

[Linda Mulcahy](#)

## Docile suffragettes? Resistance to police photography and the possibility of object–subject transformation

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# **Docile Suffragettes? Resistance to police photography and the possibility of object-subject transformation**

## **Abstract**

This paper provides a revisionist account of the authority and power of the criminal mugshot. Dominant theories in the field have tended to focus on the ways in which mugshots have been used as a way of disciplining criminal bodies and rendering them docile. It is argued here that additional emphasis could usefully be placed on stories of resistance in which the monological production site of the prison or police station transforms into a dialogical site, in which the objects of police photography can acquire agency. These issues are explored with particular reference to a set of photographs of English suffragettes acquired by the police for surveillance purposes. The suffragette's refusal to comply with requests to have their photographs taken is used as a case study through which to examine the ways in which conventions about the form of the mugshot can be subverted, ideas about the types of people who were the object/subject of mugshots disrupted and the assumption of documentary neutrality undermined.

**Keywords:** Mugshots, Women, Crime, Suffragettes, Surveillance, Police, Photography

## **Introduction**

New students of photography are very quickly made aware that histories of photography and law are inextricably bound up in a number of ways. This is particularly true of the ‘mugshot’, a type of photograph which can only be fully understood by reference to the nineteenth century politics of representation, the construction of criminal identities and the emerging discipline of criminology. Existing work in the field draws attention to the fact that police and prisons across Europe and America were quick to spot the potential of photography in facilitating the capture and re-capture of habitual criminals. In turn the vast archives of mugshots created by the police prompted the development of new theories about the commonality of certain physical characteristics amongst recalcitrant offenders in which women occupied a distinct place (Edwards 2006; Finn 2009; Sekula 1986; Tagg 1988).

Scholars have regularly drawn on the work of Foucault to emphasise the part played by police photography in the emergence of new forms of discipline which operated on particular bodies in new ways (Tagg 1988; Finn 2009). Far from it being a privilege to be pictured, as had been the case in the pre-photographic era, the mugshot became the burden of new categories of people which included criminals, the sick, working people, women and colonial subjects. These mugshots exposed criminals to a new form of double captivity which involved physical capture by the police and virtual capture by the camera. Significantly, in the course of creating these new specimens or objects of knowledge it is commonly contended that those being photographed were rendered docile or passive. For Tagg (1988) such groups were “..represented as, and wishfully rendered, incapable of speaking, acting or organising for themselves” (11). Viewed from this perspective the police and prison ‘studio’ can be seen as a monological site in which mastery was asserted

over the criminal and subjects were transformed into objects capable of being stored in filing cabinets (Edwards 1990, 64).

The possibility of resistance to this form of capture is commonly anticipated but detailed evidence of struggle is rare. Extensive discussion in nineteenth century photographic journals of how criminals being photographed could be made to cooperate appears to suggest that dissent was not uncommon, though the evidence is far from ambiguous (Edwards 1990, 65-66). It has been asserted that criminals subjected to the camera would often twist, turn and change their facial expressions (Finn 2009, 2) but detailed case studies of such activity are scarce. Tagg's (1988) seminal work on *The Burden of Representation* has a woodcut by Sir Luke Fildes (1873) on its cover which shows a prisoner resisting arrest but this is not discussed further in the book. Similarly, Finn's (2009, 2) book on *The Criminal Image* also contains a photograph of a prisoner having to be held down while having their photograph taken but a footnote makes it clear that the photograph was probably staged. In *The Disciplinary Frame*, Tagg (2009) provides another example of a sketch of a prisoner being held in place while their photograph is taken. Others have argued that while resistance was initially common criminals soon learnt to comply when they realised that the police would obtain a photograph by some means however severe the objections (Byrnes 1886, 53-4).

This article looks at an unusual set of mugshots of suffragettes which came about as a result of their refusal to have their photograph voluntarily taken on admission to prison. Drawing on a burgeoning literature which seeks to critique ways in which Foucaudian surveillance paradigms has been disrupted (see for example, Baylis, 2011; Rizzo, 2013), it seeks to address this gap in the literature by

providing an account of a successful campaign of opposition to police and prison authority that they instigated in the opening years of the twentieth century. These are significant for a number of reasons. It has been argued that suffragettes experience of prison life has tended to be discussed in the broader context of suffragette history rather than being seen as a legitimate subject for in-depth study in its own right (Purvis 1995).<sup>1</sup> Even when prolonged accounts of prison are provided they tend to focus on resistance to force feeding during hunger strikes. Apart from a flurry of news items that appeared when public records on the subject were released in 2003, and a small exhibition on the topic organised by the National Archives (BBC 2003; Casciani 2003; Travis 2003; Liddington 2005), very little sustained attention has been given to this story and accounts of it are largely notable by their absence in the prison diaries of suffragettes.<sup>2</sup> Few histories of women's suffrage refer to it and criminologists and historians of civil liberties have been equally remiss in drawing attention to the broader issues raised by the episode, not least of which is the claim that the suffragettes probably became the first terrorist organisation subjected to secret surveillance photography of this kind (Liddington 2005, 209). In this article I argue that the suffragettes' campaign of resistance served to disrupt existing accounts of the power of the mugshot to objectify and classify in a number of ways. It is argued that by resisting attempts to capture their likeness they managed to subvert prevalent ideas about the appropriate criminal pose, disrupt ideas about habitual criminals and call into question the neutrality of police photographers and evidence. More broadly, the article explores the possibility raised by Edwards (1990, 63-64) that resistance can serve to transform a

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<sup>1</sup> But see Schwan (2013); Dodge and Forward (2006).

