

**The “Gateway to Adventure”: Women, Urban Space and Moral Purity in
Liverpool c. 1908-c. 1957**

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**Samantha Caslin-Bell
School of Arts, Languages and Cultures**

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Abbreviations

| | |
|-----|----------------------------------|
| LRO | Liverpool Record Office |
| LUA | Liverpool University Archives |
| LVA | Liverpool Vigilance Association |
| TNA | The National Archives |
| WL | Women's Library |
| WPP | Women Police Patrols (Liverpool) |

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Abstract

The “Gateway to Adventure”: Women, Urban Space and Moral Purity in Liverpool c. 1908-c. 1957

This thesis examines the regulation of women in public space in Liverpool between 1908 and 1957. It considers the complex relationship between the laws used to police solicitation, governmental debate about female prostitution and local purity campaigners’ concerns with the moral vulnerability of young, working-class, urban women. It is argued that the ways in which prostitution was understood and managed had an impact upon all women’s access to and use of public space, together with wider definitions of female morality and immorality. The thesis adds to historical understandings about the implications of prostitution regulation in the twentieth century, by moving away from London-focused histories to offer a detailed analysis of the ways in which national debates about vice were taken up at local level and with what consequences.

I begin by exploring the problems with policing prostitution in the early-twentieth century and argue that increasing concern about the difficulty in differentiating prostitutes from ‘ordinary’ women provoked anxiety amongst law makers and government officials alike. It is argued that the debates canvassed by the 1927 Macmillan Committee indicate the degree to which moral codes about female sexuality informed official approaches to prostitution. The thesis considers the implications of these broad debates in Liverpool. Focusing on the work of the Liverpool Vigilance Association (LVA), it is proposed that fears about the moral threat of prostitution fuelled the organisation’s belief in the necessity of preventative patrol work centred on the moral surveillance of young, working-class women.

This thesis shows that in interwar Liverpool, women’s movements were circumscribed first and foremost by their gender. Traditional, nineteenth-century ideas about women’s place within the domestic sphere created a sense among local purity campaigners that female morality was being threatened by women’s visibility in urban spaces. Other aspects of social status, such as class, race and employment experiences, heightened the interest of the LVA in targeting distinctive groups of women. The thesis demonstrates that in their efforts to regulate women’s movements through the city of Liverpool, local purists singled-out working-class and immigrant (especially Irish) women, as they believed them to be the most susceptible to corruption.

This thesis draws on a wide range of archival sources, especially Home Office Records relating to the Public Places (Order) Bill and the establishment of the 1927 Macmillan Committee, as well as the LVA archive, in order to show how national and local policies on prostitution were both interdependent and distinct.

Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in this thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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Introduction

WORK AT THE LIVERPOOL LANDING STAGE & LIME STREET STATION

Here our workers are on duty, wearing the Badge of the Association, at six o'clock every morning to meet the Irish boats and Holyhead train, and are privileged by the Shipping and Railway Companies to interview the girls travelling and render help and service to all in need. The Atlantic Liners and special steamers from all parts are met in the same way. Night and day, Sunday and weekday, without any intermission, this godly work is carried on. Girls seeking situations, girls passing through to foreign parts, girls decoyed under false pretences are met, advised, helped and encouraged; should they be in want they are cared for and housed, and when occasion arises they are taken from the hands of the enemy and saved.¹

In 1916 the Liverpool branch of the National Vigilance Association, the LVA, proudly informed readers of its Annual Report of the “godly work” carried out by the organisation. Maintaining watches over the city’s main transport stations – the landing stage at the docks and Lime Street train station – its report noted that the Association’s workers were on hand to investigate the circumstances of women as they arrived in Liverpool. The LVA had conducted this work since 1908, when the Association was established. Acting with the agreement of officials from the shipping and railway companies, the organisation received recognition from both

¹ LVA Annual Report 1916, Unpublished, LRO M326 VIG/3 Box 2, p. 2.

officials and members of the public as an authority on the protection of female travellers. The LVA insisted that their presence at the docks and the city's main train station was essential; women travelling alone, especially young, working-class women, were perceived to be morally vulnerable and thus in need of guidance. LVA ladies who patrolled these areas of the city considered themselves to be respectable and, unlike the young women that they helped, able to negotiate Liverpool's streets without succumbing to immorality. The Association explained that it had a "duty" to protect women from the "enemy," from the white slave traffickers, criminals and immoral men and women who would corrupt and exploit the girls that the LVA "saved."

Despite this language, the LVA was not a 'rescue' organisation. The majority of the Association's work involved preventing girls from ever falling into immoral hands, rather than saving girls who had already been "taken." Preventative patrol work formed the main part of the LVA's strategy for maintaining the morality of young, female travellers. For purity campaigners like the LVA, urban spaces were full of moral dangers and temptations that they could not trust young, working-class women to avoid. This thesis will show how these purity ideas about urban moral danger on the streets of Liverpool were part of wider concerns about female morality in urban space during the early- and mid-twentieth century. Methods of social regulation, from legal sanction to moral surveillance and intervention on the part of 'respectable' women, were used to safeguard the virtue of young, working-class and immigrant women – groups considered to be especially at risk of corruption. I argue that these tactics of control were framed and, in part,

driven by national debates about the condition of the streets and the effect that female prostitution was having upon urban life.² Consequently, the thesis does not start with the story of the LVA. Instead I examine in detail state-level discussions about the use of the law to control prostitution. I highlight the extent to which the legal status of the common prostitute reflected national concerns about female morality in general. I argue that it is important to situate the regional work of the LVA within this context because it shows how national debates about the regulation of prostitution were played out at the local level, resulting in the moral surveillance of all women in public space.

As will be evident in the first chapter, prostitution is not easily defined, and the task of singling out acts labelled as prostitution for legal control was not straightforward for politicians and policy makers. This work does not seek to speak for or recover the subjectivity of the prostitute; rather I extrapolate the ways in which the law and systems of informal regulation have sought to create prostitution as a moral and social other and with what consequences. I offer a reading of the prostitute as a constructed subject rather than an objective, *a priori* agent whom law makers and regulators merely intervened to control.³ I work from the assumption that the ways in which prostitution has been defined and understood are products of their deep social and historical contexts. Certainly, acts labelled as prostitution have

² This thesis examines female prostitution rather than male prostitution. Evidence of men being defined as prostitutes for selling sexual services to women is relatively scarce, as the issue did not provoke nearly as much interest from law makers or public moralists. It was more commonly assumed that women were responsible for the selling of sex. At the same time, although there was concern about homosexual prostitution between men, the social and moral concerns associated with this should be considered on their own terms, as all sexual relationships between men were illegal during the time period covered in this work.

³ Carol Smart also advocates this poststructuralist approach to the relationship between the subject and the law in her work *Law, Crime and Sexuality: Essays in Feminism* (London: Sage, 1995), 8.

been a feature of various legal and moral codes across the world for centuries. Yet to read all acts labelled in this way as equivalent or similarly transgressive is to ignore the complex legal, political and cultural debates and moral anxieties that surround those acts and their regulation.

The only instance in which we may disregard prostitution's cultural and historical context is when noting that a society's anxieties about it and responses to it reveal a significant amount about the moral codes applied to all women within that society. Dominant ideas about the morality of sexual conduct, sexual transgression and appropriate or 'normal' gender roles have all influenced the ways in which prostitution has been defined and regulated at any one time. Writing specifically about legal regulation, Carol Smart has argued that the law creates prostitution and utilises it as a "normalising discourse" with the power to regulate and check deviant female behaviour.⁴ Although the legal regulation of prostitution may appear to be an issue specific to only those women labelled as such, it actually draws upon discourses and cultural understandings about acceptable female behaviour and has wider consequences for women more generally. As Smart has written, when prostitutes are spoken of "so disparagingly" these "remarks are...meant for all women" as a "coded warning (to remain decent, monogamous or married) or they reflect a simple misogyny which does not in any case distinguish between women."⁵ As such, a detailed exploration of the legal and social status of prostitution can tell the historian much about the social construction of gender and

⁴ *Ibid.*, 49. Indeed, Smart has argued that the law has had a role to play in defining not just the prostitute but female identities in general. Carol Smart, 'Law's Power, the Sexed Body, and Feminist Discourse,' *Journal of Law and Society*, 17, 2 (1990): 204.

⁵ Smart, *Law, Crime and Sexuality*, 57.

the extent to which women in general are morally regulated by official and unofficial institutional systems.

Working at the boundaries of the social and the political, Philippa Levine has argued that the study of prostitution has the potential to “repoliticise” social history.⁶ For Levine, social history has tended to preoccupy itself with, on the one hand, micro-studies of ever smaller “communities,” and, on the other hand, the “totalising tendencies of generalised theses.”⁷ She proposes that, if this dichotomy is to be overcome there must be an amalgamation of “the general observations and the crucial case studies.”⁸ With the aim of integrating the politics of the macro with the experience of the micro, Levine advocates that localised community experiences be understood in relation to broader social systems and practices.⁹ As an area of historical investigation, prostitution forces historians to address these problems. Though the study of prostitution deals with a relatively small, specific community (those defined as prostitutes), it has the power to hold a mirror up to “the female condition in any number of patriarchally-organised social settings.”¹⁰ With this in mind, the thesis opens by exploring the legal and social status of the prostitute in England and Wales during the early part of the twentieth century.¹¹ In particular, I examine the context and proceedings of the Macmillan Committee, set up in 1927 to investigate the efficacy of the solicitation laws used to control prostitution. I argue

⁶ Philippa Levine, ‘Rough usage: prostitution, law and the social historian’, in Adrian Wilson (ed.) *Rethinking Social History: English Society 1570-1920 and its Interpretation* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1993), 268.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ When looking at the national picture, this thesis focuses on England and Wales rather than the whole of Britain as the solicitation laws only applied in these countries. Scotland and Northern Ireland had their own legal regulations in place to combat prostitution.

that a key factor in the Committee's creation was the fact that distinctions between prostitute women and supposedly 'ordinary' women were being rendered more and more unstable by changes in women's lifestyles. Implicit within the legal and social definitions of the prostitute were messages about the fact that women's time spent in public space was detrimental to their morality. I will show that official difficulties in defining, identifying and regulating female prostitutes during the interwar period led to fears about how well these messages were being conveyed.

From that national context, I move to examine the impact of these broad legal and political debates in a local urban setting, by focusing on the activities of social purity campaigners in Liverpool. This thesis recognises and addresses the assertion made by Lesley Hall that there is a distinct lack of regionally-focused historical research on sexuality.¹² Yet it does so in a way that reveals how the local and the national were complexly interrelated. The local examination of prostitution and female morality that I offer here highlights the relationship between the legal and cultural spheres of prostitution control and the production of regulatory discourses and practices governing all women's sexual morality on the ground. I put forward an approach that seeks to bring together the discourses and practices of the national with the experience of the local. What I offer is a response to Levine's conception of a politicised social history.

That is not to say that the local picture simply represents a smaller scale version of what was happening nationally. An examination of female morality and its social control in early- and mid-twentieth-century Liverpool indicates that the

¹² Lesley A. Hall, *Sex, Gender and Social Change in Britain since 1880* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 8.

impact of national debates and anxieties were played out in ways that were locally nuanced. Perceptions of the city as a site of transience and as a magnet for the young, the Irish and the unemployed all undoubtedly influenced the ways in which the streets of Liverpool were seen to be heavily gendered. Consequently, my work heeds Graeme Milne's assertion that "we should make some effort to study the 'port city', rather than just the 'port' or the 'city.'"¹³ I argue that Liverpool's role as a gateway to other parts of Britain clearly influenced understandings advanced by local purity campaigners about the fragility of urban morality. Concentrating in particular on the work of the Liverpool Vigilance Association and their interaction with other local agencies such as Liverpool Women Police Patrols and purity associations around the country, I argue that repeated moral panics about the corrosive effects of urban life upon female morality persisted in Liverpool throughout the interwar years and even after the Second World War. I will show how marginalised groups of women, such as the Irish and sections of the urban working-class, were singled out by local purity workers because they believed that these women were most susceptible to immoral lifestyles.

By moving from national concerns to concentrate on Liverpool, this thesis provides a point of comparison with histories of sexuality and gender that have used

¹³ Graeme J. Milne, 'Maritime Liverpool,' in John Belchem (ed.), *Liverpool 800: Culture, Character and History* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006), 257.

London to address nationally relevant social and sexual questions.¹⁴ In her history of women's political organisations on Merseyside, Krista Cowman has noted that academic histories of Liverpool are still comparatively "scarce" and her suggestion that women's political history in the city has received little attention can be applied to the history of local women more generally.¹⁵ I argue that Liverpool makes an appropriate case study for a history focused on women's engagement with urban space and strategies of moral surveillance, not least because of the city's fluctuating status both in the national economy and in the national social imagination.

Consistently imagined as a city struggling to meet the middle-class standards of respectability and civility befitting its national significance, the questionable moral status of Liverpool was an ever present issue in wider public debate about its very real social problems.

Moreover, throughout this work I argue that there were strong continuities between nineteenth- and twentieth-century moral anxieties and campaigns about female morality, and that these continuities were in evidence both locally and nationally. The dominant cultural discourses that have framed gender relations for over a century testify to the endurance of moral codes developed, and contested, during the Victorian era. Most notably, Michel Foucault's thesis – dispelling the

¹⁴ See, for example, Tony Henderson, *Disorderly Women in Eighteenth-Century London: Prostitution and Control in the Metropolis, 1730-1830* (London: Longman, 1999); Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957* (London: Chicago University Press, 2006); Seth Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London*, (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004); Frank Mort, 'Mapping Sexual London: The Wolfenden Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution 1954-57,' *New Formations: Sexual Geographies* (1999) 37: 92-113; Stefan Slater, 'Containment: Managing Street Prostitution in London, 1918-1959,' *Journal of British Studies*, 49, 2 (2010): 332-357; Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narrative of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (London: Virago Press, 1992); Judith R. Walkowitz, 'Going Public: Shopping, Street Harassment, and Streetwalking in Late Victorian London,' *Representations*, 62 (1998): 1-30.

¹⁵ Krista Cowman, "*Mrs Brown is a Man and a Brother!*": *Women in Merseyside's Political Organisations 1890-1920* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004), 14.

notion of the sexually repressed Victorian – has led to an increased recognition among historians of the strategic importance of nineteenth-century official discourses of sexuality and morality and the positions of power and dominance that they have tended to support.¹⁶ Following Foucault in this respect, I argue that, at the national level, the legal system and, at the local level, unofficial modes of social control from social purists, promoted strategies of surveillance which allowed traditional understandings of gender and morality to persist well into the twentieth century. In this way, I provide a counterpoint to the notion that there was an irreparable dissonance between the years prior to 1914 and those after the war ended in 1918. For example, Samuel Hynes' work has suggested that the twentieth century did not begin in any cultural or imagined sense until almost two decades into its actual commencement.¹⁷ Certainly, I will show that there were significant changes in women's lifestyles from the interwar period onwards. But I want to suggest that these social and cultural changes were often balanced by more longstanding moral anxieties and by appeals to traditional gender ideologies.¹⁸

One of the key points of continuity between the nineteenth century and the early- and mid-twentieth century was the continuation of upper- and middle-class

¹⁶ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: The Will to Knowledge* (London: Penguin, 1998 [1978]). See also Jeffrey Weeks, 'Remembering Foucault,' *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 14, 1/2 (2005): 186-201.

