the women discussed in this research. World War I impacted the lives of middle- and upper-class women in most ways, and the compilation of all of the sources previously referenced serves to reveal these changes in a clear and specific way.

The Great War changed life for the women of Great Britain in several ways. One very tangible impact is through politics. As a result of women's activism during the war, the government of Great Britain granted women of the right social standing suffrage. The war had an effect on the emotional status of middle class British women as well. This impact is evident in the writing and art produced during and after World War I. Lastly, the war allowed for education advancements for women. Universities became more accessible to women of proper means, and degrees became attainable. Similarly, more women were educated for the purpose of the war, and that set a precedent for future women's education in Great Britain outside of the context of war.

Chapter I: Suffering at Home

Vera Brittain grew up in pre-war Great Britain. She called the town of Buxton home. Her family was kind, and she had all that she needed to be comfortable. She would not have called herself rich, but rather she sat in the luxury of the middle class.¹¹ As she grew up, she learned that she had opinions, and the pretty life she lived was sometimes unfulfilling. She was expected to dance with men she found intellectually under-stimulating, dress in the uncomfortable fashions of London, and be satisfied with the local education she was receiving.¹² This, however, was not what Brittain desired. Rather, she sought adventure, intellectual stimulation, and independence. Brittain gained some of these desires prior to World War I, but with extreme difficulty and much pushback. She gained admission to Oxford, but often felt as if she did not have the full independence that she desired.¹³ Participation in the war effort is where Vera Brittain saw the most change. World War I, while a source of many emotional hardships, provided Brittain with an opportunity to serve her country and in turn show the political and social involvement she was capable of outside of the previously accepted cultural sphere. Her most autonomous moments, prior to 1918, were the experiences she had during the war, and they led to a need for continued independence following the war.¹⁴ Her story reflects the story of many middle class British women living during the Great War.

Prior to the war, British women struggled to find a place that allowed them to

¹¹ Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth*. (Penguin Classics, 2005), 23.

¹² Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 50.

¹³ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 120.

¹⁴ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 536.

assert a political voice. The outbreak of the Great War required the help of British women in a new capacity that exceeded simply fulfilling domestic roles. There was now a call for women's participation in society and even the military. This more active role in political life provided leverage for the women advocating for women's suffrage prior to and during the war. This activism resulted in the 1918 decision to allow British women who were thirty and older, who also owned property or weremarried to someone who owned property, the right to vote.¹⁵ In addition to women working to support the war effort, there was a sect of women who used their political voice to favor pacifism. Those women did not believe that Great Britain should have been involved in the Great War. The united effects of these various points resulted in a change of how women were viewed in the political sphere. This chapter contributes to our understanding of British women's experiences in World War I by inclusively looking at women's involvement in politics during the period of the first World War brought about suffrage in a way not previously articulated. Despite the controversies that surround the extent to which the Great War impacted women's suffrage and political involvement, World War I incited an opportunity for displaying activism and gaining suffrage among British women that resulted in those women voicing their political opinions and requesting greater influence on the government that ruled them.

The political participation of British women during the Great War varies from the roles that they played prior to the war. There were women that advocated for suffrage and the passage of bills that would increase their voice. An example of such bills is the

¹⁵ Angela K. Smith, *Suffrage Discourse in Britain During the First World War*. (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge. 2016), 131.

“Representation of the People Bill,” an act of legislation that would later grant women age thirty and above of a certain economic status the right to serve as a “parliamentary elector” when it was passed as the Representation of the People Act in 1918.¹⁶ However, during the stages of suffrage advocacy that occurred prior to the Great War, the efforts to pass such bills were often futile; “few among its promoters” believed that such bills would be implemented upon parliament discussion and voting.¹⁷ In order for this mindset to shift, women in prominent positions among their organizations had to put forth great effort to achieve their goals for representation. In the years preceding the outbreak of World War I, the suffrage movement and other women’s advocacy groups were vocal and their affiliates were described in terms such as “militant members” because of the intensity with which they campaigned.¹⁸ This term is indicative of a boldness amongst these organizations, but a boldness that was often thought of as extreme in the eyes of men such as the Earl of Crawford. He was a man of high influence due to his societal standing, and he believed that suffragists were too apt to “throw their whole energy” into the suffrage cause rather than the causes important to Great Britain as a whole.¹⁹ Many influential men shared this negative view of women who were involved in politics in any capacity, so unconventional actions were required to evoke change.

When it became clear that certain methods of opposition were more effective than others, the suffragists adjusted their tactics accordingly. These methods were not always

¹⁶ Hugh Fraser, *Representation of the People Act, 1918: With Explanatory Notes*. (London: Sweet and Maxwell, Limited, 3 Chancery Lane, W.C. 2., 1918). https://heinonline-org.lynx.lib.usm.edu/HOL/Page?collection=beal&handle=hein.beal/rtplat0001&id=97&men_tab=srchresults.

¹⁷ “Votes for Women,” *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, June 15, 1910, 4.

¹⁸ Smith, *Suffrage Discourse in Britain During the First World War*, 1.

¹⁹ “Throes of Propaganda,” *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, January 16, 1918, 5.

subtle in nature. In the opinion of various suffragists, the law was not satisfactory in protecting women. Therefore the neglected group did not feel it necessary to follow said law and were arrested in some cases.²⁰ As a result, women took the opportunity to use their court time to either advocate for an increase in female protection or to simply disregard the authority of the courtroom by arguing its subjectivity.²¹ According to Mayhall, an example of this disregard for court-room authority is best demonstrated by Teresa Billington who withheld answering the inquiries of the police and refused to state her name and answer other such questions when asked by the Marylebone Police Court.²² Billington, along with many other women, did not feel an obligation to respond traditionally to the establishment that did not properly represent them. A women who was supposed to uphold the dignity of a polite, middle or upper-class lady would have been shocking as a result of her failure to comply with male authority. The assertive actions of those commonly associated with the suffrage movement perpetuated this preconceived image of what women's organizations were motivated by in their interactions with other groups that would form out of the war effort. However, the war demanded a response from British women, and their inspirations, tactics, and mindset varied across society.

During the war, there were many different women's groups that emerged in addition to the already established organizations. There were also more local groups that developed to provide some form of support for the soldiers fighting in the war. These organizations were not the same across the board. Some women's organizations seemed

²⁰ Laura E. Nym Mayhall. *The Militant Suffrage Movement : Citizenship and Resistance in Britain, 1860-1930*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 74.

