

Bessie Harrison Lee's fight for Victorian Women's Suffrage in the late nineteenth century: Educating urban and rural women on the democratic process

Jennifer Caligari
Deakin University

We ask for suffrage that we may stand side by side with our fathers, husbands, brothers, and sons, working with them ... for a noble political life for the country's wealth. Not for a man's place do we ask, but for the fullness of women's. (The Argus, 1891, p. 9)

In the late nineteenth century, adult and public learning pedagogy were the key instruments utilised in the campaign to achieve Victorian Women's Suffrage. The democratic process of changing state government legislation on franchise demanded multiple pedagogical methods. Through the actions of Bessie Harrison Lee (1860-1950), this paper identifies the reaching out to urban and rural women by the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), where they engaged in a transformative exercise in consciousness-raising. This helped women visualise the possibilities of improving their lives through the democratic process. The WCTU taught Lee the value of female-centred political action. The WCTU and Lee's involvement successfully influenced the suffrage debate and contributed to the emerging

international women's culture (McLean & Baroud, 2020, p. 506). Part of this culture featured Australian women adopting the petition as a political instrument. The petition had already had a long history in Britain, used by groups with little political influence. Ian Fletcher's conception of the British Empire as "a set of relations, rather than the sum of their parts, as frameworks structuring political, economic and cultural exchanges between metropole and colonies" is useful in understanding how political ideas travelled to and were adapted in the Australian context (Fletcher, Levine & Mayall, 2012, p. xiv).

This paper argues that new ways of knowing were made possible by Lee, who, empowered by the evangelical faith (her cultural capital) spoke out confidently in public spaces such as town halls, outside public bars, and on the front doorsteps of women's homes in both cities and rural towns. These spaces were the places of learning, or as Bourdieu described, the field. Also, the meeting places of the WCTU, whether private lounge rooms or church halls, enabled women to support each other in the political process of debate, addressing community issues, and devising strategic plans to improve the lives of women.

*Through critical discourse analysis of newspaper reports, WCTU's publication *The White Ribbon*, the Victorian Alliance publication *Alliance Record*, and Lee's autobiography, this paper identifies these learning spaces. It also explores the community of practice in WCTU meetings, doorknocking, pamphleteering and the physical act of collecting signatures for the 1891 'Victorian Monster Petition'. The language and actions used to enact democratic activity that involves women in ways of saying, doing, and being full citizens are unlocked; however, the WCTU was exclusionary of Indigenous and non-Anglo-Celtic ancestry. Therefore, their learning spaces were complicit in the Great Silence (Stanner, 1968).*

Keywords: *Woman's Christian Temperance Union, adult learning pedagogy, public pedagogy, Monster Petition, evangelicalism, social movements, Bourdieu*

Introduction and background to the research

Bessie Harrison Lee was born in Daylesford Victoria during the peak of the gold rush in 1860 (Lee, 1900, p. 4). Her mother tragically died of consumption and so, at the age of eight, her father took Lee to be cared for by an aunt and uncle in the inner-city suburb of Footscray. Initially, they smothered Lee with loving kindness, but as time passed, cracks in their family unit began to appear. Her observations show the depletion of her aunt and uncle's possessions because their money was increasingly being used to feed their drinking habit. Lee lamented: "Bit by bit the furniture went; the carpets and pictures were sold; and then they moved from their comfortable home to a cheaper suburb" (Lee, 1900, p. 9). Not only did Lee witness the diminution of home comforts, but also the damaging erratic and violent behaviour of her carers. Chillingly, Lee wrote "My aunt would one day treat me with a love inexpressible; the next my bruised and blackened body would give evidence that drink had the ascendancy" (Lee, 1900, p. 13).