¹⁷ Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (Bodley Head: London, 1990).

¹⁸ This interpretation of the broad continuities between the Victorian era and the twentieth century is also supported by Lesley Hall, who has gone as far as to argue that such was the influence of late-nineteenth-century understandings about gender and sexuality that "a case can be made for 'a long Victorian era' in Britain, which did not finally dissipate until around 1960." Lesley A. Hall, *Sex, Gender and Social Change in Britain since 1880* (Macmillan Press: London, 2000), p. 10.

fears about the morality of the lower classes.¹⁹ Throughout the Victorian period, issues such as obscenity and promiscuity were used as a means of targeting those who were believed to pose the most significant threat to the nation's social order. Lucy Bland has noted that Victorian feminist concerns with social purity often centred on anxieties about the unruliness of working-class culture.²⁰ Social purists sought to intervene in working-class lives so that they could pass on the virtues of middle-class moral respectability to those of a lower social status.²¹ The idea that the working class could set their own moral codes of respectability was anathema to the majority of Victorian purists. Keen to take the lowest strata of society in hand, the efforts of Victorian middle- and upper-class philanthropists to alleviate the condition of the poor was, in part at least, a response to elite fears that the unrest felt by the working class would ignite in social revolution. Participation in charitable endeavours afforded local elites an opportunity to address these anxieties and bolster the security of their own social position.²² This class prejudice was nonetheless laced with a veneer of social inclusion: a language of approval was deployed in recognition of those members of the working class whose behaviours and practices were deemed to meet with middle-class principles of moral order. The 'respectable' poor were defined against a more threatening social residuum or underclass; a powerful strategy that had significant implications for debates about

¹⁹ For more on the nineteenth-century "tradition" of "social investigation" into the moral and sexual lives of the working class see Peter Gurney, "'Intersex' and 'Dirty Girls': Mass-Observation and Working-Class Sexuality in England in the 1930s," *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 8, 2 (1997): 258.

²⁰ Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast: Feminism, Sex and Morality* (London: Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 2001), 97.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Derek Fraser, *The Evolution of the British Welfare State: A History of Social Policy since the Industrial Revolution*, Third Edition (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 137.

the extent to which it was legitimate or desirable for the law to impinge on the liberties of citizens. As Beverley Skeggs has argued, “[t]o not be respectable is to have little social value or legitimacy.”²³

Notions of civility and respectability had therefore become synonymous with the middle class by the end of the nineteenth century, whilst the lower classes were considered to be a threat to the morally ordered city.²⁴ Specifically, two assumptions underpinned the Victorian idea that the lower classes challenged the moral order of the city. On the one hand, it was assumed that the environmental effects of poverty, such as living in overcrowded conditions, had a corrupting influence on working-class behaviour. On the other hand, it was supposed that working-class culture simply could not be reconciled with moral refinement. The strength of the latter assumption was so powerful that during the nineteenth century Britain’s cities began to build sources of respectable middle-class amusement, such as parks, libraries and museums, in the hope that the working classes might spurn their own more “riotous entertainments” in pursuit of cultural and intellectual betterment.²⁵ Both of these assumptions were used by individuals and organisations to argue that strategies of moral and social regulation were appropriate and even necessary responses to poverty. As sociologist Roy Coleman has noted in his work on surveillance in modern Liverpool, the belief that the working class posed a danger to modern “urban ideals” was mobilised in the nineteenth century by

²³ Beverley Skeggs, *Formations of Class and Gender* (London: Sage, 1997), 3.

²⁴ The Victorian concept of social order was tied to the condition of the streets. Order and peace on the streets were interpreted as signs of “the urbanity of the citizens,” while disorder on the streets was thought to threaten the very notion of “civilisation.” Andy Croll, ‘Street Disorder, Surveillance and Shame: Regulating behaviour in the public spaces of the late Victorian British town,’ *Social History*, 24, 3 (1999): 252.

²⁵ Paula Bartley, *Prostitution: Prevention and Reform in England, 1860-1914* (London: Routledge, 2000), 55.

“powerful interest groups and professionals [seeking] to control, regulate or influence urban life generally and the urban poor in particular.”²⁶ In this regard, the city became the key site of middle- and upper-class attempts to exert authority over the lower classes.

Such was the extent of these strategies of social control, they were not confined to official agencies such as the law. This thesis will argue that unofficial forms of regulation were just as far reaching and significant as official sanctions. For example, by the end of the nineteenth century the work of the police in promoting order on Liverpool’s streets was supplemented by non-official organisations, especially the work of the National Vigilance Association (NVA).²⁷ Part of the Victorian purity movement, the NVA was a London-based body formed in response to fears about the spread of vice. Tactically, the organisation campaigned in favour of policies that aimed to regulate sexuality and they undertook prevention and rescue work in an effort to maintain public morality.²⁸ Significant during the late-nineteenth century, the organisation and their moral politics endured well into the twentieth. That the NVA was able to raise sufficient public interest in Liverpool to form a local branch, the LVA, in 1908 is testament to their ongoing influence.

At the local level, the earlier connections between poverty and immorality directly informed the ways in which many middle-class Liverpoolians understood the economic and social development of their city. The idea that the poor were

²⁶ Roy Coleman, *Reclaiming the Streets: Surveillance, social control and the city* (Cullompton: Willan Publishing, 2004), 90.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 98.

²⁸ Frank Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities: Medico-Moral Politics in England since 1830*, Second Edition (London: Routledge, 2000), 81-82.

especially vulnerable to immorality was so locally ingrained by the mid-twentieth century that it was defined as a feature of Liverpool's history. In 1944 local headmaster Charles H. Lamb and his history master colleague, Eric Smallpage, proposed in their book *The Story of Liverpool*, that nineteenth-century Liverpool:

had acquired a bad name all over the country. The rise of the town had been so rapid that its leading men had failed to keep up with the times, and regulations which had been good enough for a comparatively small and quiet borough were not nearly numerous or strong enough for a large seaport with a very mixed population.²⁹

In particular, Lamb and Smallpage highlighted “public houses and beer shops” as tarnishing the character of the city, with “daily and nightly scenes of wholesale drunkenness and of...riotous disorder” taking hold on the city's streets.³⁰ They suggested anecdotally that conditions were “[s]o bad” that when the “drinking dens” closed during the hours of Sunday service, “Sabbath-keepers” avoided travelling to church on foot because of the “impossibility of walking with any sort of decency along the pavement.”³¹ In contrasting the debauchery of the city's streets with the decorum of church-goers, Lamb and Smallpage thus created a sense of Liverpool's nineteenth-century street culture as antithetical to urban civility. Although they suggested that the establishment of the city's police force, formed in 1836, went some way towards improving the condition of the streets, the emphasis that these

²⁹ Charles L. Lamb and Eric Smallpage, *The Story of Liverpool* (Liverpool: C.L. Lamb, 1944), 59.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

writers placed upon urban unrest after this date suggested an inherent reciprocity between urban poverty and moral decay.³²

Positing a direct link between the degraded urban environment and criminality/delinquency, these school teachers considered their city's past through the lens of anxiety about the ill effects of city-living on the morality of the poor. Lamb and Smallpage's assertion that "there was bound to be a definitely bad element among the floating population of a large port" made clear the continuity between Victorian anxieties about the city's immoral populations and these historians' own ideas about contemporary Liverpool.³³ The assuredness of their correlation between the city's urban function and its morality indicates that associations between transient populations and 'bad' populations had become so ingrained in cultural understandings of port life as to appear incontrovertible to these mid-twentieth-century writers.

Lamb and Smallpage's account provides more than just a snapshot of the way Victorian Liverpool was imagined in the middle years of the twentieth century; it also provides a subtle but significant indication of the ways in which nineteenth-century anxieties about the city found their way into perceptions of Liverpool and its social problems thereafter. This thesis will show that many twentieth-century concerns expressed about the city, and its female inhabitants in particular, represented a re-articulation or continuation of ideas that were instituted almost a century before. To a large extent, this re-articulation was possible because of the

³² For more on the establishment of Liverpool's police see Coleman, *Reclaiming the Streets*, 97.

³³ Lamb and Smallpage, *The Story of Liverpool*, 64.

dual historical narratives of industrial development and social immorality that were regularly applied to the city.³⁴

Thirty-seven years before Lamb and Smallpage published their modest textbook, Ramsey Muir's more notable history of Liverpool had exhibited a similar concern with the city's immoral heritage. Muir's 1907 account of Liverpool's streets actually had much in common with that outlined by Lamb and Smallpage and it is reasonable to assume that the mid-twentieth century authors drew from Muir's earlier vision when weaving their own images of Liverpool's past.³⁵ Both histories related the city's experiences of drunkenness and licentiousness to the extreme poverty experienced by large sections of its population; equally both histories were written from a socio-political standpoint that readily conflated poverty and immorality. Coleman has argued that Muir's history of Liverpool actually "established a political-moral precedent," which had continuing modern relevance in "official formulations around the relationship between 'the masses', social control and the city centre of Liverpool."³⁶ Certainly, Lamb and Smallpage's utilisation of many of Muir's tropes about Liverpool's urban social order reveals the extent to which the immoral identity attributed to Victorian Liverpool continued to be culturally significant in more modern understandings of city life. By relaying similar concerns about Liverpool's impoverished communities and the extent of

³⁴ Colin Pooley has argued that Liverpool has been considered a "problem city" for almost two centuries because of its associations with poverty and immorality. See Colin G. Pooley, 'Living in Liverpool: The Modern City,' in John Belchem (ed.), *Liverpool 800: Culture, Character and History* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006), 173.

³⁵ See Coleman for brief account of Ramsey Muir's *A History of Liverpool* (Liverpool: Williams & Northgate, 1907); *Reclaiming the Streets*, 95.

³⁶ Coleman, *Reclaiming the Streets*, 95.

urban immorality, these historians reinforced and perpetuated the Victorian attitudes towards social control and urban experience that they recorded.

However, whilst it is clear that nineteenth-century moral codes and ideologies had lasting effects, the thesis does not suggest that the regulation of women in public space in twentieth-century Liverpool simply replicated Victorian patterns and politics of surveillance. Indeed, Jeffrey Weeks has urged caution in stating the similarities between nineteenth- and twentieth-century systems of sexuality. He argues that whilst the interwar period “inherited...nineteenth-century domestic and familial ideologies” as organisational “frameworks,” there were nonetheless “significant changes within the forms of the ideologies.”³⁷ I argue that gendered notions of public space and moral order instituted during the Victorian period continued to influence twentieth-century approaches to and definitions of female morality. But I also want to make clear that the way these ideas were articulated and their impact upon patterns of social control began to shift in the first decades of the twentieth century.

Changes in young women’s lifestyles, fears about a rise in promiscuity amongst the nation’s youth and a perceived rise in ‘amateur’ prostitution all meant that although Victorian gender ideologies were still very much in existence, they were perceived by social purists and many government officials and law makers to

³⁷ Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society: The regulation of society since 1800*, Second Edition (Longman: London, 1989), 201.

be under threat.³⁸ Up to this point, ideal notions of femininity were defined in direct opposition to the prostitute.³⁹ The Victorian separation of the male and female realms into public and private spheres had created a framework that positioned the respectable woman in contradistinction to street women, who were defined as dangerous and transgressive.⁴⁰ Yet by the early-twentieth century the gendered ideal of public and private spheres was perceived to be under threat.

Women's presence, not just within the official definitions of the public sphere, but also in real public spaces meant that their relationship to urban life was changing. Perceptions of urban space as sites of moral disorder focused heavily on women's use of such environments. Nationally, it was argued that the police were struggling to tackle prostitution because they claimed they could no longer automatically assume that the women they saw on the streets were immoral.⁴¹ This prompted anxieties about the difficulties in controlling prostitution, fears which had significant implications for all women's use of public space. James Donald has argued that the modern experience of cities and urban space has been "profoundly

³⁸ See Philippa Levine on promiscuity in her "Walking the Streets in a Way no Decent Woman Should": Women Police in World War I,' *Journal of Modern History*, 66 (1994): 34-78. See also Susan Kingsley Kent, who has argued that the First World War and its impact on women's lifestyles challenged ongoing Victorian gender ideals: Susan Kingsley Kent, *Gender and Power in Britain, 1640-1990* (London: Routledge, 1999), 277.

³⁹ See Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narrative of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (London: Virago Press, 1992), 21.

⁴⁰ Caroline Arni and Claudia Honegger have argued that the separation of the public and private spheres, with women being assigned to the domestic sphere, has its origins before the Victorian period. They have suggested that domestic role afforded to women came amid a "[f]ear of disintegration" following the social and intellectual changes wrought by the French Revolution. It was in the aftermath of this that they suggest a tiered understanding of social differentiation was produced, an understanding that "other classical sociologists would also feel bound by, decades later." See Caroline Arni and Claudia Honegger, 'The Modernity of Women: Jenny P. d'Hericourt's Contribution to Social Theory (1809-1875),' *Journal of Classical Sociology*, 8, 1 (2008): 60. However, though the distinction between the public and private spheres may have appeared prior to the Victorian period, what I am interested in examining here are the continuities between the way Victorian social purists understood this distinction and the way it was understood later, in the twentieth century.

⁴¹ This argument will be explored in detail in Chapter One.

shaped by the immaterial city of word, image, and myth.”⁴² He has suggested that individuals and social groups “learn” how to act in urban space by taking on board these immaterial aspects of the city, in “mediated pedagogies of urban life.”⁴³ I propose here that the law’s treatment of female sexuality is one such mechanism for instructing women in the ways of experiencing the city. The law defines what is right and wrong; it enacts a moral code and establishes a relationship between state and citizen, via a conceptual disassociation of the public and private realms.⁴⁴

In Liverpool, discourses and practices of social regulation drew their impetus from nationally significant institutions, especially law and government policy. Broad ideas about the need to protect female morality from the corrupting influences of urban life and about the need to maintain distinctions between the public and private spheres were shaped by local concerns. The thesis considers the social purity movement in Liverpool through the work of the LVA. I focus on this organisation because of its links to earlier purity groups (through its parent organisation, the NVA) and its explicit interest in the effects of the urban environment on female morality. The organisation’s work indicates the extent to which national debates about the need to control prostitution were applied locally. The LVA’s annual records detail the movements of women around the city and also the migration habits of women entering and leaving Liverpool. The LVA’s annual reports provide close-up case studies of the sort of work that the organisation was

⁴² James Donald, ‘The Immaterial City: Representation, Imagination, and Media Technologies,’ in Gary Bridge and Sophie Watson (eds.), *A Companion to the City*, Blackwell Publishing: Oxford, 2003), 47.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ See Matt Cook, ‘Law,’ in H.G. Cocks and Matt Houlbrook (eds.), *The Modern History of Sexuality* (Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke, 2006), 64.

involved with on the streets. I use these case studies to highlight women who the LVA perceived to be most vulnerable to moral corruption; namely young, working-class and Irish girls. I explore the LVA's anxieties about women's engagement with the public sphere via their treatment of travel, consumerism and employment. I draw on a large collection of local newspaper cuttings kept in the LVA's archives in order to show how the organisation was set up, the rationale for its creation and the messages the organisation disseminated about its work.

