Vote 100

By Sheila Quaid, University of Sunderland

My generation, aged fifty's and above, and millennial women are linked by both history and gender to the women of the Suffragette movement. All of us owe a debt of gratitude to first-wave feminists, who navigated rigid gender binaries, parochialism, and a benevolent/malevolent patriarchal terrain. They set out the ground and claimed our citizenship.

I teach feminist praxis, history of the first-wave (19th Century), second-wave (20th century), and history of women's citizenship to young women. I find myself having to write titles such as, "*Now I'm not a feminist but……*" This is because they often reject the word. I think we are not only still tackling patriarchy and inequality but also I find myself having to discuss their fear of the word. Many young women hear the word 'feminism' and 'other' themselves from it. I hope things are changing and we may be seeing a third or fourth wave of feminism.

With women feeling empowered to find a voice during the #metoo campaign I feel more optimistic for the next generation of women who will go on to argue for women's human and equality rights. Looking back to the fight for the vote I feel that the significance of the both the suffragist movement and the Votes for Women Suffragette campaign are still present in our lives. The feeling of gratitude to that generation is considerable. I think about those women during every election and always remind women students about our history and the fierce battle encountered by the Suffragettes in order to allow us the entitlement to vote. The movement was broad in its campaigning and activism. First-wave feminism tackled child sexual exploitation, the sexual age of consent, domestic violence, and equal access to jobs and careers. 'Claims for women's citizenship in the form of the vote were inextricably linked to these wider issues of sexual equality and respect between men and women.' (Smith and Quaid, 2017:3). Issues for first wave feminists included sexual protection of women (particularly young working-class girls), inequalities in marriage, parliamentary processes, and inclusion and equal rights within the parliamentary and democratic state. This achieved enormous gains for women internationally and accentuated the patriarchal privilege of men in relation to marriage, family, and sex. 'They provided us with historical visibility of empowerment of women and their activism held and continues to hold a particular place in feminist consciousness.' (Smith and Quaid, 2017:4).

You could say that it began in 1792 when Mary Wollstonecraft, following American and French revolutions, argued that women were not inferior to men and that education for women should be a right for all women and girls. For the rest of her life she was positioned as a 'Dangerous Woman', as were the suffragettes. The movement was about a lot more than the vote, although votes for women was a major signifier of equal citizenship, and was of course a necessary major claim to the state for equal positioning of women within democracy. The campaign for the vote galvanised a nation and polarised a nation into sides for or against Votes for Women.

Internationally, the process was staggered, as for example, in New Zealand women gained full voting rights in 1893, and Australia in 1908. For England and America it became difficult. This was because of the First World War. In England, 'Representation of the People Act of 1918 allowed a minority of women to vote in parliamentary elections for the first time. This was restricted to women over 30 and those who met certain property requirements: in effect, the government was reflecting the views that, as there were more women than men in

the country at that time, owing to the continued mobilisation of men immediately after the First World War; women couldn't be trusted to use their vote intelligently. It was only in 1928 that women achieved equal voting rights with men' (Smith and Quaid, 2017:3).

Despite the limitations of the extension of the vote, our historical lens allows us to appreciate the ground that was laid for us by the Suffragettes. Much has changed but women continue to face inequalities and we find ourselves still making claims for equal rights and empowerment. Current feminisms deal with: choice about abortion, genetics, cosmetic surgery, slimming, tanning, fitness, health, assisted reproduction (who should and who should not reproduce), access to medical treatments, the gender pay gap, feminisation of domesticity, lack of access to creative culture (e.g. the film industry) and sexual harassment. New feminisms are evident in #metoo campaigns, for example, continuing to fight for empowerment of women and the right to make our own choices — just as Mary Wollstonecraft fought for the choice to read in 1792.

Sheila Quaid, May 2018

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References Smith, Angela and Quaid, Sheila, *Introduction to Re-Reading Spare Rib.* In: Re-Reading Spare Rib. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, pp. 1-20. ISBN 978-3-319-49310-7