<sup>2</sup> The best academic account to date is that provided by Crawford (2005).

monological site for the production of surveillance photographs into a contested dialogical site, and the objects of police photography into subjects.

### **A footnote in histories of photography?**

This article started life as a footnote. In the course of writing an annotation evidencing the lack of interest in the artistic potential of mugshots amongst curators of major art galleries, I came across a series of eighteen photographs of militant suffragettes in the archives of the National Portrait Gallery (see figures one and two). My attempts to find out more about these images took me from the National Gallery to Tate Britain, the Museum of London, the National Archives, and the Women's Library at the London School of Economics (LSE). All of the women were labelled militant suffragettes by the London Metropolitan Police. Six of the women depicted are considered well-known enough warrant their own entry in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography<sup>3</sup> or Crawford's reference guide to the women's suffrage movement (Crawford 1999)<sup>4</sup> and all but two appear on the Roll of Honour of Suffragette Prisoners 1905-14 (Suffragette Fellowship c1950) which was compiled by the Suffragette Fellowship in the 1950s to record those who has been incarcerated for the suffragette cause. Five of these women went on hunger strike and four were force fed. Mary Richardson (11) was one of the first women to suffer this abuse and Kitty Marion (13) was fed against her will on 232 occasions (Crawford 1999). Much less is known about the other women shown in figures one and two. Most appear to have been 'foot soldiers' in the movement and it is very difficult to discover any

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<sup>3</sup> This applies to Gertrude Ansell (7); Mary Richardson (11); Kitty Marion (13); Jennie Baines (17).

<sup>4</sup> This applies to Olive Hockin (2) Gertrude Ansell (7); Lillian Lenton (12); Kitty Marion (13); Jennie Baines (17).

authoritative sources of information about figures such as Miss Johansen (15) or Margaret Scott (1).

*[ Insert Figure one around here]*

Although the National Portrait Gallery does have images of well-known suffragettes in its collection including two photographic portraits of Kitty Marion (13) and Mary Raleigh Richardson (11),<sup>5</sup> and even some portraits produced by suffragettes,<sup>6</sup> it soon transpired that the Gallery had not acquired the photographs as a contribution to their extensive collection of portraits of renowned political activists as I had originally assumed. Instead, this medley of photographs had been issued by the Criminal Record Office at Scotland Yard in 1914 (Criminal Record Office 1914a; 1914b) in order to warn art galleries and museums of the dangers posed by these militant suffragettes (Mohamed 2013). From 1913, several of those depicted were engaged in damaging works of art in public galleries.<sup>7</sup> The National Portrait Gallery's copy of figure two (11-18) is mounted on to an 'identification sheet' which also provides a

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<sup>5</sup> See further Mary Raleigh Richardson by unknown photographer (1918) and Kitty Marion by Bassano Ltd (1914). Other examples of portraits of suffragettes in the National Portrait gallery include Dame Christabel Pankhurst by Ethel Wright (1909); Emmeline Pankhurst by Georgina Agnes Brackenbury (1929); [Charlotte Despard by Mary Edis](#), Lady Bennett (1916); [Frederick William Pethick-Lawrence](#) by Henry Coller (1933).

<sup>6</sup> See for instance Keir Hardie by Sylvia Pankhurst.

<sup>7</sup> The first militant act is generally considered to be marked by Christabel Pankhurst and Annie Kenney disrupting an election meeting at the Free Trade Hall (Tickner 1987)

physical description of all the suffragettes whose photos appear on the montage.<sup>8</sup>

These images were not being used to induce people into art galleries but rather to stop suffragettes from entering them and disrupting what was contained within.

*[Insert Figure two around here]*

Suffragettes involved in the campaign to destroy prominent artworks sought to draw attention to the suffrage campaign. They argued that artists and art galleries encouraged the overt sexualisation of the female body, the reification of male artist and idealised visions of women. Several of the suffragettes depicted in figures one and two were directly involved with damaging art works. Evelyn Manesta (10) and Lillian Forester (14) attacked thirteen paintings at the Manchester Art gallery in 1913, Mary Richardson used a meat chopper to cause damage to Valàzquez's *The Toilet of Venus* at the National Gallery in March 1914 (Mohamed 2013) and Gertrude Ansell (7) smashed Herkomer's picture of the Duke of Wellington at the Royal Academy in 1914 (Crawford 1999). The others shown in the montage were known as militant suffragettes who had been convicted of the crimes of arson and criminal damage.