In highlighting national debates about female morality, I focus initially on the work of the 1927 Departmental Committee on Street Offences, known as the Macmillan Committee. In Chapter One, I use Home Office records of the proceedings of the Committee to examine how it came to be created and the moral anxieties that influenced its formation. The chapter opens by exploring the cultural significance of the prostitute as an 'other.' I draw on the work of historians Julia Laite, Susan Kingsley Kent and Philippa Levine to show that this process of othering was being undermined by changes in women's lifestyles during the interwar period, and I go on to consider the effects of these changes on the policing of prostitution. Using the official police statistics for Liverpool, I argue that the police's efforts to arrest prostitutes depended upon various factors, ranging from the fluctuating degree of influence that local purists had over police forces, to the police's own anxieties about the difficulties of enforcing the solicitation laws following a number of high-profile cases. Analysing the detailed evidence given to the Macmillan Committee by London- and Liverpool-based law-enforcement officers and civil representatives, I

argue that the Committee's efforts to examine prostitution in purely legal terms were unsuccessful. Moral discourses pervaded official understandings about solicitation and shaped the parameters of the debate on what should be done about the laws governing prostitution.

In Chapter Two I explore the significance of these moral discourses on the ground, by examining the work of civil organisations in Liverpool. I examine the aims and operation of the LVA and compare their approach with a similar organisation in the city, the Women Police Patrols (WPP). The chapter highlights the extent to which nineteenth-century ideas about the moral vulnerability of working-class women remained strong during the interwar years. The WPP attempted to integrate these inherited discourses within their own campaigns to professionalise the service they offered, whilst the LVA used similar ideas to argue for the usefulness of their own civil work on the streets. The chapter shows how the work of these organisations, and the LVA in particular, led to the increased surveillance of young working-class women in Liverpool's public spaces. I indicate that street patrolling was used in early- and mid-twentieth-century Liverpool as a means of maintaining female morality on the streets.

One of the key concerns about female use of public space in Liverpool was the supposed threat of women being forced into prostitution by criminal gangs. Chapter Three argues that fears about white slavery were important in both the formation and later activities of the LVA. I suggest that though white slavery was not a particularly significant part of the LVA's day-to-day work, nonetheless the Association prioritised this issue within public debate in order to promote its

influence. In particular, I argue that the LVA used the threat of white slavery to make powerful associations between prostitution and the moral vulnerability of women frequenting the city's streets.

The issues addressed in Chapter Four highlight one of the central themes of this thesis; that nationally significant anxieties about the corrupting influence of urban space and the need to protect female morality were applied in their own distinctive ways in local settings. I show how Liverpool's geographical positioning and its role as a port meant that the LVA became particularly concerned about the moral vulnerability of Irish girls arriving in the city. The chapter shows how Irish girls became a particular cause for concern because they were assumed to be innocent and naive. Many of the girls who travelled to Liverpool from Ireland, usually in search of work, were assumed to be from rural backgrounds. Their position within the LVA's understandings of innocence and immorality reveals that the organisation believed urban space to have a corrupting influence on these young women. In the chapter I argue that the LVA had a complex response to the assumed innocence of these girls, with the supposed need to protect them from corruption directly influencing the LVA's treatment of female Irish immigrants.

In Chapter Five, I explore how the local strategies of employment promoted by the LVA were constructed by appeals to traditional feminine ideals. The organisation recognised the necessity for female employment, where young women and their families relied upon them being able to bring in an income. As a result, the LVA took a pragmatic approach to working women, reasoning that if they needed to work outside the home then they should aim to find jobs that would not have a

detrimental effect upon their morality. Using case studies from the LVA's Annual Reports, I argue that the employment opportunities promoted by the organisation were often out of step with the ambitions of the girls that they aimed to assist. It will be shown that the LVA frequently directed young women towards jobs in domestic service, thus keeping them within the confines of the traditional private sphere.

Chapter Six examines the prevalence in the postwar years of earlier purity discourses about the need to control prostitution and female sexuality more generally. Focusing on the Departmental Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution (the Wolfenden Committee), convened in 1954, I explore in detail the relationship between national debates and local concerns with regard to prostitution. Using evidence submitted to the Committee by the Chief Constable of Liverpool, I aim to show how earlier purity discourses and strategies of moral surveillance were taken up by official agencies in the years after the Second World War. I argue that though the purity movement itself went into decline during these years, the impact of its ideas did not.

In my conclusions I argue that this thesis shows how the regulation of prostitution has been tied to official and unofficial ideas about female sexuality, urban space and social order. Moreover, I propose that these ideas can be traced back to the late-nineteenth-century purity movement. The regulation of prostitutes based on distinctions between public and private indicates that earlier moral codes about female moral vulnerability in urban spaces have continued to influence policy and practice throughout the twentieth century. So, although purity groups began to

fracture and lose momentum in the latter half of the twentieth century, this thesis shows that historians must not underestimate the lasting influence of their ideas.

Chapter One

Female Sexuality and the Law in Early-Twentieth-Century England

In December 1926 the House of Lords was gathered to discuss, amongst other things, the second reading of a Public Places (Order) Bill calling for a change in the laws dealing with prostitution. Announcing that he was able to “state...the position of the Government,”¹ Lord Desborough told his fellow peers that this was a “subject” that had interested the Home Office and the Home Secretary William Joynson-Hicks “for some considerable time.”² According to Desborough, the Home Secretary was keen to accommodate calls for an inquiry, but the Home Office had been “overworked,” citing the General Strike and disputes with those in the mining industry as examples of the workload which had had to take precedence.³ Nevertheless, Desborough insisted that the “importance of the matter and the wide divergence of views in different quarters” meant that the Home Secretary had in fact “been considering the question of an inquiry.”⁴

The divergence of opinion that Desborough referred to came from such quarters as the Association for Moral and Social Hygiene (AMSH), the National Vigilance Association (NVA) and key political figures, such as Lord Balfour of Burleigh who had introduced the Bill to the Lords. Indeed, prostitution was considered to be a societal problem of such scope and influence that it was subject to attention at a national level. In particular, the scope and application of the laws

¹ Parliamentary Debates, House of Lords, Thursday 9th December 1926, Official Report, Vol. 65, No. 88, para. 1400, TNA HO45/12663.

² *Ibid.*, para 1401.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, para 1402.

used to police prostitution, the ‘solicitation laws,’ had begun to be questioned from all sides. The first half of this chapter considers the background to this uncertainty about the solicitation laws and the problems that the police had in implementing them. I argue that the central problem with the law was that it was predicated on the notion that the prostitute was an easily identifiable, specific category of female offender, when in fact changes in women’s habits and uses of public space had made applying the law in this manner problematic.

In the second half of this chapter I move on to specifically examine the creation and debates of the Departmental Committee on Street Offences, convened in October 1927 by Home Office to examine the state of prostitution and recommend any changes necessary in the law. Significantly, the Macmillan Committee (as it is referred to throughout, after its chairman Hugh Macmillan) attempted to analyse the merits of various conflicting views on the issue, with one key theme emerging from their discussions: was it fair, apt or necessary to have solicitation laws that applied specifically to women identified as common prostitutes rather than to all persons equally? Using evidence from London and Liverpool based witnesses who gave evidence to the Committee, I will show that officials in both the metropolis and the provinces had significantly gendered moral perceptions about prostitution as an offence. In fact, comparing London and Liverpool sources, I aim to illustrate that, despite what officials might have intended, the task of managing prostitution on the streets was guided more by moral fears and anxieties than by legal notions of public disorder.

By the time the Macmillan Committee met the Home Office had already spent a considerable amount of time listening to and digesting the arguments that were being levelled against the solicitation laws. When Desborough addressed the Lords on the subject of an inquiry, almost a year before the creation of the Macmillan Committee, he already pre-empted any suggestion that the Home Office had not previously conducted an investigation into the matter because it was opposed to changing the law. Desborough told the House of Lords that the Government did not necessarily oppose Balfour's Bill. Instead he carefully stated that "they do not wish to be understood to tie themselves down to the letter of the Bill or perhaps even some of its main provisions as drafted."⁵ Certainly, had the Bill been made law it would have meant making important changes to those who could be charged with solicitation. The Bill called for the repeal of the solicitation laws and the legal category of the common prostitute. In their place it proposed "a simple provision, which substantially cover[ed] the same ground as the existing law, but applie[d] to all persons alike" (rather than just common prostitutes). It also proposed that action could only be taken on complaint of the person "aggrieved" by the solicitation.⁶ It was thought that these changes would bring about greater gender equality in the laws against solicitation and improve the clarity of the laws used to police this particular offence.

In fact there was great concern during the 1920s that the solicitation laws were too complex and too numerous. Miss E. H. Kelly J.P. was a member the 1927 Macmillan Committee. In 1929 she explained that making sense of these laws was

⁵ *Ibid.*, para 1401.

⁶ Public Places (Order) [H.L.] Memorandum, Received by the Home Office 24th November 1926. TNA HO45/12663.

not an easy task for those charged with reviewing their effectiveness: “In approaching our task, we addressed ourselves in the first place to ascertaining the existing state of the law relating to common prostitutes and solicitation...”⁷ She explained that in England and Wales the statute law in regard to these offences consisted of “a series of more or less miscellaneous provisions contained in Acts dealing with a variety of offences” and that these laws were “further complicated by the fact that various powers of subordinate legislation [were] vested in local authorities.”⁸

So what were these “miscellaneous” laws that were used to prosecute prostitutes? The Vagrancy Act, which had been passed in 1824, punished prostitutes who wandered in public in a “riotous or indecent manner” with either a fine or imprisonment, whilst in London the Metropolitan Police Act of 1839 stated that prostitutes soliciting, to the annoyance of passers-by, were to be fined. Elsewhere the Town Police Clauses Act of 1847 meant that solicitation in other parts of England and Wales was punishable by a fine or up to fourteen days imprisonment. Significantly, arrests could be made without warrant under both the Metropolitan Police Act 1839 and the Town Police Clauses Act 1847 by “any constable who [had] seen the offence committed”, giving rise to questions about how objective such laws were⁹. In addition, Kelly noted that the Committee found no reference in any laws to “men who solicit[ed] women for an immoral purpose”¹⁰. The Macmillan Committee that Miss Kelly served on was faced with the task of

⁷ E.H. Kelly, ‘Some notes on the Report of the Street Offences Committee,’ in *The Magistrate: The Bulletin of the Magistrates’ Association*, Supplement 6, June 1929, Preserved in WL 3AMS/B/04/10.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

evaluating these laws and investigating whether an alternative way of dealing with solicitation, such as that outlined in the Public Places (Order) Bill, would be possible.

Building on the work of historians such as Susan Kingsley Kent and Julia Laite, I suggest that, despite being a fixture in debates about gender and sexual morality since at least the Victorian period, the notion that it was possible and necessary to distinguish between prostitute women and ‘ordinary’ women had begun to be challenged in the early part of the twentieth century. Women’s changing use of public space and anxieties about a perceived increase in female promiscuity had steadily eroded the boundary separating respectable and disreputable womanhood. By paying particular attention to the Macmillan Committee, this chapter will show that the legislative debate surrounding prostitution in the 1920s was shaped at least as much by a cultural discourse which cast the prostitute as an other as it was by legal considerations relating to issues such as public order.¹¹ That is to say, any uncertainty about the efficacy, legitimacy and application of the solicitation laws at this time was not prompted by a change in attitudes towards prostitution *per se*. Instead, much of the debate that took place about the solicitation laws was concerned with how appropriate it was to legally define the common prostitute as a distinct category of woman, given her increasing conflation with promiscuous women. As such, this chapter is not about how prevalent prostitution was during the 1920s; I later draw out some of the problems

¹¹ This argument is supported by Elizabeth Clement’s assertion that concerns about promiscuity have been significant in legal definitions of prostitution since the Victorian period. See Elizabeth Clement, ‘Prostitution,’ in H.G. Cocks and Matt Houlbrook (eds.), *The Modern History of Sexuality* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 209.

with using criminal statistics to try to identify such trends. It is argued that the policing of prostitution was subject to the vagaries of contemporary moral anxieties about female sexuality and the deliberations of various social and legal ‘experts’ who were concerned with the regulation of social order.

The chapter analyses the discourses used by Liverpool-based experts in their evidence to the Macmillan Committee, alongside evidence from London witnesses such as the Metropolitan Police Commissioner. It highlights the extent to which moral condemnation of the prostitute as a transgressive ‘other’ and concerns about her links to promiscuity remained central to the thinking of officials across England and Wales. Moreover, I argue that the Committee’s efforts to meet with local figures suggests that the Committee wanted to avoid accusations that they understood prostitution only in philosophical or moral terms, with little knowledge about solicitation as it actually occurred on the streets. However, practical street-level concerns relating to prostitution were in fact sidelined in the Committee’s debate in favour of overarching concerns with female respectability and social order. The Committee’s recommendation to repeal the legal category of the common prostitute did not necessarily mean that they no longer regarded the prostitute as socially and morally unacceptable nor that they avoided considering prostitution to be part of a spectrum of disreputable female behaviour ranging from promiscuity to vice.

Before the recommendations of the Macmillan Committee are discussed, however, it is necessary to examine the social and cultural context which led to the formation of the Committee and to establish the ways in which prostitute women

were discursively and legally set apart from 'ordinary' women. The discursive use of 'the prostitute' as a warning to women about how not to behave was not of course new to the Macmillan Committee, or to the 1920s. If historians are to understand the significance of this cultural trope to the discussions that took place within the Committee then we must first consider how prostitute women came to be cast in the role of 'other' in the years before the Committee set to work.

The Prostitute as Other

During the early- and mid-twentieth century prostitution was subject to considerable moral panic and cultural anxiety. The legal status of the common prostitute as a criminal was largely inferred from her failure to conform to traditional codes about respectable female behaviour; that is to say from her lack of sexual innocence and moral purity. Legally and socially it was therefore significant that the prostitute be understood as a distinct category of individual and as an example to other women of how not to behave. Official efforts to confirm this perception of the prostitute as 'other' had their roots firmly in the Victorian era. Specifically, the Victorian notion that prostitution was predicated upon female disreputability and a man's struggle to control his own sexual urges proved to be key in criminalising such women. For example, in 1871 when a Royal Commission rejected the suggestion that the male clients of prostitutes should equally face criminalisation, it did so famously on the grounds that the prostitute committed an offence "as a matter of gain", whilst her male client was guilty only of an "irregular indulgence of a natural impulse"¹². Consequently, the prostitute was credited with a sense of sexual agency that the

¹² Keith Thomas, 'The Double Standard,' *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 20, 2 (1959): 198.

man, at the mercy of his own biology, was not. If male sexuality was understood to be unruly, then it was to be tamed and tempered by relationships with respectable women who were sexuality reticent. Yet the female prostitute threatened this balance between male and female sexuality, since she supposedly provoked uncontrollable male desires. Similarly, the notorious Contagious Diseases Acts, passed during the 1860s, were applied to garrison and port towns where they were used to combat disease within the armed forces. Under the Acts, women found to be suffering from venereal diseases were subjected to compulsory hospitalisation, while those who refused examination were punished with imprisonment and hard labour.¹³

These Victorian ideas about male and female sexuality and the danger that the prostitute presented to social order persisted into the twentieth century. During the First World War the government took legislative action aimed at maintaining a clear boundary between respectable women and those who were thought to present sexual and moral dangers to the troops. Under Regulation 13a of the Defence of the Realm Act (DORA) 1915, a woman convicted of “a prostitution-related offence” was not permitted to enter “the vicinity of any place where His Majesty’s Troops were stationed.”¹⁴ Moreover, alongside the common prostitute, her close relative the ‘promiscuous woman’ was also targeted. When Regulation 40d of DORA made it a crime for a woman to solicit or have sex with a serviceman if she suffered from a venereal disease,¹⁵ it worked with the assumption that promiscuous women alone

¹³ Michael Mason, *The Making of Victorian Sexuality* (Oxford: Oxford Paperbacks, 1991), 9.