²¹ Nym Mayhall, *The Militant Suffrage Movement*, 72.

²² Nym Mayhall, *The Militant Suffrage Movement*, 72.

to contribute less to the war effort than others when compared through the lens of women with differing interests. For example, Vera Brittain states in her memoir that there was a group of women from her hometown, Buxton, that “marched about the town in uniform,” though none of them know what precisely was the object of all this activity.²³ The interpretation of the value of the contributions depended on the mindset of those making the assumptions. Because of the difficulties Vera Brittain faced during her time as a nurse, the actions of her local women’s community seemed to her frivolous rather than helpful.²⁴ In some ways, the work performed by women during the war was viewed as a social competition. Women who took on more laborious jobs such as nursing felt that the women working at a more local level providing sock repairs were not fulfilling the²⁵ “heroic visions” of what it meant to aid in the war effort. While these less strenuous and quieter women’s organizations were often not outright advocating for suffrage, they served as example of female involvement in society which was an arguing point for why women deserved suffrage.

It was not unreasonable for women to compare the roles they were playing in the aid of the war effort when there was a wide range of service opportunities. Some groups developed because of the expectations placed upon women to participate in some capacity in the war effort, while others were already established with predetermined intentions such as suffrage that had to accommodate for the major concerns of the time, the war. This expectation of service placed on women by society is demonstrated in

²³ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 139.

²⁴ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 139.

²⁵ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 140.

certain propaganda images. One of the most notable images is one of a woman in uniform, likely a middle class woman with some form of training and education, offering her seat to a clearly wealthy and upper-class woman who likely had equal if not greater opportunity for education.²⁶ The woman in uniform is tending to the needs of British society by offering her assistance in the work force while the wealthier woman is failing to comply to the need for women aid in the war service. These images reveal a sentiment that praised women taking action and ridiculed women who stayed in positions of comfort rather than sacrifice.²⁷ Just as Vera Brittain turned up her nose to women who seemed to remain in comfort, images such as the New Gallant emphasized the idea that low effort war work was not considered praiseworthy in a time that was strenuous for many people (see Figure 1).

It was not nationalistic nor beneficial to the suffrage movement to remain still in the time of European crisis, so women's organizations like the ones previously mentioned, as well as propaganda, publicly advocated for women's participation. To avoid judgement by their peers, women attempted to make an impact in the war effort, even if that effort was not as physically taxing as others. However, the different styles of participation affected the increased attention women were getting in the political sphere.

²⁶ *The New Gallant*, 1918, in Susan R. Grayzel, *Women's Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood, and Politics in Britain and France During the First World War*. (Chapel Hill, N.C: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 201.

²⁷ Grayzel, *Women's Identities at War*, 201.



Figure 1. Image of uniformed woman offering seat to upper-class woman. *Women's Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood, and Politics in Britain and France During the First World War*. (Chapel Hill, N.C: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 201.

Women were proving themselves as indispensable members of society as they perpetuated the war effort. With this in mind, there were also groups that made a more substantial and noteworthy change in their community beyond the repair of socks.

Women, both directly involved with the suffrage movement and those with limited political involvement and work experience, found jobs in sectors including munitions. Not only did women enter into this field to support the war effort, they joined to have a more public rather than domestic job than was typically expected of women during the time, showing that women could participate in the more lucrative careers available.²⁸ The work that woman took on to participate in the war effort served a dual purpose. Women sought to assist their nation, but they also saw the war as a unique opportunity to work in new fields and demonstrate their capability and sense of responsibility to the society that continued to restrain their societal role and maintain domestic limitations. With their success and participation in the work force, women revealed their value to the society that questioned their capability to work and vote well.

Some women's organizations made their claim in political activism by directly participating in military recruitment.²⁹ Organizations such as the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps, also known as W.A.A.C, offered women positions that allowed them to "work with the forces at home and abroad" as "cooks, clerks, waitresses, and driver mechanics" and other positions, some of which had previously been largely male-dominated.³⁰ Women got involved in different levels of the military work in Great Britain during the period of 1914-1918 through nursing positions, clerical jobs, and

²⁸ Smith, *Suffrage Discourse in Britain During the First World War*, 72-73.

²⁹ Grayzel, *Women's Identities at War*, 192.

³⁰ "Women Urgently Wanted for the W.A.A.C.," *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, September 24, 1917, 3.

unconventional domestic work such as munitions assemblers. These women often worked under different motives. Some groups of women military volunteers claimed that their war work was not for political gain but rather strictly for “patriotism,” though they accepted the benefits that their actions would reap.³¹ These military groups sought to serve their country through their work in the military and had put the idea of suffrage aside during this time period.

This mindset, however, did not extend across all groups of women, as seen in other organization during this time. Groups of women, while maintaining a sense of patriotism, also saw a direct correlation between their military service and citizenship. Women saw their service as a foothold because they perceived their work as a demonstration of their citizenship.³² With citizenship came the right to vote, and this sect of women believed their patriotism to be a reason to demand suffrage. The difficulty that arose from women using their military service as reasoning for more political influence was that their service was viewed differently from that of men, particularly in the level of respect that women’s work deserved.

The difference in respect men and women received when attempting to participate in the British war effort is evident in the modifications that women’s military uniforms required and the controversy surrounding whether or not women should be wearing the iconic military khaki.³³ Khaki was representative of a certain amount of prestige, and some men and women thought it unsuitable to allow women to wear the specific military

³¹ Grayzel, *Women’s Identities at War*, 192.

³² Grayzel, *Women’s Identities at War*, 196.

³³ Grayzel, *Women’s Identities at War*, 198.

color that typically garnished men in positions deserving respect.³⁴ Women were eventually able to don these typically masculine garments with the understanding that men were still perceived as the main contributors to the war. Women wearing khaki became a far more natural sight with the creation of the W.A.A.C.³⁵ However, the ability for a woman to wear a uniform was based off of a merit system that acknowledged women with exemplary service in their position. This view of women in uniform is evident in a 1917 advertisement searching for women clerics that stated “successful candidates will wear khaki uniforms.”³⁶ While this may appear to be a superficial victory based on wardrobe, the military acceptance to allow women the opportunity to dress in the fashion of the male soldiers indicates a level of acknowledgement for the sacrifices of women. The use of uniform was also a way to outwardly show the integration of women in typically exclusively male domains. The W.A.A.C. advertisement that marketed the ability to wear the uniform as one of the perks of working shows the significance of integrating women into male-dominated roles.³⁷ This discussion on uniform is crucial for attempting to present the importance of women in the political sphere, another male-dominated part of society, and pose an argument for the suffrage of women.