Upon hearing of the abusive treatment experienced by his daughter, Lee's father relocated her to the mining town of Enochs Point to be cared for by another aunt and uncle (Lee, 1900, p. 14). The town was characteristically a region of high alcohol consumption. Alcohol was a staple part of a miner's diet not only because drinking water was often contaminated, but as the alluvial gold diminished, the miners experienced heightened disappointment, frustration, and loneliness (Pilkington, 1996). It was in the atmosphere of this harsh mining culture where diggers found solace in the non-hierarchical evangelical faith, a movement in the protestant churches that Lee was motivated by. A key characteristic of this movement was activism, and this, Lee believed, "gave her the confidence and licence to speak out against injustice" (Lee, 1900, p. 21; see also Piggin, 1996). At the age of nineteen, Lee married a railway worker and moved to Melbourne where she was introduced to the teachings of the WCTU.

The WCTU was initially founded in America by a group of women who believed alcohol consumption was the sole reason for the breakdown of families. Initially, the organisation had a singular goal, but with new leadership, the policy of 'do everything' emanated (Willard, 1892). The WCTU's popularity was such that it had organisations throughout the world, including Australia; it was during this time that Lee joined

the Footscray branch. The WCTU transformed into a transnational community where the aims and values of the organisation went beyond national boundaries. It promoted a temperance lifestyle that included abstaining from alcohol through a physical act that resembled a sacred ritual, the signing of a pledge. Other objectives of the WCTU were achieving women's suffrage, raising the legal age of consent, missionary work, the establishment of kindergartens, and lobbying to reduce the number of publican licences (called 'local option' campaigns).

The education of women by the WCTU took place beyond formal schooling, in places of learning such as church halls, in the open, or on the doorsteps of homes, where women would encourage the signing of the 1891 Monster Petition (O'Malley, Sandlin & Burdick, 2020). Lee emerged as the heroic figure advocating for the marginalised – women who were dependent on men for financial security, safety, and social status. As a leader in the WCTU, she performed what O'Malley describes as “educative interruptions of public space, on popular yet disqualified knowledge, and on communal engagement that organises around shared dissent” (O'Malley et al., 2020, p. 8). Public pedagogy involved the ideological transfer of a different way of being, evident in Lee's ability through the WCTU's organisational network to encourage women's participation in petitioning.

Literature Review

Studying Lee's leadership in the WCTU allows new pathways through which to interpret the first-wave women's movement in its multiple forms of education and organising, and their influence on social change to achieve the vote. Despite Lee's contributions to contemporary debates and leadership in social reform, scholars have not made Lee a central focus of sustained study. Interpreting the life of Lee requires reference to diverse bodies of literature – on evangelicalism, temperance, suffrage, colonial and women's history – indicative of the complex nature of her achievements. This paper draws on current Australian, American, British, New Zealand, and Canadian debates over female sexual autonomy and first-wave feminists (Hewitt, 2010; Morgan, 2000; Bedford, 2017; Pickles, 2010, 2002).

Within the interdisciplinary field of academic study, 1960s scholars in women's studies, which emerged in the late 1960s, became interested

in the WCTU and other women's organisations and their transnational relationships. Janice Brownfoot concluded: "visiting missionaries working for the Temperance cause inspired many women to form branches of the WCTU" (Brownfoot, 1968, p. 24). The first phase of research published on the First Wave Women's Movement primarily focused on women's suffrage and highlighted the WCTU's contributions to political lobbying and educating the electorate. Drawing on Audrey Oldfield's detailed descriptions of the suffrage debate in Australia, this paper, by focusing on Lee specifically, adds new dimensions to Oldfield's overall narrative. She identified that Australian suffrage organisations were supported or initiated by the WCTU, its members often from non-conformist churches. Also, Oldfield discovered that whilst the woman suffrage movement launched itself in urban Australia, the rural branches were important in "spreading their tentacles out beyond country towns" (Oldfield, 1992, p. 183).

This paper also contributes to the dialogue Patricia Grimshaw initiated in the 1980s by showing that Lee presented serious challenges to contemporary laws with her support of reforms to education and legal and political parity with men (Grimshaw, 1985). Grimshaw observed that Lee and her contemporaries "extended prevailing ideologies, which stressed women's superior moral and spiritual role within the family, to support the idea of women's role in the larger family, the State" (Grimshaw, 1985, p. 143). Grimshaw, Marilyn Lake, Ann McGrath and Marian Quartly in the landmark study 'Creating a Nation' identified Lee as one of four notable colonists who took public stances on issues of social justice in colonial society (Grimshaw, Lake, McGrath & Quartly, 1994). Lee was seen as significant because she distinguished structural disadvantages underlying individuals' troubles, be it workers or, in Lee's case, members of a particular sex.