¹⁴ Julia Ann Laite, ‘The Association for Moral and Social Hygiene: abolitionism and prostitution law in Britain (1915-1959),’ *Women’s History Review*, 17, 2 (2008): 212.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 212.

were responsible for sexual disease. In this way both regulations 40d and 13a of DORA recalled the sexual regulation and gender difference previously enacted by the controversial Contagious Diseases Acts.¹⁶

Though the Contagious Diseases Acts were suspended in 1883 and repealed in full in 1886, the medicalised discourse of the prostitute that they relied upon informed approaches to prostitution thereafter.¹⁷ In 1921 G. Archdall Reid, a doctor with a keen interest in public health, wrote a letter to the *British Medical Journal* addressing increases in the number of cases of gonorrhoea and syphilis since the Great War. Despite suggesting that three out of four soldiers acquired their infections from “[o]rdinary women” Reid nonetheless believed such women to be “less diseased than prostitutes.”¹⁸ Reid not only exonerated men from the spread of sexual infection, he sought to establish a distinction between prostitute and non-prostitute women. Yet Reid’s suggestion that “amateur” prostitution was partly responsible for an increase in venereal disease was undercut by his failure to differentiate between the prostitute and ordinary woman.¹⁹

¹⁶ The CDAs did not apply in Liverpool. However, in 1871 it was reported by the *British Medical Journal* that there had been discussions amongst Liverpool’s medical population about the potential merits of extending the CDAs to “the civil population.” The report suggested that there was no consensus on the issue, but it was noted that support for the regulation of prostitutes was in evidence amongst Liverpool medics. It was suggested that “any well-devised...measure” with “a reasonable prospect of diminishing the spread of syphilis amongst the community...would receive the support of at least a majority of the profession.” ‘The Contagious Diseases Acts,’ *British Medical Journal*, 1, 538 (22nd April 1871): 427. Moreover, it has been suggested that were it not for the success of the repeal campaign (and Liverpool being the hometown of repealer Josephine Butler), then the CDAs would likely have been extended to cover the city. See Philip Howell, David Beckingham, Francesca Moore, ‘Managed Zones for Sex Workers in Liverpool: Contemporary Proposals, Victorian Parallels,’ *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, NS, 33 (2008): 238.

¹⁷ For more on the repeal of the CDAs see Anne Summers, “‘The Constitution Violated’: The Female Body and the Female Subject in the Campaigns of Josephine Butler,” *History Workshop Journal*, 48 (1999): 1-15.

¹⁸ G. Archdall Reid, letter to the *British Medical Journal*, published 22nd January 1921.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Indeed, fears about an increase in female promiscuity more generally meant that by the early-twentieth century the notion that a clear line could be drawn between the immoral prostitute ‘other’ and the respectable woman was being questioned. Susan Kingsley Kent has argued that by 1915 women’s active participation in the war effort had begun to threaten the “perceived gender system of the Victorian and Edwardian periods.”²⁰ This meant that distinctions between prostitute women and working-class women in general were increasingly difficult to sustain. Across the classes, women were entering public spaces as shoppers and patrons of entertainment venues.²¹ After the war the notions of the “modern woman” and the “flapper” came to symbolise the habits of fashionable ladies with keen interests in leisure pursuits, such as visiting dance halls, going to the theatre and smoking.²² There was a sense during the interwar years that “factory girls” had started to achieve the look of “actresses.”²³ John Belchem’s research has suggested

²⁰ Susan Kingsley Kent, *Gender and Power in Britain, 1640-1990* (London: Routledge, 1999), 277. For more on the war’s impact on gender order see Levine’s work on “khaki fever”: Philippa Levine, “‘Walking the Streets in a Way no Decent Woman Should’: Women Police in World War I,” *Journal of Modern History*, 66 (1994): 43.

²¹ Adrian Bingham has optimistically examined women’s social progress during the interwar years. He has contrasted set-backs, such as the poor representation of women in the House of Commons, discrimination in the workplace and the Restoration of Pre-War Practices Act (1919) with the opportunities that had become available to women in the world of leisure and the emergence of a public discourse about sexuality and birth control. See Adrian Bingham, “‘An Era of Domesticity’? Histories of Women and Gender in Interwar Britain,” *Cultural and Social History*, 1, 2 (2004): 227-228.

²² Lucy Bland, ‘The Trials and Tribulations of Edith Thompson: The Capital Crime of Sexual Incitement in 1920s England,’ *Journal of British Studies*, 47, 3 (2008): 628. Also, Laura Doan has noted that the term “flapper” had been used in the 1890s to refer to a young prostitute. I would argue that this shift in the word’s definition illustrates the extent to which boundaries between prostitute women and other women had become less distinct by the early twentieth century. See Laura Doan, ‘Passing Fashions: Reading Female Masculinities in the 1920s,’ *Feminist Studies*, 24, 3 (1998): 670.

²³ See Rebecca Conway on J.B. Priestley, in her work ‘Modernity and Popular Cultures of Holidaymaking in c.1930s Blackpool,’ Unpublished thesis: University of Manchester (2011), p. 52. Also, Liz Conor’s conclusions about female visibility in 1920s Australia are applicable to Britain in this regard. She has argued that the flapper “embodied the scandal attached to women’s new public visibility” more than “any other type of Modern Woman.” See her *The Spectacular Modern Woman: Feminine Visibility in the 1920s* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 209.

that despite economic instability in the city during the interwar years, Liverpool was able to offer opportunities for consumers, with the Church Street and Bold Street areas of the city establishing themselves as quality retail districts.²⁴ With a specific focus on gendered experiences of urban culture, Charlotte Wildman has examined the development of interwar Liverpool and Manchester as sites of consumer pleasure. She has argued that local consumers, women in particular, used shopping to construct their own identities and, in so doing, blur class distinctions.²⁵ Developments such as this meant that the physical identifiers used to categorise the prostitute - such as clothing and the patronisation of particular city spaces – were losing their meaning and specificity.²⁶

Though these consumer practices were not totally new to the period of the First World War or the interwar years, their affects on women's identities became more profound. As noted in the introduction to this thesis, the presence of middle- and upper-class women in public space was previously accepted as respectable where it utilised feminine attributes such as care-giving through philanthropy. Yet the idea of young working-class women frequenting public space was defined altogether differently. Working-class women's respectability could be called into question by the areas that they chose to frequent, the way they dressed, or who they spoke to in public. The new, feminine consumer cultures that allowed for a blurring of class identities after the First World War undermined the police's ability to

²⁴ John Belchem, 'Introduction: Celebrating Liverpool,' in John Belchem (ed.), *Liverpool 800: Culture, Character and History* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006), 41.

²⁵ Charlotte Wildman, 'The "Spectacle" of Interwar Manchester and Liverpool: Urban Fantasies, Consumer Cultures and Gendered Identities,' Unpublished Thesis: University of Manchester (2007), p. 23.

²⁶ This argument is supported by the work of Julia Laite. See her 'Taking Nellie Johnson's Fingerprints: Prostitutes and Legal Identity in Early Twentieth Century London,' *History Workshop Journal*, 65 (2008): 103.

identify a woman's respectability. Mrs Bramwell Booth of the Salvation Army fretted in 1928 that prostitutes could not be "clearly distinguished" as they could when the solicitation laws were introduced.²⁷ She noted that "the habits of women as a whole" were:

very much changed. Thirty years ago, prostitutes could be recognised in the streets by their mode of dress, and by the paint and powder on their face; whereas, at the present time, outside the Salvation Army, there are very few women whose faces are not powdered and painted.²⁸

This change in women's habits proved to be problematic, because making judgements based on a woman's clothes and the areas she frequented had been fundamental to the police's approach to prostitution and their implementation of the solicitation laws up until this point.

In her work on the policing of prostitutes in London, Julia Laite has argued that the Metropolitan Police often emphasised the importance of the evidence surrounding a woman's respectability, or lack thereof, rather than evidence of any crime she had committed.²⁹ This policing of a woman's character meant that the law could be applied disproportionately to women identified as common prostitutes.³⁰ During the interwar period, then, increasing attention was focused on the problematic dichotomy between prostitutes and 'ordinary' women that policing and

²⁷ Mrs. Bramwell Booth, 'Summary of Evidence to be Given by Mrs. Bramwell Booth, J. P.,' 1928, TNA HO326/8.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Laite, 'Taking Nellie Johnson's Fingerprints,' 107.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 108.

the law relied upon. Though the idea of the prostitute as other was still very much in existence during the early-twentieth century, the dependence of the solicitation laws and street policing upon this reading of the prostitute was becoming an increasing cause for concern. Precisely what made a prostitute so distinctive from the promiscuous woman or the amateur was up for debate, as were the ways in which the police attempted to utilise these apparent differences in their day-to-day street work.

Problems of Policing

Given the level of police interpretation involved in the implementation of the solicitation laws, it is difficult to ascertain how prevalent prostitution actually was on the streets. Certainly, cities such as Liverpool were often thought to be places where the trade flourished. Since at least the late-nineteenth century, large cities like Liverpool were identified as places where young and poor women would prostitute themselves in order to earn money, and the more destitute parts of urban Britain came to be seen as chief sources of prostitution.³¹ However, historians need to be cautious about using official statistics to infer how prevalent prostitution actually was in these areas. Examining the later-nineteenth century records, Paula Bartley has noted that there are substantial discrepancies in the figures collected, because of the many ways in which prostitution and prostitution-related activities were recorded. Some records employed exceptionally broad definitions of a prostitute,

³¹ Alongside London, attention was often focused upon port and army towns as areas of significant prostitution related activity. Paula Bartley has argued that these localities were “commonly accepted” during the late-Victorian period as having the greatest number of prostitutes. See Paula Bartley, *Prostitution: Prevention and Reform in England, 1860-1914* (London: Routledge, 2000), 3.

including single mothers and women cohabiting with men in this category, whilst others included only those women prosecuted for prostitution.³²

Similar problems are also evident in the statistics available for the early-twentieth century. In Liverpool, for example, Stipendiary Magistrate Stuart Deacon struggled to explain why the number of arrests for prostitution had diminished radically from 1772 in 1907 to just 316 in 1927. Uncertain as to whether this decrease could be explained by “improved morals,” he suggested that a range of factors, from better social conditions on the streets to restricted opening hours for licensed houses, could have affected the arrest rate.³³ At the same time, it was also proposed that the Deputy Recorder’s decision in 1909 not to apply the Vagrancy Act to cases of prostitution may have impacted upon the figures for this offence, although the fact that there was an increase in prosecutions for prostitution between 1909 and 1910 means that even this suggestion does not fully explain the reduction in arrests between 1907 and 1927.³⁴

One possibility that was not suggested by the Stipendiary Magistrate, however, was that the decrease in prosecutions may have reflected a change in police attitudes towards the crime of solicitation. Indeed, it can be argued that the police figures relating to prostitution often reflected a local force’s interests in and

³² *Ibid.*, 2.

³³ Stuart Deacon, Transcript of Evidence, Departmental Committee on Street Offences, 14th January 1928, p. 4. TNA HO45/12663. Jeffrey Weeks has suggested that there may have been a real decline in prostitution offences during the early part of twentieth century as a result of there being less “rowdiness” and “drunkenness” on the streets, increased employment opportunities for women and greater opportunities for pre-marital, casual sex for men who may otherwise have used the service of a prostitute. However he also suggests that prostitution may simply have been less visible during this period as it had migrated into night clubs. See Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society: The regulation of sexuality since 1800*, Second Edition (London: Longman, 1989), 208. See also Judith Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

³⁴ Deacon, Departmental Committee on Street Offences, p. 4.

attitudes towards immorality rather than to mapping the true extent of prostitution in an area. Bartley has suggested that, whilst the Chief Constable of Liverpool was concerned that there were excessive levels of local prostitution during the late-nineteenth century, Sheffield's Chief Constable made the doubtful claim that there was not a single brothel in his jurisdiction and, in Manchester, one superintendent distorted evidence to show an actual decrease in prostitution.³⁵ In his history of the police, Michael Brogden has argued that, even prior to the outbreak of the First World War, the force in Liverpool had become increasingly autonomous from the local Watch Committee, suggesting that the police were able to act with increasing political independence in deciding when and where it was appropriate to target prostitutes.³⁶

That is not to say that police policy was formed completely free from the influences of the Watch Committee, or from local pressure groups and public moralists, who sought to focus a high level of attention on prostitution and brothels in the local community. Since the later part of the nineteenth century, the most vocal and active bastions of the purity movement, such as the National Vigilance Association (NVA), had set out to cultivate strong relationships with police forces throughout the country and actively sought to bring down the full weight of the law on the practice of brothel-keeping.³⁷ Formed in the wake of feminist-organised mass demonstrations in 1885 calling for a criminal law amendment act to raise the age of

³⁵ Bartley, *Prostitution*, 3.

³⁶ Michael Brogden, *The Police: Autonomy and Consent* (London: Academic Press, 1982), 70-71.

³⁷ Bartley, *Prostitution*, 166. See also Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast: Feminism, Sex and Morality* (London: Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 2001), 109 and Frank Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities: Medico-Moral Politics in England since 1830*, Second Edition (London: Routledge, 2000), 105; Mort has argued that in Victorian Liverpool, the purity movement had such local influence that it was significant in "overturning the lax Tory council sympathetic to publicans and brewers."

consent to sixteen and give police more powers over brothel keepers, the NVA wanted to protect women from vice not only through rescue work but also by increased state intervention.³⁸ From its inception, the NVA promoted the law as a legitimate means of morally educating the nation. In an attempt to use the state's influence over moral and sexual matters, the criminal law was increasingly brought into feminist discourses about the nation's moral standards.³⁹ In cities like Liverpool and Manchester, the activities of local vigilance committees were reflected in the local police force's work to close local brothels and prosecute prostitution.⁴⁰ Yet it would be inaccurate to suggest that the local police were in the thrall of the purity lobbyists, even before the First World War. It is much more likely that the police's relationship with these organisations was highly pragmatic. Bartley has noted that in Liverpool the local vigilance committee's success at bringing about a more pro-active policing strategy against brothels in 1890 was only temporary. She argued that the strategy was abandoned in 1896 when concern arose that this more determined policing had caused prostitution to migrate into respectable areas.⁴¹ In this sense, the impact of the purity movement's campaigns was mixed, as the degree of influence that these groups wielded fluctuated considerably.

An analysis of the arrests made for solicitation in Liverpool between the years 1922 and 1926 supports the idea that purity campaigners were unable to

³⁸ Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities*, 81-82. Jeffrey Weeks argues that purity campaigners also used the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885 to challenge homosexuality (through the Labouchere amendment), arguing that for purists homosexuality and prostitution were "intertwined" as "products of undifferentiated lust." Jeffrey Weeks, "'Sins and Diseases': Some Notes on Homosexuality in the Nineteenth Century," *History Workshop*, 1 (1976): 213-214.