The campaign had a number of knock on effects and caused considerable consternation. Following the attack in Manchester in 1913 galleries and museums around the country were placed on high alert and a total ban on allowing women admittance was discussed. This suggestion was rejected but new rules were

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<sup>8</sup> These include details of their names, year born, height, eye colour, hair colour, criminal record office number and crime committed. See further Ahmed, (2013, 123). The Criminal record Office also issued fliers with details of a more limited number of suffragettes. See for instance Criminal Record Office (1914c).



introduced that required women to leave muffs, wrist bags and umbrellas at the entrance (Mohamed 2013; Atkinson 1996). ‘Slasher’ Mary Richardson’s (11) subsequent attack on the Rokeby Venus led to the closure of the National Gallery, the Tate, the National Portrait gallery and the Wallace Collection for a full two weeks. The British Museum adopted a less extreme approach and allowed women to enter during this period if accompanied by a man who would vouch for them or if they carried a letter of recommendation from a man (Atkinson 1996, 153). The National Portrait Gallery’s Annual Report 1914-15 continued to reflect on the dual dangers to their collections posed by suffragettes and wartime air raids even after these additional measures had been put in place (National Portrait Gallery 1915)

I argue that the campaign also had additional impacts which have remained largely uncharted in feminist and criminal history. Responses to this campaign led to the setting up of the first in-house photographic surveillance team in the London Metropolitan Police. More importantly for present purposes, the images produced by the police question our understanding of the ways in which contemporary mugshots disciplined criminals in three ways. Firstly, they subverted established conventions about the form of the mugshot. Secondly, they disrupted ideas about the types of people who were the object/subject of mugshots. Finally, they undermine assumptions about the neutrality of the mugshot as a form of legal evidence. In the remainder of this article each of these themes is considered in turn.

#### Subverting mugshot conventions

By the time these photographs were taken police departments in major metropolitan areas around the world were routinely collecting and archiving photographs of criminals (Finn 2009, 6-11). Early use of civilian photographers by the police has

been traced back to the 1840s (Tagg 1988; Phillips 1997), though photographic records of prisoners were not at all common until the 1860s, and even then procedures varied considerably across police districts (Sekula 1986, 5). Police photography gained legal recognition with the passing of the Habitual Criminals Act 1869, as modified by the Prevention of Crimes Act 1871 and the Penal Servitude Act 1891 (Pavlich 2009). This meant that by the 1870s the police were required to attain photographs of all criminals sentenced to at least one month imprisonment together with finger prints and recording of other details about the criminal body such as hair and eye colour. Prison Governors were responsible for notifying particulars and personal descriptions to those responsible for crime prevention. From 1884 the Criminal Records Office published many of these details in *The Police Gazette* which was circulated daily to all Police Forces in Great Britain (The National Archives 2013).

A recent exhibition of police photographs suggests that Australian police photographers in the period 1912-1948 allowed subjects considerable discretion over the pose they adopted. These photographs show criminals and suspects wearing their own clothes including hats, standing on their own or clustered in groups. In some instances group photographs show partners in crime smiling confidently and conveying a sense of bravado and swagger (Doyle 2007). Across Europe there were also variations in the way that information about criminals and suspects was recorded. The French record system, developed by Bertillon, and much used across continental Europe, required extremely detailed records and prescribed camera

angles which were never used in England.<sup>9</sup> This involved measuring numerous body parts, taking descriptions of facial features and noting peculiar marks alongside more subjective considerations such as complexion, demeanour and voice (Logan 2012). It has been suggested that not all jurisdictions were as open to Bertillon's morphological system of classification of criminals as France, preferring to devote resources to the systems of fingerprinting developed by the English (Logan 2012, 1573). It is also the case that while the British authorities were prepared to put the new systems of physical identification to work in the colonies, they were much more circumspect about the use of these techniques at home. This appears to stem from fears that such intrusive record keeping might jeopardize the co-operation of the public in police detection work (Knepper and Norris 2009).

Despite these variations, dominant conventions about the mugshot had clearly emerged by the time the photographs shown in figures one and two were taken. Drawing on the customs of the photographic portraiture of the mid-late nineteenth century, it was generally expected that mugshots should be frontal images, showing head and shoulders with no facial expression (Finn 2009; Edwards 2006).<sup>10</sup> By the 1870s mugshots in England reflect a somewhat ironic preference for making the images of criminal's uniform. Albums of images of untried prisoners dating from 1897 in the National Archives contain page after page of head and shoulders shots of men in the same prison uniform holding their jackets in exactly

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<sup>9</sup> For more information on the sort of information collected in England see Dodge and Forward (2006) and National Archives (1873).

<sup>10</sup> See Byrnes (1886) which includes a range of photographs of criminals which are restricted to the head and shoulders pose.

the same way. Records from Wadsworth prison dated 1873 show a similar head and shoulders pose with each prisoner holding a crime number in front of them.<sup>11</sup>

Surviving Home Office records demonstrate that prior to April 1913 it had not been the practice of the governor of Holloway prison to photograph suffragettes because of the likelihood of them resisting and concerns about adverse publicity. After attacks on artworks began in 1913, this policy changed but Home Office officials were still keen to keep their practices of photographing and fingerprinting suffragettes after 1913 away from the attention of MPs for fear of the outrage it might provoke amongst those whose sympathised with the suffragist cause (National Archives 1913a). In the event, their decision to photograph suffragettes was not as successful as had been anticipated. There is little doubt that the prison authorities wanted to produce conventional mugshots of suffragettes but the images in figures one and two make clear that the photographs produced were far from conventional. Only one of the images, that of Kitty Marion (13), is the usual head and shoulders pose expected of the mugshot at this time. It is also immediately obvious that they are of very little use for the purposes of identification. In the photographs of Mary Richardson (11), Miss Johansen (15), Jane Short (6), Annie Bell (5) and Clara Given (16) the faces of the subjects are cast into shadow by the hats they are wearing or the angle of the pose, and very few of the women are actually looking at the camera.<sup>12</sup> A number of the women in the montages looked much more

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<sup>11</sup> See further National Archives (1897) and National Archives (1873).