Ian Tyrrell's comprehensive scholarly study first described the WCTU from an international perspective. He identified the evangelical movement and holiness doctrines as foundational influences on WCTU policies and actions, which also profoundly influenced Lee (Tyrrell, 1991). Religious discourses, as Tyrrell identified, were never passively received within religious institutions or in the wider culture; instead, they were constantly reinterpreted by women. Despite the 'religious turn' in gender and cultural history, historians of religion have by contrast still produced less sustained research on women and gender.

Recent scholarship has identified that some of the liveliest supporters of women's suffrage came from evangelical communities. Jacqueline deVries' research highlighted how religious belief could and did encourage different, and even oppositional ways of thinking. This led to a questioning of separate spheres as formulated in terms of 'public' and 'private' (deVries, 2019). Australia's continuous evangelical tradition places Lee at the centre of its sustained development (Piggin, 2007). Professor Stuart Piggin linked the growth of evangelicalism taking place in rural Victoria to understanding the environment Lee was exposed to whilst living in Enochs Point. Evangelical women's ability to make sense of human extremity, the strong communities forged in this movement, and the 'salvation for all' ideal contributed to Lee's skills in political activism (Piggin, 2007).

Professor Clare Wright's research narrates the victory of suffrage for women in Australia and highlights the many public methods of protest utilised (Wright, 2018). In this work, Wright details a political world, local and national, of which Lee was an active part. James Keating furthers the research suggesting how suffragists in Australia and New Zealand connected with their counterparts in the United States and Britain over their shared goal and worked to position themselves within the internationalist struggle for women's enfranchisement (Keating, 2020). Little attention has been given to the significance of the day-to-day struggle for suffrage in the lives of ordinary members, as well as their role in the campaign. Keating's research has remedied this void and helped position Lee as integral to mobilising these urban and rural members.

Illuminating the learning that takes place in non-traditional environments, Michael O'Malley and colleagues' work identifies the problematic processes of dominant discourses, such as patriarchy. This provides the framework to view Lee's public speaking as 'developing counter discursive strategies' (O'Malley, Sandlin & Burdick, 2020, p. 5.) Paulo Freire's pedagogical frame also informs a study of Lee's activism. The spirit of his comment "We learn and teach democracy by making democracy" married perfectly with Lee and the WCTU's aim to equip women with the knowledge and practical skills of why and how laws could be changed (Melero, 2019).

Methodology

For this paper, a critical discourse analysis was employed that focused on the language used by Lee, the newspapers, and the WCTU, so that “deeper explorations of how language works could be obtained” (Gee, 2014, p.1). Studying the language of Lee’s speeches conducted outside public bars, inside church halls, or at WCTU meetings invites insight into the language and actions Lee utilised in educating women and widening the definition of citizenship. Lee’s role in cultivating women’s understanding of the words and actions of democracy is shown by her organisation of petitions, debates, and educating women on the parliamentary process. This helped women identify with wanting change and developing their awareness that change was possible, as well as that their political aspirations required strengthening and mobilising.

The aim and purpose of this research is to identify Lee as an educator, a practitioner of public pedagogy, and the learning outcomes of adult education in public places. It provides insights into the significance of the learning relationships that helped women mobilise and produce the 30,000 signatures over a three-month time span that were needed to communicate to the Victorian Parliament women’s concerns and demands for franchise in 1891.

Collection of information

The examination of the archives of WCTU of Victoria (1887-1900) at the State Library of Victoria and the University of Melbourne has fashioned and framed this paper’s investigation. These archives contain organisational records, from individual meeting minutes to national and international convention programs and minutes.