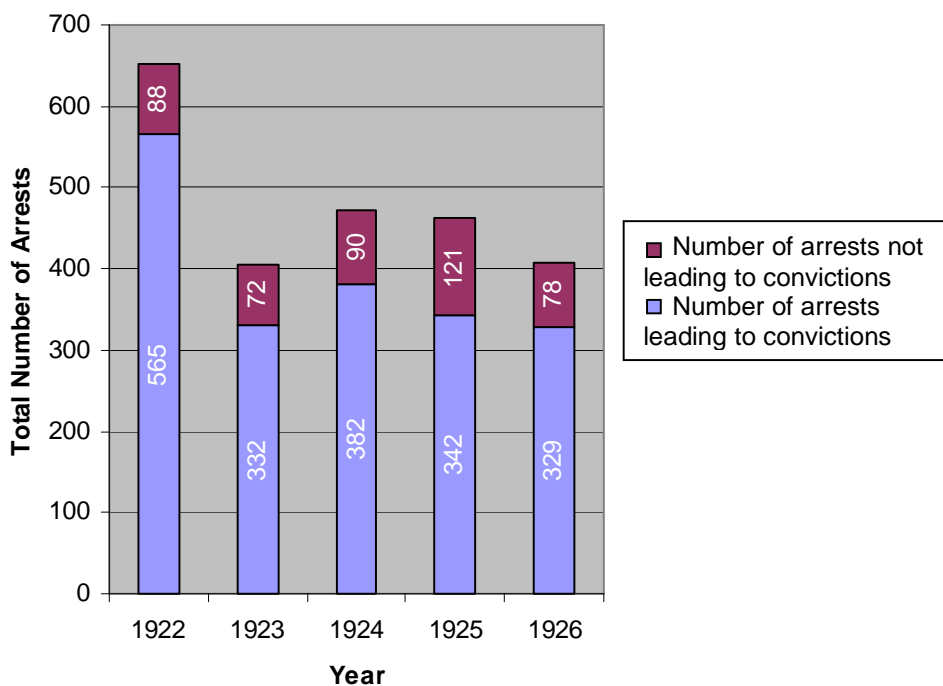
³⁹ Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities*, 82.

⁴⁰ Bartley, *Prostitution*, 166.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 167.

influence significantly the actions of the local police after the war. Far from targeting prostitution, figures provided by the Chief Constable of Liverpool in 1928, indicated that there was a sharp decline in the number of arrests for solicitation in Liverpool between 1922 and 1923 (see Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1: Arrests and Convictions for Solicitation in Liverpool, 1922-1926⁴²



In fact, the number of arrests fell by 38.13%, moving from 653 to just 404. Despite a brief rise in the number of arrests in 1924, the total number of arrests remained well below the 1922 level during the years 1923 to 1926 inclusive. These raw numbers suggest that, although arrests leading to convictions also declined between 1922 and 1923, this happened at more modest rates. The relative stability in the

⁴² Source: Lionel Everett, Transcript of Evidence, Departmental Committee on Street Offences, 14th January 1928, pp. 36-37, TNA HO45/12663.

number of convictions between 1922 and 1926 suggests that the overall fall in the number of arrests for solicitation between 1922 and 1926 was not necessarily motivated by increased or new problems with regards to obtaining convictions, nor by any increased leniency on the part of the criminal justice system. Historians cannot assume that the drop in the number of arrests, together with the fluctuating influence of the vigilance committee, was symptomatic of the police and courts taking a less serious stance towards prostitution. If a reduction in arrests for prostitution cannot be attributed to the rise of a more relaxed attitude towards prostitution, then what other factors may have influenced the arrest rates?

Historians cannot ignore the possibility that the number of arrests declined because the police were discouraged from prosecuting prostitutes as a result of a number of high profile cases, which focused critical attention on the way in which the criminal justice system dealt with cases of solicitation.⁴³ The Sir Almeric Fitzroy case in 1922 raised concerns about how solicitation was legally defined and policed. Fitzroy, a Clerk to the Privy Council, had been arrested in Hyde Park for ‘annoying’ young women.⁴⁴ Despite admitting to two out of the four cases made against him, his conviction was overturned when it emerged that one of the women was a known prostitute.⁴⁵ For Alison Neilans, Secretary of the Association for Moral Social Hygiene, the Fitzroy case exemplified a double standard in the way in which the solicitation laws were applied to men and women.⁴⁶ Criticisms of this sort

⁴³ Helen Self suggests that the police were criticised equally for their leniency and harshness in dealing with street offences. See her *Prostitution, Women and Misuse of the Law: The Fallen Daughters of Eve* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), 8.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

gave the police food for thought over how they dealt with prostitution. In 1927 Sir William Horwood, Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, told the Macmillan Committee that a “very wellknown [sic] case” from 1922 had “made a tremendous difference in the cases which were brought up in 1923.”⁴⁷ Whereas in 1922 the Metropolitan Police made 2291 arrests of prostitutes, they arrested just 650 in 1923.⁴⁸ Though he did not explicitly mention the name of the case, it is likely that Horwood was referring to the Fitzroy affair.⁴⁹

The Macmillan Committee pressed the Commissioner further on the impact that negative publicity could have on the actions of the police:

...if there is an attack upon those who administer any branch of law and there happen to have been one or two mischances, that is to say, cases reversed on appeal or something of that sort, the tendency may be for the administrator, whether he is a constable or anyone else, to say - “Well, if I show too much zeal I am merely getting into trouble.”⁵⁰

It was a point that the Commissioner agreed with as “ordinary psychology,” that is to say a response that he thought was to be naturally expected from police officers working under such scrutiny. Moreover, the potential for police corruption in vice

⁴⁷William Horwood, Transcript of Evidence, Departmental Committee on Street Offences, 20th December 1927, p. 10, TNA HO45/12663.

⁴⁸Horwood noted that the number of arrests started to climb significantly again in 1924 and that this trend continued thereafter. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁴⁹Horwood gave some details about the case that match the details of the Fitzroy case from that year. He suggested that an individual was arrested in Hyde Park, was convicted and later won an appeal to have the conviction overturned. See *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, p. 10.

cases was made apparent in 1928 with another high-profile scandal. It emerged that Sergeant Goddard of the Metropolitan Police had links to both nightclub and brothel owners and he was subsequently jailed for corruption offences.⁵¹ In this sense, strong fluctuations or decreases in police attention given to prostitutes may have reflected the high degree of negative publicity that such cases generated. Paula Bartley and Barbara Gwinnett have noted that officers were often wary of making arrests for solicitation because they feared a mistake in these cases might damage their career.⁵² They have argued that by the 1930s the police would caution a woman three times before arresting her.⁵³ This level of caution was already in evidence in Liverpool in the 1920s. Deacon, the Stipendiary Magistrate, claimed that a police officer would need to prove that a woman had annoyed “two or three persons at the least” for a conviction to be secured, although Deacon’s statement should not be taken as evidence of leniency, since the “proof” of annoyance that he was prepared to accept was very broad. It included such factors as a police officer’s testimony that a man had “stepped aside in order to pass by the woman who stood in his way.” It is also worth noting that it was not necessary for the annoyed person to make a complaint and that police officers simply inferred annoyance from the reactions that they witnessed from members of the public.⁵⁴

Additionally, the decline in the number of arrests for prostitution might also be explained by the possibility of a real drop in the visible number of prostitutes

⁵¹ Self, *Prostitution*, 6. Self goes on to suggest that this case resulted in a temporary slump in the number of solicitation charges brought by the Metropolitan police. See also Marek Kohn, *Dope Girls: The Birth of the British Drug Underground* (London: Granta Books, 1992), 122.

⁵² Paula Bartley and Barbara Gwinnett, ‘Prostitution,’ in Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska (ed.), *Women in Twentieth Century Britain* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2001), 217.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Deacon, Departmental Committee on Street Offences, p. 8.

working on the streets. Indeed, the decline in arrests of prostitutes was not specific to Liverpool during this period. Laite has suggested that the overall fall in England and Wales was so significant that it may indicate that street prostitution was indeed in decline. However, she has noted that part of this decline may have been initiated by prostitutes' tactics, evading official control by moving their trade into less visible environments.⁵⁵ For some members of law-enforcement, the latter view seemed a more plausible explanation for the fall in arrests than a general decline in the number of prostitutes. In 1927, Horwood suggested that the decrease in arrests was not necessarily evidence that there were fewer prostitutes; rather that "their behaviour [was] different. Their behaviour [was] such that the constable [did] not think it advisable to apprehend them."⁵⁶ Similarly Everett, Chief Constable of Liverpool, suggested that in his city there was a more "respectable" type of prostitute who lived alone in flats, adding that a "great many migrate" to other cities for "months at a time."⁵⁷ The possibility was also raised that the nature of prostitution had changed to such an extent that there was now a new type of amateur prostitute who was harder to profile.⁵⁸ Macmillan asked Everett whether an "improvement in the state of [the] streets" might have been the result of the "professional prostitute" having been "superseded by the amateur."⁵⁹ Everett preferred to term this type of character a "flighty girl," rather than an amateur or a

⁵⁵ Laite, 'Taking Nellie Johnson's Fingerprints,' 110-111.

⁵⁶ Horwood also cautioned against using the number of arrests to infer how prevalent prostitution was. See Horwood, Departmental Committee on Street Offences, p. 13.

⁵⁷ Everett, Departmental Committee on Street Offences, p. 42.

⁵⁸ See Lesley A. Hall, 'Impotent ghosts from no man's land, flappers' boyfriends, or crypto-patriarchs? Men, sex and social change in 1920s Britain,' *Social History*, 21, 1 (1996): 58.

⁵⁹ Hugh Macmillan to Everett, Departmental Committee on Street Offences, p. 42.

prostitute, though he did agree that such girls were “purely out for excitement, what they can get without paying for themselves.”⁶⁰

These difficulties in policing prostitution based on the subjective reading of precisely which women the law should be aimed at and which solicitation laws should be used in which particular cases had significant implications for the status of the solicitation laws. When he introduced the Public Places (Order) Bill to the House of Lords in 1926, Lord Balfour stressed that the potential for discrepancies in policing was one of his key objections to the solicitation laws as they stood. He argued that whilst he admired the police and the work that they did, he did not “regard them as ideal custodians of public morality,” arguing that “the sooner they [were] relieved of their duties in this respect the better it [would] be for their own reputation and the safety of women lawfully using the public streets.”⁶¹ The inference that law-abiding women were not safe under the solicitation laws clearly pointed towards concerns that so-called respectable women could not be easily distinguished from prostitute women, by signifiers such as clothing or their presence in a particular public space. Confidence in the police’s ability to gauge who was a prostitute and who was not and who was soliciting and who was not was shaken by the growing sense that the solicitation laws were too complex and difficult to implement. It was in this context of widespread public debate over the solicitation laws that the Home Office began to face growing calls for an inquiry into street solicitation. For social purists an inquiry was necessary because the increase in promiscuity was a signal that more needed to be done to quell the

⁶⁰ Everett, Departmental Committee on Street Offences, p. 42.

⁶¹ Parliamentary Debates, House of Lords, 9th December 1926, para. 1398.

corrupting influence of female prostitutes on urban morality and social order.

However, for organisations such as the Association for Moral and Social Hygiene (AMSH) repeal of the solicitation laws was necessary in order to effectively tackle prostitution as a moral rather than a legal issue.

The Public Places (Order) Bill and the Appointment of the Macmillan Committee

Lesley Hall has called the AMSH “perhaps the most feminist and libertarian of the social purity organizations,” with its disapproval of promiscuity being balanced against its commitment to the separation of the state from individual morality in matters concerning private sexual relations between adults.⁶² As the British branch of the International Abolitionist Federation, the organisation campaigned against the state regulation of prostitution, a position which brought it into conflict with other groups, such as the NVA, who privileged the eradication of vice over any concerns about civil liberty.⁶³ At the heart of the AMSH’s objection to the solicitation laws was their concern that the legislation did not apply equally to men and women.

In 1922, George W. Johnson, the vice-chairman of the AMSH, published a pamphlet entitled *The Need for Repealing the Present Solicitation Laws*. In it he outlined his organisation’s concern with the legal categorisation of prostitute women as a distinct type of criminal when he queried: “what...is the reason for this special regulation against prostitutes?” He asked why it was “not an offence for a woman to be a prostitute, nor for a prostitute to wander in the public streets,” but it

⁶² Lesley A. Hall, *Sex, Gender and Social Change in Britain since 1800* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 101.

⁶³ Sheila Jeffreys, *The Idea of Prostitution* (North Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 1997), 19.

was an offence for “such a woman” to behave “in a riotous or indecent manner,” since this type of conduct would be considered “an offence in the case of any person.”⁶⁴ For Johnson, a supporter of the women’s suffrage movement like many other members of AMSH, the issue was one of gender inequality.⁶⁵ It was obvious that the law took far more interest in the regulation and condemnation of female prostitutes than it did their male customers. Addressing the gender imbalance exhibited by the regulation of prostitution he wrote:

Apart from the other miseries and evils of prison life, many of these women and girl prisoners feel the injustice of having to bear the penalty, when the man who was morally a partner in their offence goes entirely free; for in many cases a woman only solicits when she sees that the man is looking out for it. Every man knows that he is rarely solicited, unless he is himself loitering for the purpose, or at the women whom he passes.⁶⁶

In this way, Johnson’s pamphlet reflected the AMSH’s long-standing concern with removing the sexual double standard from legislation, while protecting individual liberties from unnecessary state intervention.⁶⁷

Though prostitution was not in itself illegal, it was criminalised through a range of statutes which prohibited the prostitute’s use of public space and her access

⁶⁴ George W. Johnson, *The Need for Repealing the Present Solicitation Laws* (London: Association for Moral and Social Hygiene, 1922), 4. Preserved in Records of the Public Places (Order) Bill 1924, WL 3AMS/B/04/06.

⁶⁵ Laite, ‘The Association for Moral and Social Hygiene,’ 210.

⁶⁶ Johnson, *The Need for Repealing the Present Solicitation Laws*, 6.

⁶⁷ Laite, ‘The Association for Moral and Social Hygiene,’ 213.

to clients. The solicitation laws (outlined at the start of this chapter) were put in place in the early- to mid-nineteenth century and were still in force.⁶⁸ By the early-twentieth century discrepancies in the way the solicitation laws were applied gave rise to questions about their application. In July 1925, *The Times* said that it was:

...recognized that the power given to a policeman to charge a woman with solicitation, without corroborative evidence from another constable, or from the person who has been annoyed, is a very drastic one, and that the time has come when a fully inquiry into the point would be of value.⁶⁹

The AMSH, who had campaigned for a repeal of the solicitation laws since the Association was formed in 1915, pressed for the setting up of a government committee.⁷⁰ Between 1923 and 1926 the Public Places (Order) Bill, which had been drawn up by the AMSH, was introduced to Parliament on a number of occasions.⁷¹ Backed by Conservative politician Nancy Astor, the Bill proposed to replace the solicitation laws with a more gender-neutral approach to the problem of social and moral order.

The purpose of the Public Places (Order) Bill, as it was aired in 1926, was, firstly: "To repeal the provisions in the existing law which refer to solicitation by common prostitutes, and other provisions which do not explicitly refer to solicitation but are sometimes used for dealing with such conduct." Secondly, the

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 212.

⁶⁹ *The Times*, 9th July 1925.