In addition to military organizations serving as an example of female involvement in politics, preexisting suffrage organizations that would intentionally enter in the war effort also showed the feminine capability to be politically active. Influential women such as Emmeline Pankhurst, the leader of the Women’s Social and Political Union, an

³⁴ Grayzel, *Women’s Identities at War*, 192.

³⁵ Grayzel, *Women’s Identities at War*, 198.

³⁶ “National Service,” *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, May 19, 1917, 6.

³⁷ “Women Urgently Wanted for the W.A.A.C.,” 3.

organization that was heavily involved in advocating for women's voices, took the war as an opportunity to use patriotism as a foothold in making her organization heard among many other groups whose indifference to aiding the war effort was viewed as opposition toward Great Britain.³⁸ She promoted the interests of her organization, however, by pausing advocacy for suffrage and using the influence of the WSPU to promote participation in the war effort. A stigma had developed around militant suffragette organizations because of both their cause, women's suffrage, and methodology, speaking out publicly and protesting, and the more conservative and largely anti-suffrage population of Great Britain developed this mindset. As a result of platforms providing limited support for suffrage information to be produced and displayed, there was a difficulty disseminating information that would potentially sway the population's opinion regarding a woman's claim toward governmental participation.³⁹ However, people were more likely to support an organization that was actively responding to the common concerns held by the majority of the nation. These largely suffrage based organizations shifted their platform towards the support of the war effort in order to be seen positively. Understanding this development presents the notion that the Great War was profitable for women's suffrage organizations as they attempted to build greater clout throughout the nation for their war work.

Other women's groups showed their face and demanded rights on the claim of their motherhood. This claim was built on the idea that women were actively participating in the war effort by the fact that they physically provided the soldiers that

³⁸ Smith, *Suffrage Discourse in Britain During the First World War*, 4.

³⁹ Nym Mayhall, *The Militant Suffrage Movement*, 120.

were dying in battle.⁴⁰ With this perspective, women were participating in the war effort, whether it be through a conventionally articulated way or not. There was a suffering in the deaths of their children, a concept evident through much of human experience and also through the writing of women. One such example is the poem “A Question of Courage” that captures the imagery of the “quaking hearts and faces bleached” of the women that received the news of their sons’ deaths.⁴¹ This view of motherhood as a direct link to the war led to the belief that women should share in the political privileges provided to their male counterparts as they were suffering from the war just as the men were. While men received the right to vote because of their participation in the government, some mothers believed they should receive suffrage from their role in providing those men. In a way, the deaths of the men with whom the women loved, though emotionally troubling, was advantageous for their political ascension. This perspective, however, was not shared across society.

Emmeline Pankhurst, leader of the WSPU, advocated for pacifism amongst mothers claiming that the work of mothering a child into adulthood and then sending them to war was in direct opposition to a mother’s interest.⁴² In contrast to the previous discussion of motherhood, it was argued that the deaths of family members were not effective in changing the societal perception of women. Similarly, some women’s advocates held the argument that countries in war fail to view the women and mothers in the community as more than child bearers.⁴³ This claim asserts that mothers were not

⁴⁰ Grayzel, *Women’s Identities at War*, 159.

⁴¹ Jessie Pope. “A Question of Courage,” *Simple Rhymes for Stirring Times*. C. Arthur Pearson, (1916.) <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/wu.89089959142>.

⁴² Grayzel, *Women’s Identities at War*, 161.

⁴³ Grayzel, *Women’s Identities at War*, 161.

viewed as particularly useful except in producing children. This, according to claims made by the author, meant that women were prevented from fully receiving rights simply because of the time of war.⁴⁴ However, it is clear that these claims produced a discussion regarding the role of women, particularly mothers in the war effort. This talk of the role of women left an opening to perceive these women as valuable, and with that perceived value comes an openness by society towards women's suffrage.

With the common experience of losing someone as a result of the war, there were women that chose to express their political beliefs through a vocal opposition to the first of the World Wars. A notable quantity of women took a pacifist stance, women who were not out of the public light, and this affected the way that women's political participation evolved. For pacifists of the Great War, one of the largest concerns was the seemingly wastefulness of the war. World War I was sometimes perceived as a waste of life, energy, and resources. Vera Brittain begins to reveal her view in the frivolity of the war when she discussed Roland, her future fiancée's, perception of the war. She notes that the "only possible motive for going [to war] was 'heroism in the abstract,' and that didn't seem a very logical reason for risking one's life."⁴⁵ Brittain's statement reflects a large insight into how women advocating for pacifism viewed the idea of participating in the war. She notes that there does not seem to be a purpose to endanger one's life without passion for the cause.⁴⁶ Many pacifists were women with loved ones fighting in the war. The claim of loved ones fighting on the battlefield provided specific groups of women a reason to continue to advocate for pacifism in Great Britain. Pacifist advocacy once more reveals

⁴⁴ Grayzel, *Women's Identities at War*, 159.

⁴⁵ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 129.

⁴⁶ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 129.

an interest by women towards the political sphere laying claim that these women were equipped to have an opinion on, and participate, in politics.

While pacifism in many ways brought to light the influence of women, society did not always perceive it positively. In some circumstances, women's roles as pacifists negatively influenced the perception of others about the part women should be playing in the government. A newspaper article from the *Daily Sketch* best demonstrates this notion by comparing pacifism to pro-German sentiment.⁴⁷ This comparison was intended to assert that there was a lack of patriotism that comes along with pacifism by stating that a withholding of support from the British forces was a direct aid to the German and enemy cause. With Germany as one of the key enemies of Great Britain in World War I, this comparison was not flattering for those who identified as pacifists. With this notion in mind, some women gained the respect of their peers by directly opposing pacifism at a government level. Some influential women took the authority and leverage that they had to condemn the pacifist movement that was highly prevalent in the Labour Party, a party that Vera Brittain became active in following her nursing service, even as the war was over and pacifism should have been less controversial.⁴⁸ In one of the elections immediately following the war, society "dealt scathingly" with pacifist remarks.⁴⁹ While this does not reveal a positive perspective of pacifists, it does reveal an acknowledgement of women in the world of government which was important for suffrage advocacy.