At first, the WCTU had no journal of its own, but women were granted the use of a page in the Alliance Record, the official newspaper of the Victorian Temperance Alliance (also known as Victorian Alliance, the male temperance organisation). The Victorian Alliance provided the voice of the WCTU in Victoria through the publication of the Alliance Record from 1881 to October 1887 as a monthly publication, then bi-weekly until July 1892, when it returned to a monthly schedule. Offering eloquent editorials written by Lee and a wide range of temperance news items, the WCTU page assisted the rapid growth of the Union in its

early years; membership increased from some six hundred at first to about four thousand by 1892. The network structure of the temperance groups contributed to the large number of signatures collected in only a few weeks for the Monster Petition of 1891 for women's suffrage. The major contributor was the WCTU, supported by the Victorian Alliance and their use of media with the Alliance Record. The Alliance Record therefore was a valuable tool for providing WCTU members and other readers with the latest information about WCTU activities. I will use these archives to assess pedagogical methods surrounding the fight for female suffrage.

The commencement of the official WCTU publication *White Ribbon Signal* in November 1887, which Lee had helped to coordinate, was a distinctive move asserting both the importance of women's issues and understanding the need for a woman's voice. This was historically important for Victorian women as it heralded a paradigm shift in their participation in political debate. The archive, held at the University of Melbourne, covers publications from 1887 to 1999. Reading this archive has revealed that the pages strengthened women's collective identity and established common grounds for action. Studying the archives of the WCTU and Lee's dynamic contributions to the work show the organisation's political agenda.

Theoretical framework and conceptual analysis

There was great complexity in Lee's motivation to achieve a democratic voice for Victorian women and it was through adult and public pedagogical methods that her actions were framed. McLean's work on public pedagogy is a useful comparative scaffold (McLean, 2020, p. 504). It was Lee's position in the margins, her working-class background, early exposure to what alcohol dependency could destroy, and her talent for oratory that helped her build relationships with other women to the point of obtaining signatures for political change. Public education was employed as a tool for social and political reform by encouraging her audience to question what it meant to be a woman. Helping women imagine their role in public policies on family life was transformative for many, who initially could not envisage being part of the political process (McLean, 2020, p. 504).

Bourdieu's theories can illuminate how the WCTU women and Lee

organized, practised, and interacted with each other. Lee interacted socially by penetrating different learning spaces while educating her audience on doxa, the social field rules of democracy. Lee's persona as an evangelical Christian was a powerful resource to promote progressive thoughts and ideas (Bourdieu, 1984).

Findings

The early leadership of Lee and the WCTU provided multiple learning opportunities for Victorian rural and urban women. Although women first received the vote in the State of Victoria by default in 1863 through a piece of faulty legislation drafting, in 1865 the lower house (the Legislative Assembly) changed the clause to restrict the vote for parliamentary elections strictly to male ratepayers (Victorian Parliament, 2014). A contentious issue for the women's suffrage movement across all states of Australia was whether advocates for women's suffrage should argue for the vote on the same conditions as men, or whether they should first seek abolition of the property vote ('Female suffrage', 1891).

The fight for women's suffrage became a natural extension of Lee's evangelical and temperance sensibilities. Lee's involvement with the practicalities of the 1891 Victorian Monster Petition demonstrated how she navigated a woman's place in the political landscape. On becoming the Footscray Branch President of the WCTU, Lee helped women to "not ask for this [the vote] except upon the same terms, and for the same reasons that it has been granted to men" (McLean, 1891, p. 2).

Using Bourdieu's theory of practice, the habitus, values, and dispositions placed on late nineteenth-century women are questioned. Confidence in Lee's leadership was gained by her insistence that she was "a girl who without education, money, influence, position or friends [could], by taking Christ's hands, and trusting her all to Him, rise to any eminence" (Lee, 1900, p. 153). The field – the hierarchical structure – was questioned by Lee, and women's involvement in the WCTU widened their life's chances. Referring to Bourdieu, Lee's social and cultural capital obtained more leverage with her leadership in the WCTU (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 2). Also, Bourdieu emphasised a reflective practice of learning made evident by Lee's ability to establish insightful conclusions about her own life's challenges and achievements (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 2).