<sup>12</sup> See for example Miriam Pratt (18), Maud Brindley (8), Gertrude Ansell (7) Mary Wyan (4) and Verity Oates (9). Not all of these photographs appear to have been taken in prison. See for instance Mary Wyan (4) and Annie Bell (5).

dishevelled than normal. This is evident when the photograph of Jennie Baines (11) is compared with the image of her in the *carte de visite* produced for sale in the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) shops in which her hair is dressed and she is wearing a spotless high necked white blouse. Why do these images fall so far outside the boundaries of the conventional mugshot?

Analysis of surviving records at the National Archives shows that the police and prison authorities were forced to settle for these less than satisfactory photographs as a direct result of a suffragette campaign of resistance to complying with the requests of their captors. Far from allowing themselves to be transformed into docile objects of a disciplinary gaze, the suffragettes objected vehemently to being compliant. The prison diary of female warder at Holloway, Agnes Resbury, recalls the admission of 40 suffragettes into Holloway prison after a march. She recalls

The Governor knew they were coming, and we were ready for them, but they wouldn't do anything they were told, would not undress to be searched, said they were not going to obey the rules made by mere men (Dodge and Forward 2006, 799).

Once admitted to prison, suffragettes would often shout out from their cells and smash cell windows. More specifically, Home Office records from July 1913 record that suffragettes "...invariably do their utmost to avoid being photographed while in prison". They raised their arms, turned their heads and made faces in order to render the photographs less valuable for surveillance purposes. (National Archives 1913b). Contemporary accounts suggest that just one of the photographs, that of Lilian Forester (14), was taken by the police with the permission of the

subject (National Archives 1913i). By way of contrast, the photograph of Evelyn Manesta (10), reproduced in larger format in figure three, shows her screwing up her face and closing her eyes. Her facial expression makes her lack of compliance clear and provides a much more nuanced account of the power dynamic than is usually anticipated in accounts of the mugshot.

*[Insert Figure three around here]*

This strategy of resistance forced the police and prison authorities to review the surveillance methods they were employing. In the aftermath of the problems surrounding the Manesta photograph they found themselves in a new political environment. The increasingly militant campaign of the suffragettes from 1909 until the outbreak of the First World War (National Archives 1909) radically altered the relationship between suffragettes and police. Prior to the launch of the militant campaign in 1905 the function of the police was largely to protect suffragettes from hecklers at the meetings the women organised. Once the suffragettes began to embark on acts of criminal damage the function of the police switched to that of protecting others from the suffragettes (Crawford 2005; Smith 1978). As the window smashing and marches of the early suffragette campaign turned into arson attacks and damage to public art works the resultant publicity meant that capture of those responsible became an imperative for the police if they were to retain credibility in the eyes of the public. As Crawford (2005) has suggested:

It was the incongruity of middle-class women coming into close physical contact with the police that gave the WSPU so much publicity at least in the early days of the campaign. Apart from the newspaper reports and

photographs, this aspect spawned an amazingly inventive range of comic postcards, card games and even pottery figurines depicting suffragettes (488).

Another equally powerful incentive for improved identification procedures came about as a direct result of the suffragettes claiming the status of political prisoners. The refusal of the government to formally afford them this recognition led to a strategy of hunger strikes and the controversial decision to force feed the women. Growing public disquiet over this practice led to the passing of the Prisoners (Temporary Discharge) Act or the 'Cat and Mouse' Act in April 1913. This allowed hunger strikers to be temporarily released when fasting put their health at risk, followed by their re-arrest once it had improved. The legislation placed the police in the role of hunter with responsibility for recapturing a category of convicts who proved themselves extremely adept at avoiding re-arrest. Consequently, the police began to seek out new methods of surveillance that would allow them to match the skills of their adversaries and the recently established special branch were given additional resources in order to achieve this.<sup>13</sup> One of the suffragettes shown in figure two, Lilian Lenton (12), who was also known as Ida Inkley and May Dennis, was particularly famous for avoiding the police (BBC, 2002). The result was that mugshots, taken before interruptions in periods of incarceration, began to play an ever more important role in the playing out of the tense relationship between these political activists and the state.

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<sup>13</sup> See generally the MePol 2/1310 series at the National Archives.

Faced with the suffragette strategy of non-cooperation, the police and prison authorities turned to covert surveillance methods. From April 1913 the Home Office instructed all prisons that if suffragettes objected to having their photograph taken as expected then an 'expert photographer' from Scotland Yard could be sent to take one without the prisoner's knowledge (National Archives 1913f; 1913g). A memorandum of 1914 required, in a rather convoluted feat of reasoning around the notion of consent, that: "As ...photographs cannot be taken by force, the officer who takes photographs at the prison should be instructed to endeavour to take a photograph without the knowledge of the prisoner" (National Archives 1914a).