Suffrage for women in Great Britain was directly impacted by their newfound governmental participation, a participation that was limited before the war. In a

⁴⁷ Grayzel, *Women's Identities at War*, 199.

⁴⁸ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 646.

⁴⁹ "Bradford Women and Pacifism," *Leeds Mercury*. December 11, 1918, 8.

newspaper article discussing the suffrage movement among British women prior to the outbreak of WWI, the unnamed author of the article states “The whole suffragist agitation is artificial, representing not the women of the nation but only the malcontents among them,” indicating that the effort put forth to gain women’s voting rights was not considered a priority.⁵⁰ The author of that particular newspaper article was under the impression that the fight for suffrage and greater political rights was a fad adopted by a small section of hard to control women, those women being the often publicly acknowledged suffragists active in the newspapers. This view was unsupported by the role that women took in assisting with the war effort as military workers, advocates, mothers, and even pacifists who were publicly demonstrating the capability of women to influence the government.

Despite the difficulties that women faced in their service of the war and the perceptions that people held of them, by the end of the war in 1918, the women of Britain were afforded the privilege of voting if they met the proper social and financial standards. However, the right to vote was not the only interest of many women activists. Women desired a greater government involvement as well as respect for their newly acquired privilege.

Even though there was a significant appearance of women voters and their ability to execute their new found right, their participation in the polling process was portrayed in a manner that undermined the significance of their effort in gaining the ability to vote. The *Birmingham Daily Gazette* published an article that seemed to highlight the male accompaniment of the female voters by noting that they tended to come with their

⁵⁰ “Votes for Women,” 4.

husbands.⁵¹ Similarly, the article acknowledged that the polling process was inconvenient for the children drug along as they “were not so excited in the polling as usual.”⁵² Noting these two points seems to suggest a displacement of women in that place of society. The article indicates that the society of the time believed that women should remain in their domestic sphere because the opposite result is the domestic sphere following her, and suffering as a result, like her bored children. The newspaper article also discusses the seemingly frivolous nature of one of the women voters who loudly exclaimed which candidate she was voting for.⁵³ The competency of women voters is not supported by this point. However, society’s feelings toward women voters did not reverse the impact of women who served in World War I who made it possible for a greater influx of female participation in political environment of Great Britain.

While it is clear that not everyone was in full support of the advances women made during their service of the Great War, it is undeniable that their contributions reverberated across the history of Great Britain. The middle-class women of England saw a significant change in rights from the onslaught of World War I to its conclusion. Women with a claim to property were able to play a more active role in society, granted by the Representation of the People Act of 1918. Suffrage and even opportunities to run for office were now benefitted to women who met the proper qualifications as a direct result of their political and domestic participation during the war. The role that women played in sustaining Great Britain was undeniable seeing as the men, typically credited

⁵¹ “The Women Voters: A Lady’s Day in the Ladywood Division,” *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, Dec. 16, 1918, 5.

⁵² “The Women Voters,” 5.

⁵³ “The Women Voters,” 5.

with societal maintenance at the time, were not physically present on the home front to perform all of the jobs necessary to both continue fighting in the war and sustain domestic duties. While some women were praised for their service and other women were condemned for their controversial vocality on the war, the nature of their participation increased societal views to allow for increased female participation in the male-dominated political world.

Chapter II: Emotional Implications

British women's political advancements, as previously acknowledged, were a direct result of actions taken by upper- and middle-class women on the home front. Women took on the roles typically assumed by men as well as jobs such as nursing that were predominantly female. The assumption of new roles did not just have a political impact, it also had a cultural and emotional effect on British society as well as the individual women. Women had to adapt to life without many of the usually present male figures. Similarly, they had to grieve the lost lives of loved ones while continuing to persist in their daily obligations. The evolving society created by the war that greatly affected women resulted in various grieving and remembrance methods such as great writings and poetry with *Testament of Youth* as a prime example.⁵⁴ Authors that emerged from the "lost generation" used their writings as a way to remember and acknowledge their story as well as that of others, particularly the deceased. World War I impacted the individual lives of British women that lived during the war in the way they managed familial changes and death, redefined their personal self-image, and interacted with grief with the whole of their society in a new way.

The initial start of the war was not on the radar of the whole of Europe, particularly the youth who were occupied with their own lives. On July 31st, a little over a month after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, Great Britain took a stance on preserving peace. Cabinet Minister, Sir John Simon, a member of the House of Commons, was quoted stating that Great Britain would "be the part of mediator" in the

⁵⁴ Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth*. (Penguin Classics, 2005), 12-13.

chaos that was occurring throughout Europe.⁵⁵ As a result, the readers of newspapers such as the *Birmingham Daily Gazette* would have perceived the war as a nonthreat to their lives and therefore not something to be particularly concerned about. Youth, such as Vera Brittain, who were particularly impressionable and optimistic, would have taken such information at face value. Vera Brittain notes that, at the outbreak of the war, it “seemed to me an infuriating personal interruption rather than a world-wide catastrophe,” a perspective she would later recall as naïve.⁵⁶ This perspective held by society resulted in the complex feelings that women would later respond to through their actions during and after the war. The calamity caused by WWI impacted their previous beliefs about their lives and the world, and these feelings were exacerbated by the shock in which the war caused.

One of the ways World War I greatly impacted the lives of women was through the change in family lifestyle. A war of that degree required men to enlist in the army which meant that husbands, brothers, sons, and close friends were sent away to fight in a war, leaving women to perform their daily activities without those men. The loss of the male presence on the home front as a result of enlistment caused women to respond to their new lifestyles as a result of the war, and women did this in a variety of ways. Some women, seeing that their loved ones and peers were out sacrificing their lives, both physically and through their youthful years, entered into strenuous war work as well. Vera Brittain is a prime example of this notion. Following the deployment of her brother and soon to be fiancé, and her return to Oxford, Brittain states, “To be once again at

⁵⁵ “War Rumours,” *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, July 31, 1914, 4.