Petition

Lee's involvement and successful influence over the suffrage debate was influenced by and further contributed to an emerging international women's culture. Part of this culture made frequent references in the media to parliamentary petitions. Within this world culture of using the petition as an effective instrument of women's political expression, Australian women's political activity, in which Lee became a leader, involved vigorous campaigning and petitioning in support of women's suffrage. These petitions were collected in all states and presented to the various parliaments.

In 1891 the media reported that "Mrs Harrison Lee and the Blue Ribboners [an alternative name for WCTU members] interviewed Premier James Munro with a request that he bring in a bill to extend the franchise to the females" ("The extension of the franchise to women", 1891). Premier Munro assessed their ardour and pointed out the prosaic difficulties in the way of granting womanhood suffrage ("The woman's suffrage question", 1891). Munro suggested that women who were ratepayers might have their names inserted on the Roll of Parliament electors. Such a change, he argued, would practically make very little difference and it would fall very short of the demands put forward by the deputation. Lee and the women exhibited a "fine scorn for any less proposal" ("The woman's suffrage question", 1891, p. 4-5). In response to Premier Munro's advice that women needed to show a united and representative front, or as one report described it, "an army of Amazons" ('An army of Amazons', 1891, p. 2) to the suffrage issue, Lee organised a conference. This conference was between the Victorian Alliance (the male temperance organisation) and the WCTU, regarding the "best means to promote women's suffrage" ('Women's suffrage and marriage', 1891, p. 5).

Freire's problem-solving pedagogy was enacted here. A resolution was adopted by the WCTU that "a parliamentary subcommittee should be formed in connection with each branch, and as there are 88 branches in the colony which will receive instructions from headquarters it is evident that considerable influence will be exerted" ('Adult suffrage', 1891, p. 5). The WCTU also approached the two suffrage societies, the Victorian Women's Suffrage Society (VWSS), and the AWSS. Turning to public pedagogy theories, Lee demonstrated success in "organising women

and men around shared dissent from marginalisation and constructs alliances across difference” (O’Malley, Sandlin & Burdick, 2020, p. 8). Lee also performed the role of “interrupter intending to enact political and cultural questions through the very acts of public interaction and human togetherness” (O’Malley, Sandlin & Burdick, 2020, p. 9).

Campaign to mobilise women

Lee’s leadership changed the Women’s Suffrage movement so that the local environment became the focal point of woman suffrage activism, its battleground. She did this by working diligently through the Monster Petition to reach an audience that in the 1880s and 1890s was almost wholly outside the metropolitan suffrage organisations. The individual sheets of paper were pasted on cotton or linen fabric backing, which was then glued together and rolled onto a cardboard spindle. The VWSS, AWSS, and the WCTU organised hundreds of women to engage in a united door-knocking campaign (Third Annual Report and Methods of Work done by the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union of Victoria, 1890). Firstly, the WCTU divided the city into districts, and each of these was visited by different members of the union (‘Adult Suffrage’, 1895). Signatures were not only collected in the metropolis but across Victorian rural and regional areas, particularly where towns were linked by railway lines. Nearly 30,000 signatures were recorded on sheets of paper, an average of 5,000 signatures a week (over 700 a day). According to the census data for the same year, these signatures comprised about ten per cent of the adult female population of the colony (Victorian Parliament, 1891). This was a 260-metre-long petition to the Victorian Parliament, which stated that “women should vote on equal terms with men, a government of the people, by the people and for the people. Adult persons should have a voice in making the laws which they are required to obey” (The Women’s Petition, 1891). Lee was a leader, as Freire articulated, in the struggle to be more “fully human” (Freire, 1978, p. 21).

Lee’s political mobilising skills were evidenced in the physical presentation of the Monster Petition to the Parliament of Victoria on November 18, 1891; it had the support of Premier James Munro, whose wife Jane Munro was one of the key signatories (Victorian Parliament, 1891). Mrs. Munro was often a special guest on key social occasions with Mrs T. Ferguson, Mr R. Baker MLA, Mrs. Hunt, and Mr. Vale (leader

of Victorian Alliance) (Alliance Record, 8 August 1891). Other notable signatures that adorned the top of the petition were Margaret McLean, head of the WCTU; Margaret Higinbotham, wife of George Higinbotham (a controversial politician and lawyer), and Bessie Harrison Lee.