Home Office documents provide us with an intriguing, and often detailed, account of the procedures subsequently adopted. New Scotland Yard employed a professional photographer, Mr Barrett of Salisbury Court Fleet Street, to provide advice to them about the best method of successfully photographing prisoners without their knowledge. He was also asked to take a series of clandestine photographs of suffragettes (National Archives 1913b). Initial experiments at Holloway prison, where most suffragettes were incarcerated, proved unsuccessful because of problems with focus caused by the long distances between photographer and suffragette. The police also became increasingly concerned about the cost of instructing a private photographer on a regular basis (Crawford 2005, 495). As a result the police sought further advice from Mr Newton, a scientific instrument maker of Covent Garden and purchased a telecentric lens and Wigmore Model 2 reflex camera on his advice (1913c; 1914c; 1914d). Equipped with this superior equipment, a police constable and superintendent from Scotland Yard took photographs from inside a van parked in the exercise yard at Holloway. The photographs taken were shared with police forces,



prisons and art galleries throughout the country (Crawford 2005), a development that marked an important step in the development of modern surveillance techniques by the police.

Accounts of attempts to take a covert photograph of Kitty Marion (13) suggest that guards were asked to coax prisoners towards a particular position in the yard in order to ensure the photographs were in focus (1913d). Photographic collections held at the National Portrait Gallery, National Archives, Women's Library at the LSE and Museum of London make clear that not all the surviving images were taken from the same angle, or with the suffragettes in the same position, but there are clearly some favoured backdrops which suggest that the van at Holloway was often located in the same position. Significantly, there are suggestions that Kitty Marion (13) may have had some idea that attempts were being made at covert photography. Contemporary records show that she was unwilling to remove her hat and motoring veil when in the exercise yard, despite being coaxed to do so by a prison guard (National Archives 1914b). A photograph found in the Museum of London showing her in the yard at Holloway demonstrates how her reluctance would have undermined attempts to take a photograph for identification purposes. This may explain why the photograph of this popular vocal comedienne in figure two (13) is in the style of a *carte de visite*, as this would have been easy for the police to purchase.<sup>14</sup> At least one other photograph located in the Museum of London, which shows an unknown suffragette pointing at

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<sup>14</sup> Although the National Portrait Gallery catalogue suggests that the photographer was from the Criminal Records Office, the style of the photograph and Marion's profession suggest it was more likely to have been a *carte de visite* on sale to the public.

the camera, suggests that they might have had some inkling of what was going on (see further Museum of London undated).

Despite these suggestions that the suffragettes might have had an inkling of what was going on, it seems unlikely that they understood the full scale of this clandestine operation. An analysis of *Votes for Women*, the Suffragettes' weekly newspaper, reveals no discussion of these police practices, although concern is expressed about the new practice of forcibly taking fingerprints of suffragettes (*Votes for Women* 1914, 443). Accounts of covert photography are also absent from the diaries of prisoners (see for instance Kitty Marion undated). The highly secretive nature of the police operation is evidenced by a note in the National Archives which describes the code names to be used to denote photographers, suffragettes, police stations and New Scotland Yard in telephone conversations between prisons, the Home Office and the Police (National Archives 1913e).

By altering their approach to producing photographs the police were successful in their attempts to put images of the suffragettes on record. The fact that agents of the State were exercising powers considered legitimate when they snatched these likenesses places the women in the guise of passive objects of the police gaze. At the same time, the failure to comply with mugshot conventions causes us to pause a little in what might otherwise have been an instant recognition of the subject as an incarcerated criminal. Separated out and placed in newspapers or scrapbooks many of the eighteen images might have been made by a photojournalist or feminist supporter. Once the criminal mask of the conventional mugshot pose, with all its associated

cultural signs, is removed these images continue to destabilise the currency of the surveillance records produced by the state.

Not the criminal kind

These photographs also disrupted prevailing concepts of who the appropriate objects of the police gaze are. In addition to their role in identifying individual criminals, the mug-shot was seen as providing another important function in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The growing popularity of criminal anthropology, psychiatry, phrenology, criminology and physiognomy all contributed to the emergence of theories that linked the propensity to habitually commit crime with physical traits, heredity and retarded evolution (Finn 2009; Rafter 2009). Photography played a critical role in establishing the credibility of such claims. It was generally considered possible during this period to read criminality from the face. Mugshots were commonly used in the construction and illustration of seminal works on the topic. In Italy, Lombroso drew heavily on photographs of prisoners to illustrate his theories about the criminal type (Rafter 2009) and in England, the statistician Galton (1879), used composite photographs of convicts to identify a biologically determined average offender. In this way the emerging discipline of criminology produced a new set of signs which allowed identification of the criminal by reference to physical characteristics (Logan 2012).