⁵⁶ Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 93.

college, hearing the Principal congratulate me with unwonted cordiality upon my ‘brilliant performance’ in getting through Responsions Greek in record time, brought me back with a jerk out of my dream to the realisation [*sic*] that examinations still existed and some people still thought they mattered,” revealing that her mind was preoccupied with the war and the importance that this conflict held over all other matters.⁵⁷ Her concern was no longer on her education, something that she had previously invested much of her time and resources into attaining. Not every women participated in war service in the same way, but women were encouraged to “stand by their men” through war work, indicating a link between action and emotional connection.⁵⁸ This was a theme that influenced the perception of service by women in relation to men.

Many women, like Vera Brittain, no longer felt it possible to continue the lifestyle they previously had prior to the war. Vera Brittain’s way of responding to the sacrifice of her loved ones was to enter into the service available to her as a V.A.D., voluntary aid detachment.⁵⁹ Brittain’s desire to serve was separate from a pride of a nation, it was a need to feel connected to those not physically present by uniting herself to their struggles in a very physical way. When noting her previous commitment to her studies, it is clear that her choice to leave Oxford was due to a sense of obligation created by the war. This obligation, however, was for her loved ones rather than for her nation. For many women of this time, war service is what made them feel connected to the men fighting in the war. Brittain, in this particular case, represents the British women well. Women adopted the

⁵⁷ Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 124.

⁵⁸ “National War Service for Men and Women,” *The Scotsman*. June 4, 1915, 7.

⁵⁹ Janet Lee, *War Girls The First Aid Nursing Yeomanry in the First World War*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), xiii.

mentality that “They’re going to keep their head up/Till the khaki soldier boys come marching back” in order to survive and persist on.⁶⁰ It was not only necessary that women change their habits and enter into the work force for productivity to occur for the functioning of society, but it was also the way women could feel like they were aiding their loved ones. Even for those women who lost their loved ones in the war, continuing to aid the nation that the deceased had fought to protect allowed for a feeling of connection. This is evident in the poetry of Jessie Pope as she writes in “A Worker” that “‘We are fighting to a finish,’ said her soldier who has gone/She lifts her head up proudly, for it’s hers to carry on,” indicating that the subject of the poem receives consolation from serving her country and continuing her soldier’s legacy.⁶¹ In this way, action was a coping and mourning mechanism for women during the war.

The death of loved ones caused women to mourn and respond in different ways as they navigated a grief previously foreign to them due to the large amount of casualties caused by the Great War. In addition to entering war service as a method of responding to the war, another way of handling grief and processing through emotions for women was through writing. As a result, a large amount of poetry and other forms of literature and art emerged. Jay Winter notes that much of wartime poetry was experimental and emerged “to reformulate and reinvigorate older tropes about loss of life in wartime,” indicating that poetry is very revealing of a form of change that occurred in the overall British

⁶⁰ Jessie Pope, “War Girls,” in *War Girls: The First Aid Nursing Yeomanry in the First World War*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 1.

⁶¹ Jessie Pope, “A Worker.” *Simple Rhymes for Stirring Times*. (C. Arthur Pearson, 1916).
<http://hdl.handle.net/2027/wu.89089959142>.

society during and following World War I.⁶² Winter focuses on soldier poets in his analysis of the change in poetry, but the poetry of women during this time followed the same variations from traditional poetry in that they were “rarely either simply patriotic or straightforwardly pacifist.”⁶³ Vera Brittain’s work reveals the change in complexity of poetry as she also wrote wartime poetry in addition to her memoir. Her poem, “Scars Upon my Heart,” was not particularly patriotic and was largely focused on the impact of her brother’s experience during battle affecting her heart and her life.⁶⁴ This change is due to the unprecedented war and a need for understanding grief on a global scale. Brittain notes “it seems very hard that we should be the generation to suffer the War... it seems to me that the War will make a big division of ‘before’ and ‘after’ in the history of the world,” and this is clearly evident in the literature of the war.⁶⁵ The distinct changes in the writing style and subject matter when compared to previous writings reveals that there was a cultural division from the pre and post war society.

In the same way that pacifism revealed the impact of women on the government of Great Britain, it also revealed a way for women to cope with their war experience. Pacifism and anti-war attitudes existed from the outbreak of the war from a more political standpoint. An article from the *Daily Herald* notes the opinion of some women that those government officials in support of the war were the same ones that were opposed to women’s political advancement.⁶⁶ This claim was made on an emotional basis focusing

⁶² J. M. Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning : the Great War in European Cultural History* Cambridge. (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 204.

⁶³ J. M. Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, 204.

⁶⁴ Vera Brittain, “Scars Upon My Heart.” *The Poetry Society*. 1918.

<https://poems.poetrysociety.org.uk/poems/to-my-brother/>.

⁶⁵ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 317.

⁶⁶ “Appreciation of ‘Herald,’” *Daily Herald*. August 6, 1914, 5.

on the grief that women experience during war rather than simply focusing on the experience of men. The assertion builds on the notion that the emotional and political oppression of women worked hand in hand during this war period. The author of this newspaper article quotes the words of Sylvia Pankhurst that stated “Happier are they who die in war than those women who watch their beloved perish” in order to use someone of authority to demonstrate that war would affect women seriously in addition to men.⁶⁷ In this instance, pacifism was used to try and eliminate the emotional effects that are produced by war that were a direct result of the death of loved ones. If war could be ended, the emotional difficulties caused by the death of men would no longer be as large of a burden that women would have to carry. Vera Brittain, an outspoken pacifist following the war, notes in her memoir that “we were all victims; that was the only way to look at it” and this adds to the argument against war.⁶⁸ For women like Brittain, speaking out against the war was a way to attempt to prevent more casualties in the future like the ones that greatly victimized her life.

Independence found in work, as well as a rediscovery of self-independence separate from the male soldiers, resulted in a change in self-perception and responsibility that was more personal. This change was independent from the experiences of their male peers as there was a physical and even mental separation that was a direct result of their

⁶⁷ Appreciation of ‘Herald,’” 5.

⁶⁸ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 376.

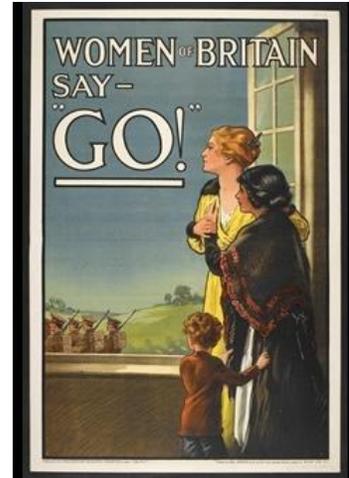


Figure 2. Image of women encouraging soldiers to go fight in the war. “Women of Britain Say ‘Go!’” British Library. 1914. <https://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/women-in-world-war-one-propaganda>.