⁷⁰ For more on the formation and history of the AMSH see Laite 'The Association for Moral and Social Hygiene.'

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 217.

Bill proposed: “To substitute [the solicitation laws with] a simple provision, which substantially covers the same ground as the existing law, but applies to all persons alike.” Lastly, the Bill proposed “To enact that proceedings shall only be taken on complaint by or on behalf of the party aggrieved.”⁷² In this way, the Bill promoted feminist concerns that the law singled out prostitute women for punishment, whilst her male client went ignored. At the same time it responded directly to widespread concerns about inconsistencies in the policing of prostitution.

Supporters of the Bill took issue with a number of solicitation laws used to police prostitution-related activities. When the Public Places (Order) Bill was presented to the House of Lords for its second reading in December 1926, Lord Balfour argued that paragraph 11 of the Metropolitan Police Act 1839, which targeted the prostitute for loitering in public for the purpose of solicitation to the annoyance of inhabitants or passers-by, was too subjective to be effectively implemented. How one defined or measured annoyance was so imprecise, Balfour argued, as to make it extremely difficult for the police to prove such an offence had occurred. He went on to tell the Lords that in such cases proof of a man’s annoyance was nothing more than a “legal fiction.”⁷³ With this phrase Balfour inferred that, in order to prosecute, the police were obliged to look for signs proving that annoyance had occurred. On the same grounds, Balfour was heavily critical of section 3 of the 1824 Vagrancy Act. He argued that in penalising the common prostitute who behaved in a “riotous or indecent manner” in the streets, this piece of legislation was subject to the same problems of definition and proof as the

⁷² Public Places (Order) Bill Memorandum, November 1926, TNA HO45/12663.

⁷³ Parliamentary Debates, House of Lords, 9th December 1926, para. 1395.

aforementioned “case of annoyance.”⁷⁴ Indeed, a police officer or magistrate could define solicitation as being part of the spectrum of offensive acts covered by this clause. This meant that it was possible for solicitation to bring the charge of indecency under the Vagrancy Act.⁷⁵

Those seeking to repeal the solicitation laws appealed to a sense of a new, modern Britain to make their case for legislative change. In the same address to the Lords, Lord Balfour urged that the solicitation laws as they stood were neither feasible nor appropriate for the *modern* world:

The fact is that the laws relating to solicitation are entirely out of date. They are not modern enough to be in line with modern requirements. At the same time they are not old enough, I think, to have become covered with any sort of sacred antiquity which entitles them to special protection.⁷⁶

With this statement Balfour tacitly acknowledged the impact of social change upon legal definitions of prostitution. Increasing difficulty in demarcating acts of promiscuity from those of amateur prostitution and the greater presence of women in public spaces meant that laws designed to specifically target the common prostitute were outdated. Abolitionists thus appealed to a progressive idea of social change and sought to convey excessive state intervention as a relic of a bygone era. Ahead of a deputation from the AMSH calling for the establishment of a committee to investigate the solicitation laws, Lady Astor wrote to the Home Secretary, Sir

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Laite, ‘Taking Nellie Johnson’s Fingerprints,’ 101.

⁷⁶ Parliamentary Debates, House of Lords, 9th December 1926, para. 1394.

William Joynson-Hicks. In her letter she requested that he “give a very sympathetic hearing to the request for a committee of Enquiry,” arguing that “such an enquiry would be welcomed on all sides, since...the laws which govern offences of this kind are not applicable to modern conditions.”⁷⁷

Politically, abolitionists pragmatically positioned themselves as progressives. Their efforts to associate the ‘modern’ with an idea of the liberal state were informed by ongoing struggles to define a feminist politics that allowed women to be active players within the public sphere. Moreover, the AMSH was able to garner support from other voluntary organisations who agreed that the increasing visibility of young women in urban spaces made existing laws all the more unsuitable. Miss Picton Turbervill of the Young Women’s Christian Association argued:

...twenty years ago no respectable young girl would be found walking down Regent Street at night and it was comparatively easy to know the character of women found walking in such a street. But today all that had been altered by the different habits prevailing amongst women and girls.⁷⁸

It is clear from this statement that scepticism about the ability to distinguish between the chaste, moral woman and her prostitute ‘other’ was not limited to the AMSH. At the deputation called by the AMSH, Mrs. Bramwell Booth of the

⁷⁷ Margaret Astor, Letter to Sir William Joynson-Hicks on AMSH Deputation, 10th November 1925, TNA HO45/12663.

⁷⁸ Picton Turbervill paraphrased in Home Office report on the AMSH’s deputation calling for an enquiry into the solicitation laws (Home Office reference 483.171/21), Unpublished, dated November 1925, p. 4, TNA HO45/12663.

Salvation Army also told the Home Secretary that the law as it stood was unfair. She explained that “the dividing of the community into three classes – men, women and prostitutes – was unjust and a grave injustice to the women.”⁷⁹ In addition to arguing for the abolition of legislative distinctions between ‘ordinary’ women and prostitute women and between men and women, members of the AMSH also insisted that such distinctions made no sense from a public health point of view. The notion of female culpability and male blamelessness in matters of promiscuity did nothing to help prevent infection. Neilans, then assistant secretary to the AMSH, wrote to the *British Medical Journal* in June 1916:

The thing which makes all moral and social reform work so intensely difficult, which produces both the prostitute and her partner, is that great body of public opinion which tacitly upholds the double standard of morals, and when it sees the results of its doctrines murmurs meaningless platitudes about “human nature.”⁸⁰

With this rebuke, Neilans challenged the long-standing assumption that prostitution was a social inevitability brought about by the need for men to find a controlled release for their sexual urges. By voicing this opinion in a letter to the *British Medical Journal*, Neilans did not attempt to disassociate prostitution from debates about venereal disease. Indeed, she attempted to appropriate the interests of public

⁷⁹ Mrs. Bramwell Booth paraphrased in Home Office report on the AMSH’s deputation calling for an enquiry into the solicitation laws (Home Office reference 483.171/21), Unpublished, dated November 1925, p. 3, TNA HO45/12663.

⁸⁰ Alison Neilans, letter to the *British Medical Journal*, published 10th June 1916.

health in order to further her own organisation's approach to prostitution.

Specifically, she wanted to tackle the double standard of gender morality that worked against prostitute women, whilst seemingly offering her male clients automatic moral absolution.

Amid this wave of contemporary concern, Joynson-Hicks finally formed a committee of inquiry into solicitation laws in October 1927, ten months after the second reading of the Public Places (Order) Bill in the House of Lords. Under the chairmanship of Hugh Macmillan, the remit of the Committee was, according to the Home Secretary, to enquire into:

...the law and practice regarding offences against the criminal law in connection with prostitution and solicitation for immoral purposes in streets and public places and other offences against decency and good order, and to report what changes, if any, are in their opinion desirable.⁸¹

Those to sit on the Committee represented diverse interests, from legal professionals, such as Miss E. H. Kelly J.P and Sir Henry Fairfax-Lucy J.P, to religious figures such as the Lord Bishop of Durham and the Reverend R.C. Gillie. Out of a total of fifteen, five of the members of the Committee were women. However, the Home Secretary's personal influence was in evidence in the composition of the Committee, with one of the women being his wife, Lady

⁸¹ Home Office Notice on the Establishment of the Macmillan Committee (October 1926), TNA HO45/12663.

Joynson-Hicks.⁸² Also, the Committee faced criticism over its political representativeness. MP Ramsey McDonald criticised the Home Secretary's decision to appoint a Departmental Committee rather than a Parliamentary Select Committee, complaining in a letter to Joynson-Hicks that "Had it been a Home Secretary of ours who had appointed the committee I should certainly have insisted upon his consulting you, had you been an ex-Home Secretary belonging to the Opposition."⁸³ Joynson-Hicks defended his decision, returning a letter in which he argued:

Party considerations did not seem to me to enter at all and my concern was merely to get together a body of men and women representative of various types of experience who would bring entirely fresh opinions and open minds to bear upon the problem and give me an unprejudiced opinion upon it.⁸⁴

Nevertheless, Joynson-Hicks already favoured a social purist approach to prostitution even before he established the Committee.⁸⁵ Jeffrey Weeks has noted that contemporary social purists were able to influence a number of high-profile individuals, such as Sir Thomas Inskip (the Solicitor-General), Sir Archibald Bodkin (the Director of Public Prosecutions) and, crucially, Joynson-Hicks

⁸² William Joynson-Hicks, Letter to Lady Joynson-Hicks on her Appointment to the Macmillan Committee, dated 14th October 1927, TNA HO45/12663.

⁸³ Ramsey McDonald, Letter to William Joynson-Hicks on the Composition of the Macmillan Committee, dated 17th October 1927, Home Office file 483171/84, TNA HO45/12663.

⁸⁴ William Joynson-Hicks, Letter to Ramsey McDonald on the Composition of the Macmillan Committee, dated 19th October 1927, TNA HO45/12663.

⁸⁵ This was not the first instance where Joynson-Hicks had taken a purist interest in matters of public morality. During his time as Home Secretary he also opposed the publication of pornographic literature. See H.G. Cox, 'Saucy Stories: Pornography, Sexology and the Marketing of Sexual Knowledge in Britain, c. 1918-70,' *Social History*, 29, 4 (2004): 475.

himself.⁸⁶ From the outset, it was clear that the NVA had influenced the opinions of the Home Office and that the Committee were keen to pay attention to purity concerns, alongside those of the opposing AMSH. During the course of the inquiry, Macmillan reviewed what he regarded as the two main opposing positions on the legal status of the common prostitute. Outlining what was essentially proposed in the Public Places (Order) Bill, he noted: “Some people take the view that it is undesirable to create an offence which can only be committed by a common prostitute and that the law should be expressed in general terms, saying ‘any person’ who does these things.”⁸⁷ The counter argument to this, as the Committee understood it, was that the “requirement of the person being a common prostitute is a protection to ordinary women, which may outweigh the disadvantages to the common prostitute of being so labelled.”⁸⁸ The government was also forced to consider that voices calling for the wholesale repeal of the solicitation laws had also become louder. It was the abolitionists in the AMSH who had drafted the Public Places (Order) Bill which was presented to Parliament on various occasions between 1923 and 1926.⁸⁹ Yet whereas the AMSH argued for the abolition of solicitation laws on the grounds that they created prostitutes as a lower class of woman and stigmatised those convicted, social purists remained convinced that laws to control prostitution were vital if England was to adapt to post-war conditions with its sexual morality intact.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society*, 218.

⁸⁷ Horwood, Departmental Committee on Street Offences, p. 20.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Laite, ‘The Association for Moral and Social Hygiene,’ 217.

⁹⁰ Laite has argued that prostitution policy in Britain was “if anything growing more repressive” as purity groups drew attention to brothels and street prostitution. See Laite, ‘Taking Nellie Johnson’s Fingerprints,’ 101.

The tension between the position of abolitionists in the AMSH and social purists in the NVA was not lost on the state. In a Home Office report on the Public Places (Order) Bill it was explained that “representations have been received from many quarters that the present law is not satisfactory” and that the “wide divergence of view in different quarters” had given the Home Secretary cause to consider an “inquiry.”⁹¹ Significantly, this report revealed that the Home Office was already sceptical about the measures outlined in the Public Places (Order) Bill. It noted “Many of the societies which are interested in public morals are also of the opinion that the Bill as it stands might be harmful.”⁹² The NVA was privileged in the document as a particularly prominent opposition group and one that was believed by the Home Office to have “exceptional experience of this problem.”⁹³

The Home Office’s recognition of the views of the NVA points to the Association’s ongoing power and influence during the interwar years. Even before he had agreed to form a committee, the Home Secretary set out his own views, which strongly suggested that he favoured the NVA’s interest in continuing to use the law to combat prostitution. A Home Office report describing events at an AMSH-organised deputation calling for an enquiry into the solicitation laws suggested that the Home Secretary had told those present that he was “keenly interested in social conditions,” and that he was “in favour of any practical steps for

⁹¹ Home Office Report on the Public Places (Order) Bill, (c.1926), Unpublished, TNA HO45/12663.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*

improving the condition of the streets” and combating the “evil of prostitution.”⁹⁴ Distancing himself from one of the central complaints of abolitionists in the AMSH, the Home Secretary appeared unconcerned that the law targeted female prostitutes whilst their male clients were ignored. He argued that “morally the man might be as bad or worse but the moral offence of which the man was guilty was not an offence of which the law had hitherto taken cognizance as a legal offence.”⁹⁵ He went on to explain to the deputation that because the man “was not selling his own body...his position from a legal point of view was different.”⁹⁶ In fact, the Home Secretary did not accept that laws targeting prostitutes were problematic, claiming that it was “not true to say that what one woman can do another cannot.”⁹⁷ The Home Office report made clear that Joynson-Hicks considered the “use of the streets as a public market” to be “the scandal at which the law is aimed” (rather than fornication *per se*).⁹⁸ As such, the Home Secretary showed himself to be reluctant to accept the notion that common prostitutes were being singled out for special regulation that was not meted out to other women. He also showed himself to view prostitution as a moral and social problem and he seemed accept the use of the law to target solicitation.

Much of what Joynson-Hicks told the AMSH deputation would have resonated with many in the social purity movement. In the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century purists had attempted to intervene in the lives of women working

⁹⁴ Home Office report on the AMSH’s deputation calling for an enquiry into the solicitation laws (Home Office reference 483.171/21), Unpublished, dated November 1925, p. 6, TNA HO45/12663. Also, a letter from Alison Neilans, Secretary of the AMSH, to the Home Secretary suggests that this deputation was introduced by Lord Muir Mackenzie and was attended by, amongst others, George Johnson of the AMSH and Mrs. Bramwell Booth J.P. of the Salvation Army. See Alison Neilans, AMSH Letter to William Joynson Hicks, dated 6th November 1925, TNA HO45/12663.

⁹⁵ Home Office report on the AMSH’s deputation, p. 7.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

as prostitutes or thought to be potential prostitutes. With so many purity campaigners located in the middle- and upper-classes, Victorian feminist concerns with social purity were frequently founded upon fears about the dangers of working-class culture.⁹⁹ The social purity movement's efforts to intervene in the lives of the working class during this period concentrated on a desire to inculcate in the poor a sense of middle class moral respectability.¹⁰⁰ It was in this context that debates about what was to be done about street prostitution became a key site in purity campaigns to bring the law to bear on the more disruptive aspects of life in Britain's cities. In the discourse of legal rights that emerged from this debate, the prostitute woman was conceived of as being distinct from all other women. The maintenance of her liberty was inimical to the advancement of women's moral and social protection. Lady Laura Riding made the point explicitly in her address to the National Union of Women Workers (NUWW) in 1912. Riding argued that any legal infringement of a prostitute's liberties came as a result of her decision to work as she did. For Riding, the prostitute might be pitied but no more: "It is not a trade that should be specially protected," she told the NUWW.¹⁰¹ Riding's comments illustrated the extent to which Victorian feminists' moral and political concerns about female sexuality and social purity endured well into the twentieth century.