The photographs of the female suffragettes being considered here disrupted this new system of branding in ways that are particularly relevant to studies of gender and crime. Criminality had long been associated with the masculine rather than the feminine (Zedner 1991; Lacey 2008). Where women and crime had been discussed they tended to be associated with a limited number of particular crimes such as

witchcraft, infanticide, shoplifting and prostitution (Smart 1995; Carlen and Worrall 1995; d’Cruze and Jackson 2009). The focus on prostitutes has been particularly pronounced as women convicted of offences relating to this category invariably made up a larger proportion of incarcerated women than any other category (Tarnowsky 2009). In the period in which each of the suffragettes depicted in figures one and two were facing prison it has been calculated that 85-90 per cent of the women in prison had been convicted for offences relating to prostitution (Crawford 1999). The crimes to which women have been linked can often be seen as mere extensions of the roles it has been considered legitimate for them to play in capitalist and patriarchal societies. For Weis (1976, 18) understandings of female crime often constitute an illegitimate expression of legitimate female role expectations. Homemakers become shoplifters, healers become witches and submissive sexual partners become prostitutes. The resonance of these conventional representations of gender and crime is made all the more obvious when women step out of the usual role expected of them by murdering their husbands, lovers, seducers and children and are characterised as ‘freaks, lunatics or rebels’ by the press, judiciary and even ‘sober historians’ as a result (Hartman 1973, 381; Carstens 2011). Viewed in this way it will come as no surprise to readers of this journal that militant suffragettes were labelled hysterical, fanatical, sexually depraved, menopausal, intellectually pretentious or delusionally ambitious (Purvis 1995, 104). Like other women in history who have failed to comply with dominant norms, these women were conceptualised as being out of place (Gullickson 2014).

These attempts to explain female criminality remained rare. Dominant theories of crime focused on the behaviour of lower class men and typically disregarded middle class and female crime on the basis that it was negligible and insignificant. Scholars are increasingly alert to the fact that many of the

assumptions about the criminal behaviour of women are based on now contested theoretical progenitors, reliance on official crime statistics which did not necessarily reflect all criminal activity, logical errors of inference and questionable interpretation of the skewed data available (Weis 1976, 17). Regardless of the many claims of early criminologists to scientific method, contemporary commentators are apt to recognise the significance of the status and class of those constructing these new knowledge systems in determining what they sought to theorise (Phillips 1997). As Tagg (1988) has convincingly argued it was particular categories of people such as the working classes, sex-workers, colonised peoples, the poor, ill-housed, sick or insane who became the objects of knowledge in this discourse. For present purposes, the real importance of these photographic archives is probably not what they tell us about those photographed but how the mugshot became enmeshed in a class based binary of normal versus deviant (Sekula 1986; Finn 2009). For Sekula (1986, 10-14) photography provided a means to produce a biotype which was organically distinct from its bourgeois observers. As a result it might be argued that interpretations of mugshots can be seen as a mirror of what the elite feared might reside within them rather than objective pieces of data.

It is far from easy to fit the 1,085 militant suffragettes imprisoned for their cause (Crawford 1999) into these contemporary ideas about the criminal body. It has been suggested that those suffragettes who served time in prisons were more likely to be middle class women who enjoyed the support of independent income and servants and as a result found it much easier to be absent from households. This has caused some commentators to characterise the suffragette policy of accepting imprisonment rather than the payment of a fine as posing an unacceptable risk for working class women and a blatant display of class privilege (Bolt 1995; Caine

1997). However, the assumption that suffragettes who went to prison were invariably middle class has been challenged by Liddington and Norris (2000) and Purvis (1995) and is relevant here. Several of the suffragettes depicted in figures one and two had to work for their living including Gertrude Ansell (7) who worked as a 'typewriter' (Crawford, 2004), Lillian Lenton (12) who was the daughter of a carpenter and worked as a professional dancer, Kitty Marion (13) who worked on the stage and Jennie Baines (16) who worked as a sewing machinist and paid volunteer at the WSPU (Crawford 1999).

Whatever, the ethics of the suffragettes prison strategy, none of the women shown in figures one and two were typical subjects of the surveillance photograph. It is their political convictions rather than a life of crime that led to them being photographed. Tagg (1988; 2009) has argued that those who provided the focus of new theories of the criminal type were generally those who were cut off from command of meaning. By way of contrast, the leaders of the militant suffragettes had a number of influential supporters in political circles. Whilst not always able to steer political debates in the way they wanted, the suffragettes were nonetheless highly skilled in their attempts to interrupt them. The mugshots being discussed here provide an excellent new case study in the success of this strategy.

Unlike many of the female prisoners with whom they were incarcerated the suffragettes actively courted imprisonment when they had a viable alternative and defied the judicial process by interrupting the link between crime and punishment.<sup>15</sup> Prison for them was an important site of protest (d'Cruze and Jackson 2009) as

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<sup>15</sup> It has been suggested that many poor women also actively sought imprisonment because they often felt they were safer there (Dodge and Forward 2006)

illustrated by these small acts of rebellion as well as the hunger strikes on which most other studies of their incarceration focus. This conviction is captured in the quotation from W.E. Gladstone on the sketch of a prison cell drawn by Olive Hockin (2): 'You have made of your prison a temple of honour' (Crawford 1999, 288). For these suffragettes, prison was not just a conscious choice but an integral part of their political struggle. Though the Fenians might be regarded as one of the first modern movements to furnish political prisoners in the 1860s, it has been argued that the suffragettes were their successors. Moreover, it was in the militant suffragette campaign that the prison first emerged as a terrain of political contestation in its own right and this was a model that was to be adopted around the world (Kenney 2012). Unlike those usually captured by the mugshot these suffragettes actively chose to be in prison.