Figure 3. Image of woman lighting cigarette for wounded soldier. Muddie-Cooke, Olive. “In an Ambulance : a VAD Lighting a Cigarette for a Patient.” Imperial War Museums. Imperial War Museums. Accessed March 24, 2020. <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/19893>

different experiences, men serving in the front lines and the majority of women performing jobs farther removed from combat areas. The need for women to jump into war work required that they turn away from an attitude of passivity and enter into a more hands on experience, both physically and culturally. This is demonstrated in the propaganda and art of the time. When analyzing figure 1, the image of the two women and the child saying “Go!” to the passing soldiers, the women are portrayed in a very passive position.⁶⁹ They have looks and body language that suggest that they are distressed and emotional towards the scene at hand.⁷⁰ This depiction is representative of the initial feminine response to the war. Figure 2, however, depicts a British V.A.D. lighting a cigarette for a wounded soldier.⁷¹ The very act of her lighting this cigarette shows that she is taking action. She is no longer the docile woman seen on the propaganda poster, she has immersed herself in the throes of the war as a V.A.D. and has taken action. Family priorities are no longer the cultural concern when analyzing these two images.

The change in cultural expectation for women did not come without resistance or emotional consequences. In reminiscing on her own experience, Vera Brittain notes, “What exhausts women in wartime is not the strenuous and unfamiliar tasks that fall upon them, nor even the hourly dread of death for husbands or lovers or brothers or sons; it is the incessant conflict between personal and national claims which wears out their energy

⁶⁹ “Women of Britain Say ‘Go!’” *British Library*. 1914. <https://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/women-in-world-war-one-propaganda>.

⁷⁰ “Women of Britain Say ‘Go!’,” <https://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/women-in-world-war-one-propaganda>.

⁷¹ Olive Muddie-Cooke, “In an Ambulance : a VAD Lighting a Cigarette for a Patient.” Imperial War Museums. Imperial War Museums. Accessed March 24, 2020. <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/19893>.

and breaks their spirit,” demonstrating that while some parts of society were requiring women’s contributions, other parts were slow to change.⁷² This caused the women afflicted to make tough decisions between family life and national obligation. In situations like Vera Brittain’s, that decision between the old societal expectation and the new one was difficult and exhausting. Brittain was obligated per her father’s request to leave her nursing duty and take care of the responsibilities at home, the opposite action of her desire to continue nursing and fulfill her national obligation.⁷³ With all of the cultural, political, and emotional changes occurring in women’s lives, women such as Vera Brittain still felt a restrictive obligation toward others.

World War I was a formative time for young, British middle-class women as they navigated the expectations and restrictions of society and their own personal experiences and emotions. This period would have a lasting impact on the self-perception of the women who lived this war time story. In addition to making political advancements, women made advancements in literature, activism, and entered into the work force. Their sense of obligation changed, and they lived out a different sort of feminine duty not previously seen in British culture through their participation in society and personal reflection.

⁷² Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 422-23.

⁷³ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 421.

Chapter III: Work Force and Education

The process for women to gain an education prior to the Great War was difficult because of the societal perception that men were the ones that should acquire anything beyond a basic education. However, upon the outbreak of the war, women with a university education were valuable to society and preferred over uneducated women because of their formal education and capability to fill positions left vacant by men leaving for war. Educational programs and jobs in the medical field were open and required a female presence because of the absence created by men fighting in the war and the need for those men to be medically treated. The education and training of women entering this work force varied across fields but remained groundbreaking for British history during this time. The entrance of women into the higher education world and the specialized work force created a lasting impact following the war in the ways that women's education and work was perceived. World War I impacted the education experience of women attending universities through giving upper- and middle-class women an opportunity to enter into the higher educational sphere, particularly to study roles in the medical field made necessary by the need for war injuries to be treated, and creating a precedence for the future education of women.

The Great War impacted the educational opportunity of women during this time as the need for women workers increased. Women such as Vera Brittain felt society's resistance when it came to women's education prior to the major involvement of Great Britain in World War I. In Brittain's case, it was her own family that was hesitant to allow her to pursue an education beyond her local women's school. Brittain reflected that her father, when asked to allow her to go to college, stated "that he had already spent

quite as much on my education as was necessary, and that ‘little girls’ must allow their elders to know what was best for them,” a statement representative of many middle- and upper-class men of this time of British history.⁷⁴ In Brittain’s case, it was not until a friend of her father’s that was well respected “regarded the presence of women at Oxford as in no way remarkable” that he became comfortable with the idea of allowing Brittain to further her education.⁷⁵ Brittain’s father’s hesitancy to allow her to further her education was a direct result of the taboo against women performing duties outside of the domestic role. Brittain recalls that her mother made a comment where Brittain left with the message that “people like me just become intellectual old maids” because there was a notion that an educated woman would no longer be capable or satisfied with performing the usual domestic tasks.⁷⁶ There was this idea that an educated woman would no longer comply to the domesticated mold of a woman culturally accepted during the early twentieth century. However, the war expedited the process for a woman with college experience to be deemed valuable assets. The demographic defined by educated, middle to upper-class women targeted to fulfill typically male jobs makes this concept evident.

In addition to familial resistance for women to receive a university education, there was restrictions at the university level as well. Prior to the war, women were not able to earn a degree, rather, they simply had to “sit exams.”⁷⁷ However, the war changed

⁷⁴ Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth*. (Penguin Classics, 2005), 52.

⁷⁵ Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 60.

⁷⁶ Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 131.

⁷⁷ Emily Frisella, “‘Go Home and Sit Still’: WWI and Women’s Colleges at Oxford,” The Isis, Oxford University, March 2, 2015, <https://isismagazine.org.uk/2015/03/go-home-and-sit-still-wwi-and-womens-colleges-at-oxford/>.

the rate of enrollment for women at universities. This was due to a greater demand for educated women, particularly in the medical field. There was a variety of women's colleges at Oxford, and many of them saw a spike in enrollment with the college of St. Hugh's increasing their numbers by over double.⁷⁸ This is in part because of the progression of viewpoints on the woman's role in the war. It was undeniable that women with a formal education were necessary for filling roles left vacant by men and created to care for these same men. In the initial outbreak, women's desire to volunteer was rejected, and Frisella cites that the volunteers were told to "go home and sit still."⁷⁹ This concept had to be reevaluated as the effects of the war were felt at a more local and personal level. Oxford, in particular, converted many of the vacated men's colleges into hospitals, and it was clear that the war was creeping closer to home.⁸⁰ Brittain acknowledges men's disappearance from the Oxford community as she states that, despite the proximity to the already existing Radcliffe Infirmary, Somerville College was converted into a military hospital by the War Office because of the space made accessible by the enlistment of the university's men.⁸¹ With this vacancy left at the higher education level, the need for knowledgeable women became increasingly harder to deny.