Regulating the common prostitute

Evidence gathered by the Macmillan Committee reveals how the sense of the prostitute as a moral other permeated official responses to solicitation. Though

⁹⁹ Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, 97.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities*, 112.

witnesses did not necessarily agree on the extent to which the law should be the means used to control prostitutes, the witness statements I explore in this section all justified some form of legal intervention on the grounds that the prostitute represented a threat to moral order and social stability. Here I want to compare the testimony of one London-based witness and one Liverpool-based witness. I aim to show that, despite some important differences, both condemned the prostitute from a highly gendered moral standpoint. This is significant because it not only indicates that the type of stance taken by the NVA was accepted by those in positions of power, it also shows that these views were held by officials from very different parts of the country.

The evidence provided to the Macmillan Committee by the Commissioner of the Police of the Metropolis, Sir William Horwood, showed that at least some of the experts and officials responsible for controlling prostitution considered the female prostitute as ‘other’ – a sexually transgressive female outsider. Horwood had experience of dealing with difficult issues in policing. Anne Pimlott Baker has noted that Horwood was credited with restoring the morale of the police after their strike in 1918.¹⁰² Moreover, he also had experience of dealing with women’s issues in policing, having been responsible for overseeing an “experimental force of women police in 1919.”¹⁰³ However, Horwood’s support for women police was relatively “half-hearted” and his approach to prostitution certainly not

¹⁰² Anne Pimlott Baker, ‘Horwood, Sir William Thomas Francis (1868–1943),’ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2011 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/51587, accessed 3rd January 2012].

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

progressive.¹⁰⁴ Replicating the Victorian notion that a distinction could and should be drawn between ordinary women and street women, Horwood did not consider laws targeting only prostitutes to represent any threat to their liberty, or the liberty of women in general. Horwood concurred with the social purity movements' broad approval of the common prostitute as a legal category of offender to whom solicitation laws applied. He suggested to the Committee that this categorisation was "a very great protection to the ordinary woman."¹⁰⁵ Rather than acting as a label which could potentially stigmatise any woman who frequented urban public spaces, Horwood believed that respectable women would not be affected. He explained that though a policeman might be "suspicious" at the sight of, in the Committee's words, "an ordinary lady" talking to a man in the street, the policeman would "not presume she was a common prostitute."¹⁰⁶ For this reason, Horwood suggested that the term "common prostitute" should remain in law.¹⁰⁷ He argued that to dispense with the category, in favour of prosecuting *any* persons who committed solicitation offences, would make the powers of the police "very much wider," a prospect that he could not support.¹⁰⁸ The commissioner was confident that it was possible to distinguish between the civil liberties of ordinary women and those of prostitute women. In targeting the common prostitute specifically, Horwood presented prostitute women (rather than their efforts to solicit) as a social problem. Their perceived difference from other, respectable women meant that

¹⁰⁴ Louise A. Jackson, 'Care or Control? The Metropolitan Women Police and Child Welfare, 1919-1969,' *The Historical Journal*, 46, 3 (2003): 627.

¹⁰⁵ Horwood, Departmental Committee on Street Offences, p. 20.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

prostitutes unsettled traditional gender codes governing female conduct. They were legally and culturally fashioned as other because they were defined as a moral threat to the social order of the nation's urban spaces.¹⁰⁹

Specifically, the visibility of professional prostitutes in English cities undermined the notion that women were to be chaste and morally pure. Though some contemporary commentators stressed the economic circumstances that drove these women onto the streets, Horwood's evidence accorded more with other experts who were far less compassionate in their attitudes.¹¹⁰ Investigative writer Gladys Mary Hall argued that poverty was a "diminishing factor" in the causes of prostitution.¹¹¹ She suggested that it was "impossible to know...whether [the professional prostitute's poverty] is the cause of her way of life, or the accompaniment," an argument which effectively presented the professional prostitute as deserving of moral judgement rather than compassion.¹¹² Other public commentators offered a similarly damning assessment of the morality of the professional prostitute; factors such as "choice" or "laziness" were thought to be significant in attracting women into vice.¹¹³ Viewed from these perspectives, the prostitute represented a form of disreputable womanhood, with her chosen profession making her "essentially unfeminine."¹¹⁴ As a result, officials like the Metropolitan Police Commissioner were more interested in policing this form of

¹⁰⁹ See Philip Hubbard on the prostitute as a "nefarious 'other'" in his *Sex and the City: Geographies of prostitution in the urban west* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 1.

¹¹⁰ See Mrs. Cecil Chesterton, *In Darkest London* (London: Stanley Paul & Co, 1926) on the economic causes of prostitution.

¹¹¹ Gladys Mary Hall, *Prostitution: A Survey and a Challenge* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1933), 84.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ Taylor Croft, *The Cloven Hoof: A Study of Contemporary London Vices* (London: D. Archer, 1932), 29.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 30.

disreputable womanhood than dealing with solicitation. The only evidence Horwood required to be sure that a woman was a prostitute was that she was seen “continually and persistently speaking to men.”¹¹⁵ That the act of liaising with men in public spaces was deemed to be a transgressive enough offence to warrant the attention of the law illustrates the extent to which gendered codes of respectability informed the views of high ranking police officials.

It is important to note, however, that the process of othering prostitute women in law, on the basis of the threat they presented to the social order, was not a tactic favoured by all those in positions of legal authority. The evidence of Deacon, Stipendiary Magistrate in Liverpool, was significant because though he offered a similarly negative moral view of prostitutes, Deacon did not consider it useful to retain solicitation laws which applied only to common prostitutes. He was not opposed to the strategy of legal othering on the grounds that it threatened civil liberties, or that it represented a form of gender inequality, or even because of the problems the police had in distinguishing between prostitutes and supposed ordinary women. Instead, he opposed this type of official categorisation because he believed it gave the prostitute an official status. Deacon’s objections to the use of the law to regulate solicitation were quite different to policies proposed by bodies such as the AMSH. In fact, Deacon’s evidence indicates that the act of interrogating the solicitation law should not automatically be interpreted by historians as inevitably progressive. It cannot be assumed that all criticisms of the way in which the common prostitute was categorised were motivated by concern about the gender inequality enshrined in the solicitation laws.

¹¹⁵ Horwood, Departmental Committee on Street Offences, p. 23.

Deacon differed from the AMSH because at a fundamental level he stressed that the law should simply be changed rather than repealed. For Deacon, solicitation required legal regulation because he was concerned that the visibility of prostitutes in urban centres could have a disastrous effect upon the morality of young women. He told the Committee that it was necessary for law enforcement officers to focus on “habitual offenders,” as these were the individuals most likely to “turn...other young girls into prostitutes.”¹¹⁶ In this sense he fully supported the notion proposed by the likes of Horwood and the social purists that the law must be used to regulate prostitutes because they presented a threat to social order. In particular, Deacon was concerned that the mere presence of prostitutes on the streets of Liverpool was leading to a lowering of moral standards. He argued:

There are certain lodging houses and certain streets which get known as the places where these women live, and young girls going away from home, and so on, will drift into these places and come under the influence of these older women.¹¹⁷

Deacon’s evidence reflected the wider cultural and environmental fears that the boundaries between prostitute women and ordinary women were increasingly being broken down by changing sexual practices. When he was told that there had been a fall in the number of solicitation cases in Liverpool during the early part of the twentieth century, even Macmillan, as chairman of the Committee, implied that

¹¹⁶ Deacon, Departmental Committee on Street Offences, p. 30.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

increased promiscuity might be to blame. He speculated in conversation with Deacon whether “changes in social conditions [may] have rendered this offence less common without necessarily establishing what we should like to hope an improved moral condition.”¹¹⁸

Fears about the changing moral climate had led Horwood to attempt to reassert the usefulness of the category of the common prostitute as a means of differentiating between women, while as Stipendiary Magistrate in Liverpool Deacon did not believe this legal categorisation was helpful. Deacon wanted to see the term common prostitute “eliminated from the statute book” because the definition conveyed legitimacy about the actions of such women. “I have often been struck,” he told the Committee, “by the fact that many of the women seem to regard their trade as a recognised trade.”¹¹⁹ He went on:

I have often heard a woman in effect say to me, apparently in good faith as far as she is concerned, “my occupation is selling my body; that is my trade;” and to a certain extent the law recognises it when it speaks of a common prostitute, as you may speak of a bookmaker; it is her trade, her occupation.¹²⁰

In summary, though Deacon acknowledged prostitution to be both a moral offence and a social problem which the law should intervene in, he did not consider the law as it stood to be satisfactory.

¹¹⁸ Hugh Macmillan to Deacon, Departmental Committee on Street Offences, p. 4.

¹¹⁹ Deacon, Departmental Committee on Street Offences, p. 5.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

Unlike the AMSH, Deacon did not appear to have been at all concerned with the gender bias that the legal category of the common prostitute endorsed. Although Deacon did not detail an alternative legal framework for dealing with solicitation, he argued that more should be done to challenge “habitual prostitutes.”¹²¹ He proposed the introduction of incremental penalties for “convictions for second, third and further offences” under new legislation that he thought might be of the “kind and character” of the existing Vagrancy Act.¹²² Although members of the AMSH such as Neilans were also concerned with questions of public health, Deacon’s idea of prostitutes as a “danger to the community from a health point of view” depended upon a gender-biased reading of the prostitute as a carrier and transmitter of sexual disease.¹²³ Unlike Neilans, Deacon did not include the male client in his moral discourse of public hygiene. He went so far as to suggest that a new offence, tackling the danger that prostitutes presented to public health, should be enacted, though he did not stipulate how the state would define or deal with such an offence.¹²⁴ In this respect, his argument has much in common with Victorian attitudes towards prostitution which were enshrined in the Contagious Diseases Acts of the 1860s.

Far from showing any great concern about the rights of prostitute women, and at odds with his dislike for the legal term common prostitute, Deacon repeatedly defined prostitutes as a particular class of offender requiring specific penalties. For example, when the matter of introducing women previously convicted to the courts

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 12.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

as common prostitutes was raised, he refused to accept that this practice might prejudice the court against them.¹²⁵ He believed himself and other members of the judiciary to be impartial in their attitudes towards such women. Yet he went on to agree with the suggestion that, when committed by prostitutes, “trivial” offences should be treated more seriously than if these misdemeanours had been committed by non-prostitutes.¹²⁶ This suggests that, at the very least, Deacon may well have given cases involving common prostitutes greater weight as a result of knowing about their legal status. It is clear from his stance on this matter that despite his initial suggestion that he did not support the legal category of the common prostitute, Deacon saw prostitutes as a distinct category of offender. By taking a moral view of prostitutes as a danger to the community, Deacon perpetuated the same sense of the prostitute as moral, if not a legal, other that Horwood did.

As a magistrate, Deacon was in position of power when it came to dealing with cases of solicitation. The ambiguity that surrounded the solicitation laws meant that there was considerable potential for personal factors to influence a magistrate’s handling of solicitation cases. The lack of clarity that surrounded the solicitation laws and their implementation left the authorities trying to work with a legal framework that was at best disputed and at worst open to accusations of inaccuracy and prejudice. On the matter of annoyance, the chairman of the Committee suggested the question of “the proof expected of annoyance” was giving “us some anxiety,” and he asked Deacon what he would “expect in the way of proof.”¹²⁷ Deacon replied by suggesting that he would expect the police constable to have

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ Macmillan to Deacon, Departmental Committee on Street Offences, p. 7.

witnessed “a man who resented – that is the expression they use – obviously resented the conduct of the woman in some visible form.”¹²⁸ Answers such as this no doubt added to the Committee’s concern about this issue since, as the chairman noted, such evidence was based on “a matter of inference.”¹²⁹

The degree to which Deacon was prepared to *infer* that a person had actually been annoyed was suitably vague. When asked: “Would you infer annoyance if the policeman’s evidence was to the effect that a man stepped aside in order to pass by the woman who stood in his way?” Deacon answered “I think so.”¹³⁰ For Macmillan himself it was “unsatisfactory” that such proof “rested on inference from rather trivial indications.”¹³¹ Even when Deacon attempted to allay these concerns by suggesting that, in Liverpool, a conviction would not be obtained “if the annoyance were only to one passenger,” the chairman remained worried at this ambiguous implementation of the law.¹³² Macmillan queried: “I cannot see how three unannoyed persons make one annoyed person.”¹³³ In this regard the chairman was uneasy about the fact that the degree of subjectivity surrounding the matter of annoyance meant that it was possible that the law was not being implemented in a uniform manner across solicitation cases. He wondered whether “Persistent solicitation rather than persistent annoyance” might be a more “precise” way of administering the law.¹³⁴ The chairman was not the only member of the Committee

¹²⁸ Deacon, Departmental Committee on Street Offences, p. 7.

¹²⁹ Macmillan to Deacon, Departmental Committee on Street Offences, p. 8.

¹³⁰ Macmillan and Deacon in conversation, Departmental Committee on Street Offences, p. 8.

¹³¹ Macmillan to Deacon, Departmental Committee on Street Offences, p. 8.

¹³² Macmillan and Deacon in conversation, Departmental Committee on Street Offences, p. 8.

¹³³ Macmillan to Deacon, Departmental Committee on Street Offences, p. 8.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

to raise concerns about the insubstantial evidence required to prove annoyance. Mr Pickford asked Deacon:

Isn't it [the issue of annoyance] really a fiction. Do you really think that the average man in the street...is in the slightest bit annoyed if he is stopped and solicited by a prostitute?¹³⁵

Though Deacon could not agree, Pickford remained unconvinced and he wondered whether the issue of annoyance had "become more or less a farce under these statutes."¹³⁶

The issue of annoyance also caused the Bishop of Durham to wonder about associated problems surrounding the policing of solicitation. He asked Deacon whether the police "naturally...have an expectation in their minds of what is required [as evidence of annoyance] and they provide the answer."¹³⁷ The inference that the police might fabricate or exaggerate evidence in a bid to prove annoyance was not lost on Deacon who responded: "I do not like to put it that way. I do not think it is fair to the police really."¹³⁸ However, the notion that the police were involved in a highly subjective and therefore potentially prejudiced process of bringing solicitation cases to court on the basis of annoyance was a matter of concern for the Macmillan Committee. Later the same day they heard evidence from the Chief Constable of Liverpool, Lionel Everett, and both the chairman and

¹³⁵ Pickford to Deacon, Departmental Committee on Street Offences, p. 25.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ Bishop of Durham to Deacon, Departmental Committee on Street Offences, p. 9.

¹³⁸ Deacon, Departmental Committee on Street Offences, p. 9.

Mr Wilberforce pressed him as to why instructions in the local police order book on how to deal with prostitution did not mention annoyance.¹³⁹ Everett's assertion that "the men who handle this class of offence [solicitation] are more or less picked, more rather than less" did nothing to ease the concerns of those on the Committee about the police's apparent disregard of the issue of annoyance.¹⁴⁰ Wilberforce noted that the lack of instructions with regard to annoyance "seems strange."¹⁴¹

The Macmillan Committee was presented with the difficult task of deciding whether and how prostitutes should be regulated in law, given the difficulties of establishing precisely what the nature of their offence was. The evidence of both Horwood and Deacon clearly suggested that prostitutes represented a specific class of woman, from a moral point of view. They set the prostitute apart from other women on account of the danger that they considered her to represent to their communities. Specifically, prostitutes were described as presenting communities with sexual health problems and exerting a negative influence on corruptible young girls. For Horwood, the official othering of prostitutes in law through the category of the common prostitute was a necessary way of dealing with the issue of female disorder. For Deacon, the danger that this type of official recognition might legitimate the prostitute's trade meant that he was more comfortable with maintaining a sense of the prostitute simply as a moral other. However, as Deacon's evidence showed, his idea that the moral could be separated from the legal in matters of prostitution and solicitation proved highly problematic. Deacon did not necessarily want to see the prostitute defined in law as a distinct category of

¹³⁹ Macmillan and Wilberforce to Everett, Departmental Committee on Street Offences, p. 41.