To support the second reading of the women's suffrage bill, which gave women suffrage and abolished plural voting, the 30,000 signatures were presented on 29 September 1891 (Victorian Parliamentary Debates, 1891, p.1613). Support by the male temperance organisation the Victorian Alliance, of which the Premier was a key member, was voiced in their paper, the Alliance Record: "is it not much nicer to see a brother standing up for his sister's rights, and gallantly giving them to her, than to be calmly monopolising all the privileges..." ('Woman's Petition', 1891, p. 5). The Victorian Premier James Munro was strongly attacked by his opponents for risking the abolition of plural voting by linking it to woman suffrage. By doing so, although the two provisions were passed 39-13 in the Legislative Assembly, Munro lost votes for women before the bill went to the Legislative Council, the upper house. The women were bitterly disappointed that this should happen after all their hard work.

Political activity

Whilst not successful in achieving women's suffrage, it was not until the WCTU and the suffrage societies collected these signatures for the petition that women's enfranchisement became a frequently debated question. A suburb of Melbourne, St Kilda, had only been colonised for thirty-six years and proclaimed a city for one year when two hundred and eleven local women added their names to the Monster Petition and demanded that the suffrage be extended to them (Eidelson, 2001, p. 7). The St Kilda Advertiser demonstrated that a significant volume of women's suffrage activities took place in St Kilda from the 1890s until the early twentieth century. Many local meetings and debates discussing the issue of women's suffrage were arranged by Lee under the auspices of the WCTU, such was the effectiveness of her leadership at the local level. Lee utilised a coterie of rhetorical tactics to communicate her message to a range of audiences (McLean & Baroud, 2020, p. 505). During a rally in St Kilda's Alma Road, the Prahran Telegraph report highlighted Lee's ability to "design her language in terms of how she would like her recipient(s) to be, think, feel and behave" (Gee, 2014, p.

21). It wrote:

Mrs Harrison Lee was as pleasantly piquant and as softly sarcastic as ever. She alluded to the triumphs of the women's cause in New Zealand and South Australia and declared that Victoria was not leading just now and would have to be quick to catch up with the sister colonies ('Woman suffrage: a rally at St Kilda', 1891, p. 3).

Lee's problem-posing involved a "constant unveiling of reality" in her assessment of Victoria's position to other states (Freire, 1978, p. 99). The decentralised nature of Lee's public pedagogical methods "take[s] the form of performative and improvisational" (O'Malley, Sandlin & Burdick, 2020, p. 6). For example, Lee communicated "the discovery by women of America that legislation was for and by the people, and how all the wise men, assisted by the Philadelphia lawyer, discovered that women were not even 'people'"; in response to Lee's assessment, "ripples of laughter followed" from her audience ('Woman suffrage: a rally at St Kilda', 1891, p. 3). Lee's sarcastic tone was used as an instrument of critical discovery that both they and the speaker were victims of degrading laws. For example, Lee's referenced that "in Victoria, it was found that all persons were entitled to vote except 'criminals', lunatics, idiots and women", which mirrors Freire's practice of helping the audience "recognise the necessity to fight for it [suffrage]" (Freire, 1978, p. 19). Her ridicule of American democracy coupled with the revelation that Victorian women "were not even people" evidenced Lee's sharp rhetorical ability to highlight that the oppression of women's voices was a form of dehumanisation (Freire, 1978, p. 22).

Lee's rallying visits and unrelenting work to remote rural towns were also evidenced in, for example, Castlemaine, and other informal sites of learning:

Our tract distributors are doing good work, and the WCTU literature is being distributed to nearly every home in our town. Our alliance superintendent [Lee] is indefatigable in getting subscribers for the paper, five dozen copies being disposed of every fortnight. ('White Ribbon News', 1891)

During her public visits, Lee also excited her audience with her news on membership levels overseas, which made WCTU members feel part

of a vibrant and growing international community – a striking message to keep and attract members, and an instrument of public pedagogy. For example, while addressing an audience in Moe she comforted her audience with the reassurance of numerical strength and transnational support: “Mrs Lee said the union that she represented numbered in America 300,000, England 170,000; in Victoria 30 branches with 1,000” (‘Mrs Harrison Lee in Moe’, 1889, p. 2).