Women were needed to enter into fields typically dominated by men in order to maintain a functioning British society, and there were a wide array of positions to be filled. However, women who were in or had been in the university setting were often the

⁷⁸ Emily Frisella, "Go Home and Sit Still," <https://isismagazine.org.uk/2015/03/go-home-and-sit-still-wwi-and-womens-colleges-at-oxford/>.

⁷⁹ Emily Frisella, "Go Home and Sit Still," <https://isismagazine.org.uk/2015/03/go-home-and-sit-still-wwi-and-womens-colleges-at-oxford/>.

⁸⁰ Emily Frisella, "Go Home and Sit Still," <https://isismagazine.org.uk/2015/03/go-home-and-sit-still-wwi-and-womens-colleges-at-oxford/>.

⁸¹ Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 145.

first women to be called upon. Organizations such as the Federation of University Women served as a platform for women attending universities to be contacted about potential war service.⁸² In 1916, “10,000 forms of enquiry were sent out,” and an Active Service List of 1-2 thousand university women was created in order to place women in “responsible positions.”⁸³ Responsible positions were jobs that could be performed without constant supervision, therefore women who were placed on a list stating that they had received a college education were deemed more valuable because they would be more capable to work with less supervision in the eyes of employers. This number of women in the Active Service List was not greater because of reported prior commitments, either to family or other work, by roughly seven-thousand of the women contacted.⁸⁴ So, while in previous times, it was deemed unnecessary for women to receive a formal education at the university level, the war directly resulted in a shift in perspective.

While women filled many responsible positions during this time, jobs in the medical field were of the utmost importance for women to fill. The demands of war resulted in a greater need for women to serve in the medical field as nurses and V.A.D.s. Vera Brittain serves as an example of this notion. While some women worked to attain an education because of the war, Vera Brittain, who had already been previously enrolled at Oxford, changed her path of learning from classical studies to practical training in the field of nursing. Brittain was not interested in the “routine Civil Service posts which represented the only type of ‘intellectual’ war-work offered to uncertificated young

⁸² “Mobilising University Women,” *Common Cause*, July 28, 1916, 8.

⁸³ “Mobilising University Women,” 8.

⁸⁴ “Mobilising University Women,” 8.

women,” those posts being the jobs often advertised to women.⁸⁵ Similarly, the positions offered to university educated women were undesirable because of the salaries that were offered. The employers seeking women workers often used the patriotism of the women and their desire to serve their nation to underpay them.⁸⁶ Women would often accept small salaries because they did not seek work with the aim of attaining wealth, especially since this work was primarily targeted towards middle to upper-class women who were not dependent on making a living, but rather sought to provide a contribution to the Great Britain war effort. Rather than serving in a business or clerical position, Brittain desired to get “a few weeks of training” as a nurse through the Devonshire Hospital.⁸⁷ She temporarily changed her path, and like many women during this time, received specialized training to serve as a V.A.D. in the Great War.

Women were able to serve in the medical field during the war in different ways. This includes as nurses and V.A.D.s. Each of these groups of women learned their professions in different ways with varying amounts of prestige surrounding their processes. For example, during World War I, women had the capability to study medicine at Oxford for the first time in the University’s history with the stipulation that there would be women’s only dissecting rooms in order to avoid scandal, and some male professors that did not consent to lecture to their female students.⁸⁸ This admission into the university as well as the encouragement to educate female students was a previously foreign phenomena.

⁸⁵ Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 146.

⁸⁶ “University Women’s Work and Wages,” *International Woman Suffrage News*, January 1, 1916, 8.

⁸⁷ Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 146.

⁸⁸ Emily Frisella, “Go Home and Sit Still,” <https://isismagazine.org.uk/2015/03/go-home-and-sit-still-wwi-and-womens-colleges-at-oxford/>.

The medical field had varying degrees of education and training for women who were newly allowed to take part in these programs. There were trained nurses and then Red Cross V.A.D. training that was less prestigious and strenuous and often was disparaged by the opinion of nurses. Vera Brittain suggests this idea noting the attitude of one of the nurse's towards the V.A.D.s who resented the idea of these previously unexperienced women becoming experienced health professionals simply from their role in the war effort, taking jobs away from nurses, who had a more rigorous education, following the war.⁸⁹ This was often because the training of V.A.D.s was less arduous in the initial learning period when compared to that of nurses. This idea is misgiving when analyzing the actual experience of the V.A.D. Vera Brittain notes that "no one less than God almighty could give a correct definition of the job of a V.A.D." because those women had to be so versatile in their training and their expectations in a way that nurses did not.⁹⁰ In a newspaper description of the role of V.A.D.s by Katherine Furse, the Commandant-in-Chief Women's V.A.D.'s, it was documented that they would scrub the hospital, prepare the furniture, tend to the linens, and account for the utensils in addition to tending the wounds of the men admitted into the hospital.⁹¹ With all of this considered, the preparation to serve as a medical personnel in World War I was job varying, but it required women to receive some form of formal training or education that was deemed inappropriate before the outbreak of war.

The war directly contributed to the educational process of women as they were

⁸⁹ Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 309.

⁹⁰ Vera Brittain. *Testament of Youth*, 394.

⁹¹ Katherine Furse, "Work of the V.A.D.'s.: Recruits For Magnificent Work Needed," *Leeds Mercury*, April 21, 1917, 7.

granted the ability to formally earn a university degree at Oxford in the year nineteen-twenty, two years after the end of the war.⁹² It cannot be suggested that this is coincidental because women proved successful in their studies of medical practices and other subjects needed as a result of the war. Without the educational opportunities provided to women by the need for educated workers, women would not have been accepted into the university setting in such a speedy manor.