The suffragettes' transgressions also went beyond their physical acts of criminal damage and arson. Those considered 'ladies', who had previously represented, and been represented as, the ideal of womanhood offended their own class as much by their political activism as by their militancy (Zedner 1991). It was the idea that amongst the militants were middle class women who might damage the contents of the very West End shops and galleries which had been created for them to consume that also rendered their behaviour problematic (Crawford 2005, 493). This anomaly is particularly potent in the cases of Mary Richardson (11) who had studied art and travelled to Paris and Italy or Olive Hockin (2), an artist trained at The Slade who had exhibited at the Walker gallery in Liverpool and the Royal Academy (Crawford 1999). Zedner (1991 128) concludes that the stigmatisation of this new class of deviant forced a reappraisal of the category of criminal women and created an entirely new set of offenders for criminologists to grapple with.

## Editing out resistance

The final way in which the suffragette photographs being discussed question prevailing norms about documentary evidence is that they cast doubt on the credibility of claims that police photography displayed an objectivity not enjoyed by other forms of representation. The mugshot is commonly identified as a prime example of the 'documentary' form of photography (Warner-Marien 2002). In contrast to photography which claimed to be an art form the mugshot was, and largely continues to be, conceptualised as capable of presenting a direct and unmediated index of its subject. Viewed from this perspective, it is perceived to be relatively neutral, style-less and devoid of subjective intention on the part of the photographer. In short, the mugshot is a mechanically produced non-aesthetic object. Edwards (2006) terms it as an example of a category of photography "...cast in the role of lowly carrier of information" (16).

The credibility of the notion of the purely documentary photograph has been hotly contested. It has been argued, for instance, that although police photographs are not taken with an explicit aesthetic purpose they do nonetheless embody expressive properties and tend to offer an ambiguous rather than an absolute truth (Phillips et al. 1997, 7). Despite such assertions, the notion of the ideal type of documentary photographs remains central to scholarly debate about photography. This type of image continues to be characterised as *relatively* truthful because of the aspiration of the photographer to marginalise their own values and influence. Practitioners of this form are not expected to alter negatives for effect or edit the image in any way by cropping, retouching, posing, staging or adding of dramatic light effects. However, as Edwards (2006) has argued "What is left unsaid in this



account is that some institutions or powerful individuals have the resources and authority to decide what counts as true or objective” (27). The story of the suffragette’s photographs demonstrates just how easily the state was able to manipulate the messages conveyed by the photographs they took.

An analysis of Home Office files demonstrates that, contrary to the conceptualisation of the police document as a reliable index, those responsible for producing the photographs that appear at figures one and two deliberately edited them. In some instances the photographs have been cropped in ways that create a very different impression of the subjects. For instance, the images labelled 1-3 in figure two of Margaret Scott (1), Olive Hockin (2) and Margaret McFarlane (3) come from the same photograph of four suffragettes walking together companionably in Holloway prison exercise yard . They have been severed, only to be reunited as a set of discrete images in the montage.<sup>16</sup> The four companions of Maud Brindley’s (8) with whom she is talking have also been cropped out of the photograph of her, just as the companion affectionately linking Clara Giveen (16) arm has been removed (Museum of London, 1913). What is lost when these images of groups are re-presented as separate frames is the sense of camaraderie shown in the original photographs. In the place of images that demonstrate solidarity each suffragette is represented instead as isolated.

*[Insert Figure four around here]*

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<sup>16</sup> See further Women’s Suffrage Collection Photographs Portraits s-Z Group photographs, 53.140/59 Museum of London (undated). The original version of this photograph can be seen in Atkinson (1996, 142) and in the Museum of London 50.82/1481 (1913).

These transgressions clearly impact on how we interpret the photographs, but the most blatant misrepresentation of the circumstances in which a photograph was taken is reserved for the photograph of Evelyn Manesta (10) in figures two, four and five. Home Office files make clear that Manesta resisted being photographed in line with suffragette policy and an initial attempt at producing a clandestine photograph in a Manchester prison resulted in a photograph deemed unsuitable for identification purposes. As a result, the Prison Commissioner requested the Deputy Governor of Holloway prison to arrange for another photograph, shown as figure four, to be taken of her when she was in Holloway prison (National Archives, 1913h). A comparison of figures three and four demonstrates that the version circulated to art galleries was radically altered. The original version in figure four reveals a warden standing behind a resisting Manesta holding her in place by means of an arm around her neck and a hand on her side. A contemporary memorandum from the Prison Governor provides a perfunctory account of the decision to edit the photograph resulting in figure four:

The photographer informs me that he can easily print out the matron's arm around Manesta's neck, should it be considered desirable to do so. They were required in order to prevent her holding her head down. The likeness is very fair and I have not had another one taken as she would inevitably only close her eyes again so the result would be similar (National Archives 1913h).

In the image circulated to art galleries by the Metropolitan Police the warden's arm has been replaced by a scarf and uncomfortable evidence of coercion has been covered up by the editing process. Historians have since referred to this

‘cumbersome manipulation’ as politically convenient and an attempt to avoid negative publicity (Liddington 2005, 205). For present purposes it provides an important case study of Edward’s (2006) suggestion that state institutions commonly have the discretion to decide what counts as true or even neutral representation.