Speeches

The speeches made by Lee demonstrate her powerful use of language and public performance. For example, her lecture tour of 1894 is illustrative of her talents on several levels. She was a skilled social observer, and she was able to read her crowd and develop a framework for debate. One reported speech that she performed in Wagga Wagga in 1894, for example, provides a vignette of her social commentary and arguments as to why suffrage should be granted to women. Lee worked systematically through the arguments against women's suffrage, a clever and tactical strategy. Her speech briefly documented her personal journey from anti-suffrage to a suffrage campaigner, a map through which others with similar values could navigate. Initially “believing the agitation was fostered only by strong minded, objectionable females pictured by Punch”, Lee quickly followed this claim with: “Further experience had, however, shown her that the movement was taking part, with the best women in both England and America, who desired to have some voice in the making of the Laws which govern society” (‘Women Suffrage, Address by Mrs Harrison Lee’, 1894, p. 4). A succinct message was communicated by Lee: the vote should be granted first and foremost in terms of citizenship; Australian women needed to take part in the creation of laws that govern society. Identifying to her audience England and America as exemplary participants in this campaign was a powerful approach, reminding listeners of the possibilities that they, too, could be part of this civilising process in the making. This theme was apparent in many of her public addresses during this tour, where the vote, Lee highlighted, should be awarded to women because “it was right and just and [...] it would advantage the whole community”, she contended; “this would follow woman suffrage” (‘Mrs Harrison Lee Franchise for Women’, 1893, p. 5).

Portrait

The uniting of Lee's skills within the specific historical context of the suffrage debate shaped and altered traditional symbols and images, reinvesting them with further content and renewed vigour. Such a process of change occurred in the image of the 'true Christian woman', where the promotion of Lee's image infused traditional ideals with new possibilities of content and meaning. Lee's strategy was what Gee would define as actively trying to entice her audience to be who or what she wanted them to be. In other words, she positioned her followers to take on a new identity that may lead to new or different beliefs, opportunities or actions (Gee, 2014, p. 121). From 1891 until 1908, Lee dedicated all her waking hours to the WCTU and Victorian Alliance, not only in Victoria but also throughout the world. Her fame increased to the point that the Victorian Alliance made profits by selling her photos, where power for change was inherent in the symbols and images featured in her photos. By their very nature, photos are capable of revealing new depths of meaning and lend themselves to nuances of interpretation. With Lee's photograph plastered on thousands of pamphlets, she became recognisable in the public arena. Pamphlets contained her words: "I am a woman, and knowing now the feelings of a very large number of our women, I plead on their behalf for women's suffrage" (Lee, 1906, p. 24).

Lee's photographs, as representative of Australian womanhood, served as an incongruous symbol alongside the public definition of citizenship. The photograph of Lee in typical Victorian fashion boldly communicated that women intended to move from the private, domestic sphere into the public world and not be lumped together with "other criminals, lunatics and idiots" who had no legal status. In including this statement, she made clever reference to Frances Power Cobbe's influential essay outlining the logic of British women's rights to parliamentary franchise. Lee envisioned a limitless space for women's abilities and talents. While not iconoclastic (she had not abandoned or destroyed the ideal of 'true womanhood'), she sought to broaden and re-vision its possibilities:

We ask for suffrage that we may stand side by side with our fathers, husbands, brothers, and sons, working with them in purity and truth for a noble political life for the country's wealth. Not for a man's place do we ask, but for the fullness of women's (*'The Woman's Suffrage Question', 1891, p. 9*)

In other words, Lee's struggles were what Freire described as "creating a new situation, one which makes possible the pursuit of a fuller humanity" (Freire, 1978, p. 21).