Similarly, the educational process for high school girls was also affected by the shift in subject area of women and their studies. In a special way, the familial understanding of women's education was changed as a direct result of the war. With more and more women entering a specialized learning institutions and receiving training for these focused medial jobs and responsible positions, it became clear that there was a benefit to the daughter of a middle to upper-class family being sent to receive a university education. The Head Mistress of the Manchester High School in 1917 stated that "parents were showing a new keenness...about their daughters' progress" indicating that the change in educational culture was palpable even during the time of the war.⁹³ This change would remain a permanent effect of the Great War in the educational sphere of middle- and upper-class women of Great Britain.

World War I placed demands on women that resulted in a large surge of women entering into the previously male-dominated workforce and educational system, and women's lives were greatly affected beyond the end of the war through this change in education and experiences in war service. Women of upper- and middle-class status who

⁹² Emily Frisella, "Go Home and Sit Still," <https://isismagazine.org.uk/2015/03/go-home-and-sit-still-wwi-and-womens-colleges-at-oxford/>.

⁹³ "A New Era for Girls," *Common Cause*, January 12, 1917, 2.

had previously held the opportunity of receiving a university education, though not a degree, were valuable in the work force at the climax of the war when new job positions were vacant and in need of qualified workers. This demand for qualified workers placed a need for a greater number of women to receive an education that would previously been denied to them because of societal limitations and condemnation. Despite the variations in education and training, a consistent concept held beyond the period of the First World War was an acceptance of the education of higher class British women. Following the conclusion of the war, women were able to receive a formal university degree and the stigma against women being educated decreased from its previous level.

Conclusion

World War I was an inciting event for many changes that took place in the lives of middle- and upper-class British women. The cultural changes that the war demanded prompted a reaction from this population of women that had not previously been seen in the modern history of Great Britain. This reaction involved a step into the workforce, particularly the medical field, an increase in women's education, and it placed women in a position to request suffrage in British society, a right previously only bestowed upon men. With the involvement of middle- and upper-class women in the war effort, there was a change in the perception of society on women's roles as well as a change in the way that women perceived themselves. A definite shift in the art and literature of the time serves as a demonstration of this change.

Women, prior to World War I, seriously advocated for suffrage and a greater political involvement. However, they were denied by a government that did not believe

that women had the capacity to serve society outside of the context of the domestic role. As a result, the activity of women in Great Britain following the outbreak of the war served as a new precedent for how women would interact with politics. Upper- and middle-class women filled various job positions and did so through a myriad of women's organizations. Women who were previously in suffrage groups made their organizations more appealing to the government by taking a hiatus from suffrage advocacy and entering into aiding the war effort. Women took on clerical positions and other such roles in the military and were directly involved in a traditionally male-dominated field of the government through that service, breaking the barrier between women and government. Pacifist women spoke out politically against the war and the effects it was causing in their lives as well as the lives of their loved ones, giving a voice to a distinct sect of politically involved women. Mothers claimed their role in the war effort as the producers of soldiers as well as victims of familial casualties, and they were an example of the population that had failed to receive its due political representation. All of these ways of advocating for a particular cause in the war effort showed the capacity women had for voicing their political opinions and affecting genuine change in society. These many demonstrations served as evidence for why women should receive suffrage.

In addition to involvement for the sake of suffrage and political advancement, women entered into new societal positions as they came to terms with the actions taking place around them. In the initial stages of the war, women and British society as a whole, did not see the effects of what seemed to be foreign war having significant implications on their lives. However, the war caused a change in the familial and societal dynamic of the time. As men enlisted to participate in the war effort, a vacancy that had previously

been filled by these men was left open for women to fill. With that, women such as Vera Brittain were no longer content with trudging through a lifestyle that was familiar yet foreign all at the same time as a result of all of the changes that were occurring. This change in everyday life prompted women to enter work in various capacities with the intention of supporting and being in solidarity with the men that were no longer physically present in their lives.

While female support for absent men was shown through work, writing served as an outlet for responding to grief and emotional confusion on a more personal level. Poetry was notable throughout this time and reflected the confusion and grief that the women authors felt. Similarly, the grief felt by the female population was addressed through political activism as women publicly promoted pacifism and an end to war. This served as a way for women to express their discontent with the violent situation as well as make their voice heard in the political sphere.

The submersion of women into the world outside of their homes created a sense of autonomy in women not previously allowed. Women took on tasks that were typically associated with men and turned them into their own. The need for a woman of boldness that would enter fully into the the messiness of the war replaced the ideology of a passive mother. With an ideological shift towards work came a demand to reevaluate familial loyalties during this war era. For many women, the change from focusing on family to work was difficult as past traditions seemed to cause confliction. Older generations were hesitant to accept the work of women in the war effort in the same light as they acknowledged the service of the men. Because of the failure to see women's contributions to the war as necessary and valuable, women often had to choose between

loyalty to their families or patriotism to their nations. The experiences of the middle- and upper-class British women who lived during this time would continue to be part of their personal and historical narrative past the conclusion of the war in 1918.

The educational effects of World War I on the privileged sector of British women extended beyond the war years with a lasting impact in addition to the political and emotional changes. Prior to the war, there was a limitation on what level of education was deemed acceptable for a woman, particularly one of the middle or upper class, because of a fear that she would no longer be willing to fulfill a domestic role. The war, however, saw many universities in need of more students to accommodate for the loss of men and the increase of jobs that required a certain degree of training and education. Employers sought out women with an education because of the belief that they would be able to competently fill positions typically held by men. Jobs in the medical field became abundant as nurses and V.A.D.s were needed to treat the men wounded at war, so there was a greater influx of women receiving that specialized education. While there were hesitations to train these women by some, and a level of discrimination in the medical field over the disparity in education levels by others, women received an opportunity to complete an education that went beyond their local level of learning. The influx of educated women set a precedent for the future education of women beyond the war that surpassed its conclusion

It is important to look at these analyses in conjunction with each other because research has often focused strictly on the war era in regard to men rather than the lasting impacts it held on the lives of the upper- and middle-class British women. This view of their lives is short-sighted and lacks the full story. The changes that women of Great

Britain experienced did not end after the war was over. Rather, the consequences defined the experiences that they had throughout their lives. The way these women interacted with society was influenced by the ways that their society interacted with and treated them in the period of World War I. In looking at these societal consequences through the lens of the political, emotional, and educational experiences of upper- and middle-class women of the time, we can better understand how the war reshaped gender roles in Britain.

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