### **Conclusion: Object Subject Transformation?**

In this concluding section I return to the issue of whether the story of the suffragette photographs allows us to re-conceive of these women as agents in the production of images of them rather than as mere objects of production. One interpretation of the account presented here would be to conclude that their resistance was futile. When they refused to have their likeness taken the police just took photographs covertly. The resulting photographs discussed here portray the suffragettes in a less than positive light. Caught unawares they appear dishevelled and distracted. The images place these women against the bleak backdrop of a prison and the story behind the photographs makes clear that they held her in place, edited out the person restraining her and circulated the photograph widely. Viewed in this light the assertion that sustained protests against powerful institutions armed with new technologies of power were often futile has credibility (see in particular Tagg 1988; 2009; Finn 2009). However, an important postscript to the story of these photographs allows us to put their actions in a broader context and makes clear how tenacious the suffragettes were in their efforts to retain control over exactly how they were constructed and portrayed.

*[Insert Figure five around here]*

The militant movement undoubtedly had a complex and multi-faceted engagement with the press and issues pertaining to the politics of representation. The suffragettes undoubtedly understood the power of the image from an early stage in their campaign. The Artists' Suffrage League and Suffrage Atelier produced posters, postcards, badges, illustrated leaflets, banners and other political propaganda in abundance for sale in the WSPU shops with a view to popularising their cause (Tickner 1987; Mercer 2005; 2009).<sup>17</sup> The Women's Library at the LSE has several albums of elegantly posed *carte de visite* containing the photographs of well-known members of the movement embossed with the WPSU stamp. These formed a vital part of the suffragettes' propaganda campaign, the sophistication of which has often been overlooked. In part, their efforts were a reaction against the many negative images of them as butch and aggressive produced by their opponents and the press (Mercer 2005, 471). By way of response the suffragettes became adept at the production of heroic images of prominent members of its movement.

While suffragettes objected vehemently to having their photographs taken in prison they produced numerous celebratory photographs of themselves in prison dress once freed. Appearing in prison garb during organised protests was seen as a source of pride for those who had been incarcerated and models of prison cells and postcards of suffragettes in prison garb were produced for exhibitions and for sale (see for instance Atkinson 1996, 37 and 69). In contrast to the photographs taken by

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<sup>17</sup> It has been claimed that the art work and imagery of Sylvia Pankhurst gave the WSPU a particularly coherent visual identity. Somewhat ironically for the modern feminist these outputs also reminded onlookers that many of the suffragettes were accomplished in traditional female skills of drawing, sewing and needlework (Atkinson 1996).

the metropolitan police these alternative prints were produced to the strict specification of the leaders of the suffragette movement. It can be seen that the photograph reproduced at figure five is radically different from figures one-four. The images commissioned by the suffragettes portray them wearing prison clothes with pride, though they objected to wearing them when imprisoned. The garments they are wearing stand in direct contrast to contemporary accounts of the disgusting state of prison clothes, which were often unwashed and ill-fitting (Crawford 1999). By way of contrast, figure five shows former prisoners in tailored, clean and starched dresses and aprons produced to the suffragettes specifications. The worried and distracted facial expressions of the suffragettes in Holloway are replaced by assertive poses in these celebratory images.

Unlike the multitude of other women portrayed in the photographic archives of the police, the suffragettes had the resources and inclination to challenge how they were represented and what it meant to be labelled a criminal. In their alternative representations of prison it is law enforcers who are the absent aggressors while the suffragettes are portrayed as vulnerable, at time even angelic. In this way, it could be argued that these deviant objects of male bourgeois fear transform themselves into sympathetic and political subjects in the public sphere. Ironically they did so by commissioning the services of Arthur Barrett who was also instructed by the Metropolitan police to produce the first clandestine photographs of them in Holloway prison.<sup>18</sup> This is far from being the only irony in what Biber (2013) has called the

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<sup>18</sup> Significantly Arthur Barret was also the person who took the now famous photograph of Mrs Pankhurst in the dock at Bow Magistrates court. A surviving Pathé (1955) film shows him explaining how the photograph was taken.

cultural afterlife of such photographs. When the 'Art Under Attack' exhibition was launched at Tate Britain in 2014 (see further Barber and Boldrick, 2014) figure two was one of the exhibits and at the time of writing figures one and two were on display in room 31 of the National Portrait Gallery. It is clear that as time has passed the suffragettes portrayed have transformed from being perceived as destroyers of art to heroines worthy of having their images hung on the walls of the very art institutions that they once terrorised. The sophistication of these numerous turns in the politics of representation should not be underestimated. Rather than allowing photography to discipline their criminal bodies they have left us with a lasting record of their resistance and political agency. They have forced the camera to act as the handmaiden of their campaign rather than an oppressive medium of their political destruction.

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Figure One: ['Surveillance Photograph of Militant Suffragettes'](#) by Criminal Record Office 1914 © National Portrait Gallery, London.



Figure Two: ['Surveillance Photograph of Militant Suffragettes'](#) by Criminal Record Office, 1914 © National Portrait Gallery, London.



Figure Three: [Evelyn Manesta](#) by Criminal Record Office, 1914© National Portrait Gallery, London.



Figure Four: Evelyn Manesta by Criminal Record Office (original print), 1914. The National Archives, ref. PCOM7/252



Figure Five: Suffragettes dressed in replica prison clothing, 1908, The Museum of London, Image number 429497