Discourse

Women of the WCTU did not cast off their faith, but instead were led to re-examine it and redirect it into radical work. Lee contended that "God made man and woman equal – see Genesis, Ch. 1, verses 27-28 – and gave those [women] equal powers to rule the earth. The stronger half had, therefore, unjustly defrauded the weaker, and should make restitution" (*'The woman's suffrage question', 1891, p. 9*). Freire argued that "the oppressed were not unaware that they were downtrodden. Their perception of themselves as oppressed was impaired by their submersion in the reality of oppression" (Freire, 1978, p. 19). Lee questioned existing interpretations of the Bible while continuing to hold a literal reading of Scripture in the evangelical sense. She announced that the Bible supported that "women take part in the making of the laws which govern the whole people" (*South Australian Chronicle, 1894, p. 24*). Freire identified that people "will not gain liberation by chance, but through the praxis of their quest for it, through their recognition to fight for it" (Freire, 1978, p.19). Lee acknowledged that "Ten years ago it would have been difficult to speak about women in the church; there were many men who knew only one text, 'let you women keep silence in the church'" (*Women's Franchise League, 21 April 1900*).

Through her story telling ability, she was able to cite examples from the Bible such as Anna, the woman of Samaria, and Mary Magdalene to normalise women's leadership. She also did this through her observable presence and leadership. In Ballarat for example, *The Western Mail* reported that "Mrs Harrison Lee conducted divine service at the Baptist Church and in the evening at Trinity Congregational Church on franchise and temperance" (*'Arrival of Mrs Harrison Lee', 1900, p. 39*).

Discussion

The life experience of Lee gave her the qualifications to speak out against injustices and promote suffrage for women. Growing up in Daylesford, Footscray and then Enochs Point, Lee witnessed people suffering from disappointment, loneliness, poverty, and alcoholism. As a committed evangelical Christian, Lee became committed to activism. Her marriage and subsequent move to Footscray and exposure to the WCTU further ignited her desire to work for a more just society. Through public and adult education, she helped her audience understand why they were learning the ways of politics and how the franchise would be transformative. Immediate relevance to women and children's economic and physical safety was emphasised in Lee's public speeches and writings. Through Lee's leadership, she was able to mobilise women and supporters of the suffrage cause through the network and support of the WCTU, which had a long history of community-based activism. The directive by the leader of the American WCTU to "do everything" also ignited the response to change laws. The transnational nature of the organisation fuelled Lee's confidence that she was working in a united front with other sisters. However, Lee's adult education was not inclusive and did not communicate the suffrage message to Australia's Indigenous or non-Anglo-Celtic women.

Drawing on Canadian women's experiences, Jill Vickers argued that pedagogical theorists should chart women's different modes of 'doing politics', noting especially women's participation in community-based groups and organisations where an 'amateur tradition' of politics flourished. She argued that:

For the first generation of women's citizens, it was the collective power of feminist consciousness-raising through mass organisations such as the WCTU, that constituted the important forms of political power, for it was broad social reform, not careers for aspiring women politicians, that were their primary goal (Vickers, 1989, p. 21).

Lee's experience endorses Vickers' observation, which highlights her consciousness-raising; but it also went beyond the boundaries that Vickers suggests, to informal places such as homes, church halls, the outdoors, or formal environments such as audiences with politicians or

meetings with other suffrage groups.

Conclusion

Adult and public pedagogy were integral to Lee's campaign to achieve suffrage for Victorian women in 1891 (Sandlin, Schulz & Burdick, 2010, p. 130). The place of education was the front veranda of homes, town halls or WCTU meetings and conferences. It was these places where Lee had to convince her audience of the importance of democratic participation to properly fulfil their role as women and citizens. It was in this environment that she pontificated that women and children would be protected and families would prosper. Lee's upbringing and influence of the wave of evangelical faith gave her the confidence and licence to speak publicly to diverse audiences. Lee's materials of education were tracts, pamphlets, newspaper reports, speeches, and her photos. Recent scholarship on adult and public pedagogy has provided significant new ways to interrogate Lee and nineteenth-century women's activism.

ORCID ID 0000-0001-5601-678X

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About the author

Jennifer Caligari is a secondary school teacher and a casual academic in the School of Education at Deakin University.

Contact details

Email: j.caligari@deakin.edu.au