¹⁴⁰ Everett, Departmental Committee on Street Offences, p. 41.

¹⁴¹ Wilberforce to Everett, Departmental Committee on Street Offences, p. 41.

criminal, but he was interested in using the law to police such women as moral outsiders.

The conflation of the law with matters of sexual morality was an issue that greatly concerned the Macmillan Committee overall. Tasked with making recommendations regarding changes to the solicitation laws, the Committee wanted to avoid suggesting that the law intervene in private sexual conduct between consenting individuals. However, as Helen Self has noted, the Committee's final report was contradictory in its argument that the law should not attempt to police individual morality. Self has argued that despite the report's claim that the law should deal only with "the way in which the individual woman conducted herself in public and not with her private morality," there were actually over thirty references to morality in the report itself.¹⁴² Nevertheless, the Committee did not want to be seen to be telling people how to behave morally. In fact, they wanted to avoid bringing matters of morality into their supposedly objective legal discourse as much as they possibly could. But the task of deciding what was criminal and what was not involved making morally inflected decisions about what was right and wrong. As a result, the Committee struggled to decide which aspects of the prostitute's supposed immorality should come under the jurisdiction of the law.

The case for moral regulation

Members of the Macmillan Committee wanted to clarify that they did not morally condone prostitution whilst at the same time trying to maintain distinctions between

¹⁴² Self, *Prostitution*, 6-7.

morality and law. This tension was particularly evident in the discussions that took place between the Committee and Mabel Cowlin on 20th April 1928, not least because Cowlin took the view that solicitation was a moral rather than a criminal offence.¹⁴³ It was a stance that some members of the Committee, including the chairman, struggled with.

Cowlin was introduced to the Committee as a “pioneer,” a title that she readily acknowledged.¹⁴⁴ Her experience of working to improve conditions on the streets was extensive; the Director of the Women Patrols and Training School in Liverpool, she had worked on the patrols since January 1915, until her retirement in 1927.¹⁴⁵ Initially the Liverpool patrols began in conjunction with the National Council of Women, before being established as an independent body funded by a grant from the City Council, though they remained separate from the city’s Police Force.¹⁴⁶ Cowlin described the patrols as a “voluntary organisation,” established “at the beginning of the war to deal with the street problem.”¹⁴⁷ Her sense of the importance of these patrols was evident in her presentation of these initiatives to the Committee as “very skilled work required on the streets.”¹⁴⁸ She noted that the only women working in Liverpool’s police force at the time were “uniformed women working privately,” one of whom took statements from “women and children.”¹⁴⁹ It is also worth noting that, despite their unofficial status the Women Police Patrols

¹⁴³ Mabel Cowlin, Transcript of Evidence, Departmental Committee on Street Offences, 20th April 1928, TNA HO326/7.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

wore a uniform and understood themselves to be an official body, very much in the same mould as the police force.¹⁵⁰ Talking about the patrols, Cowlin said:

They do what the policemen do. They work in the streets very much on the lines of the police. When we are in uniform we represent to the public an official body, we are always open to be questioned on anything we do. Of course we are out to help and protect young people, and to raise the standard of conduct in the streets; that is the objective of the patrols.¹⁵¹

Cowlin's suggestion that the women police performed the same role as male officers was an effort on her part to gain more recognition for women police. In actual fact, Louise Jackson's research has suggested that women police did not do exactly as male officers did. Considering police efforts to tackle prostitution during the postwar years, Jackson argues that the role of the women police tended to be preventative, with policemen carrying out arrests and investigations into prostitution.¹⁵² This evidence presented in this thesis concerning women police suggests that this was also true for 1920s Liverpool.

Nonetheless, this preventative role was significant. Cowlin noted that the Women Police had a central role to play in preventing the corruption of younger members of the community. During the course of her testimony, she talked about the problem of solicitation, with direct reference to the issue of youth. She told

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.* p. 11.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² Louise A. Jackson, *Women Police: Gender, Welfare and Surveillance in the Twentieth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 174-175.

those present that: “The great object of the women patrols is to protect young people; we include boys as well as girls, young men as well as young women; and the patrols are specially trained to observe the problem of soliciting.”¹⁵³ By discussing these issues together in this way Cowlin implied that she believed the issues of solicitation and youth to be connected. She recalled wartime fears about the sexual interest young girls were thought to have shown in soldiers and explained that the patrols were originally established during the war to combat this specific problem. Telling the Committee that the patrols had “rather kept that [wartime] outlook,” Cowlin considered the “chief danger in the streets at night” to be that faced by the “young man or girl [who] may fall through the overtures of men or women soliciting. It is for that they are out, very largely.”¹⁵⁴ To this end, Cowlin and the patrols represented a continuity with earlier moral anxieties about the sexualisation of young people who frequented city spaces. As will be shown in later chapters, these anxieties also drove the initiatives of another local group, the Liverpool Vigilance Association, where they were held on to even more strongly.

The Macmillan Committee did not challenge Cowlin’s idea that urban spaces presented dangers to the morality of the young. But that is not to say that the Committee were content to discuss the issue of solicitation as a purely moral (rather than a moral *and* legal) matter. The Committee pursued a deliberate line of questioning with Cowlin intending to draw out to what extent she thought the law should enforce morality. The Committee were frustrated by her reluctance to provide a definitive answer. The chairman asked Cowlin if she thought it

¹⁵³ Cowlin, Departmental Committee on Street Offences, p. 11.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.* p. 12.

“undesirable that open solicitation should go on in our streets for immoral purposes.”¹⁵⁵ Questions such as this were loaded in such a way as to give an indication of the chairman’s own position on the issue. Despite being given the task of questioning the laws that surrounded it, the chairman’s wording made it clear that he did not want to be seen to be condoning prostitution. His use of the words “our streets” immediately placed ownership of public spaces in the hands of the supposedly moral and righteous and set these people aside from prostitutes and the men who used them. Indeed, there was a sense among the Committee members that the issues being discussed were potentially transformative. It was put to Cowlin:

We have been listening to some evidence which rather surprised some of us, to the effect that solicitation for immoral purposes should be permitted in our streets and the law should take no notice of it unless it reaches the state of actual disorder, breach of the peace.¹⁵⁶

When asked about her position on this Cowlin responded “You are asking a difficult question,” leading the chairman to push “It is one of the difficult questions we have to answer on this side of the table.”¹⁵⁷

The discussions that took place between Cowlin and the Committee indicate that there was concern amongst the members not to be seen to be condoning prostitution by asking questions about its relationship to the law. For Cowlin:

¹⁵⁵ Macmillan to Cowlin, Departmental Committee on Street Offences, p. 13.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ Macmillan and Cowlin in conversation, Departmental Committee on Street Offences, p. 13.

the whole question of whether [solicitation] should be regarded as a vice that society should deal with through non-legal measures, or whether it should be regarded as a crime which the law should put down, is a very difficult thing...because if you deal with solicitation per se as a crime you are laying tremendous responsibility on the people who have to bring that crime to Court, namely on the police.¹⁵⁸

In this way, Cowlin explained her own doubts about using the law to deal with solicitation by referring to the practicalities of policing rather than entering into a discussion on the relationship between morality and jurisprudence. Overall, it was a response that left the Committee unsatisfied.

Charged with answering these difficult questions, Committee members continued to seek clarity from Cowlin on her understanding of the legal and moral status of solicitation. Macmillan asked Cowlin whether the patrols in Liverpool were performing a “public service” by intervening in instances of solicitation.¹⁵⁹ When she agreed that they were, he continued by asking whether the same efforts should also be applied to instances of smoking in the streets. Cowlin could not agree.¹⁶⁰ The question from the chairman was deliberately intended to distance solicitation from other forms of anti-social behaviour, in order to present solicitation as a moral transgression in which the law could intervene. Macmillan’s personal views on solicitation became apparent when he implied that smoking could not be legislated against while solicitation could be, because the latter “is calculated to

¹⁵⁸ Cowlin, Departmental Committee on Street Offences, p. 13.

¹⁵⁹ Macmillan to Cowlin, Departmental Committee on Street Offences, p. 13.

¹⁶⁰ Cowlin, Departmental Committee on Street Offences, p. 13.

have unfortunate results upon the people of this country, and because it is in itself an indecent and disorderly thing.”¹⁶¹ Not only did he present solicitation as a threat to national order, he believed this threat to be deliberate and conscious. For the chairman solicitation was both a legal *and* a moral matter. Though Cowlin shared the Macmillan’s dislike of solicitation she remained uncomfortable with the idea that it should be treated as a legal matter. She replied: “I think it is almost entirely a matter of conscience. They know they are doing an anti-social thing.”¹⁶² In fact Cowlin even went as far as to suggest that “We should do as much [work to combat solicitation] I think” were there no law backing the patrols.¹⁶³

The Committee found a similar reluctance to support a legal approach to solicitation in the evidence of Cowlin’s colleague, Miss L. D. Potter, the Patrol Leader with the Women Police in Liverpool. Giving evidence at the same meeting, Miss Potter suggested that the law should only be applied to instances of solicitation if there was “annoyance.”¹⁶⁴ She explained that she did not think solicitation should be punished if it was conducted discreetly, leading her to correct an assertion by the Committee: “You were saying a minute ago that it was always an offence against decency and good order; it is usually very quietly done.”¹⁶⁵ This immediately prompted Wilberforce to ask “Isn’t it just as mischievous?”¹⁶⁶ To which Potter replied:

¹⁶¹ Macmillan to Cowlin, Departmental Committee on Street Offences, p. 13.

¹⁶² Cowlin, Departmental Committee on Street Offences, p. 14.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ Mrs. L. D. Potter, Departmental Committee on Street Offences, 20th April 1928, TNA HO326/7, p. 16.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ Wilberforce to Potter, Departmental Committee on Street Offences, p. 16.

There are different ways of looking at it. You must punish street disorder; therefore disorderly solicitation must be punished; but supposing it is not disorderly, the question is whether you can punish a thing which is in itself a moral offence. No, I do not think I should say so.¹⁶⁷

In light of this testimony, Potter explained that the patrol work she undertook was “preventative” in nature and she went on to say that she thought the patrols and “to a certain extent” the police should “use their discretion to try and stop immorality.”¹⁶⁸ Confused by this position, Wilberforce asked Potter why she would not like greater support from the law.¹⁶⁹ Her response of “I do not think there are laws enough and you cannot interfere with private morals,” caused the chairman to interject “But aren’t you interfering with private morals?”¹⁷⁰ The chairman was correct, insofar as the work conducted by such street patrols was moral in nature rather than legal.

The Committee struggled to make sense of the evidence of these two witnesses because their reluctance to argue that the law should be used to regulate morality was considered to be at odds with Cowlin and Potter’s ideas about the need to police public morals. Potter’s assertion that they were “Not really” interfering with private morality did not square with her active role in trying to prevent solicitation.¹⁷¹ The chairman confessed that he had “difficulty” understanding “how the police patrol, any more than the policeman, should have any right to interfere in

¹⁶⁷ Potter, Departmental Committee on Street Offences, p. 16.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹⁶⁹ Wilberforce to Potter, Departmental Committee on Street Offences, p. 17.

¹⁷⁰ Macmillan and Potter in conversation, Departmental Committee on Street Offences, p. 17.

¹⁷¹ Potter, Departmental Committee on Street Offences, p. 17.

a matter of morals between two citizens...if what they are doing is not an infringement of some legal dictum?”¹⁷² By interrogating the purpose of the women police patrols in this way, the Macmillan Committee was able to draw out the moral strategy of the organisation and the work that they did.

The Women Police Patrols were part of a culture of unofficial street policing which aimed to prevent women falling into prostitution on Liverpool’s streets. Like the other organisation that was very active in the city, the LVA, the Women Police Patrols saw city spaces as morally dangerous. Areas which housed the poor or foreigners were regarded as sites of immorality. Cowlin told the Committee about “one special district in Liverpool,” which she described as being “in the Irish Quarter,” where there was a great deal of disorderliness and “hooliganism” prior to the Women Police Patrols entering the area.¹⁷³ Not only did this anecdotal evidence reproduce wider cultural perceptions of the Irish as a group in need of particular moral guidance, it also reflected the view that a person could be corrupted simply by spending time on the streets. This latter inference was made more explicit when Cowlin suggested that the patrols would “centralise on the poor districts where the streets have to be used by the people for their recreation because they have no gardens or outlet otherwise.”¹⁷⁴

The significance of moral regulation in the work of the Women Police Patrols was picked up by the Committee, as they attempted to make sense of their views on the use of the law in cases of solicitation. The chairman told Cowlin “we want your view as to whether you could do as good social work and preventive

¹⁷² Macmillan to Potter, Departmental Committee on Street Offences, p. 19.

¹⁷³ Cowlin, Departmental Committee on Street Offences, p. 25.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

work of the type you are engaged in if you had not behind you the sanction of the law.”¹⁷⁵ Despite her earlier scepticism about the usefulness of the law to the work of the patrols, Cowlin said that this was a question she could not answer. Significantly, she did not challenge or comment on the chairman’s understanding of her work as a form of “social work” rather than policing.¹⁷⁶ Both Cowlin and Potter appear to have accepted another Committee member’s description of their work as “philanthropic activities.”¹⁷⁷ In fact they seem to have acknowledged this type of social welfare status, with Cowlin telling those present: “We do not feel that the country is ready yet for the setting up of what is equivalent to a women’s police service.”¹⁷⁸ The women police’s efforts to explain their work via social work and philanthropy implied that they were still more comfortable as moral guides than as law enforcers. Still relatively new to legal regulation, these women attempted to pioneer a new professional status for themselves, whilst at the same time falling back on the traditions of the purity campaigners who patrolled the streets in order to maintain female morality. In this way, the women police representatives attempted to offer a solution to the problem of solicitation that bridged both the moral on the legal. They did not think that the law should be used to target solicitation or that the official police force should overly concern itself with this offence. Yet they did not think that solicitation should be ignored as a social problem either. Instead, the

¹⁷⁵ Macmillan to Cowlin, Departmental Committee on Street Offences, pp. 15-16.

¹⁷⁶ Potter, Departmental Committee on Street Offences, pp. 15-16. The description of the Women Police’s work as a form of social work was likely unchallenged because it was largely accurate. In her research on the work of the Women Police Patrol’s in Liverpool, Gaynor Williams has noted that much of the work that the patrollers undertook could be considered “a form of street centred social work.” Gaynor Diane Williams, ‘Women in Public Life in Liverpool Between the Wars,’ Unpublished Thesis: University of Liverpool (2000), p. 124.

¹⁷⁷ E.H. Kelly to Potter, Departmental Committee on Street Offences, p. 27.

¹⁷⁸ Cowlin, Departmental Committee on Street Offences, p. 27.

women police proposed their own brand of unofficial and informal street policing whereby they, as respectable women, would watch over and maintain the morality of other women. It was an approach already taken by purity groups around the country and, as this thesis will show, in the midst of the unrest about the solicitation laws, it was an approach that was to remain prominent throughout the interwar years.

Conclusion

In an effort to clearly demarcate the boundaries between legal and moral arguments about solicitation, the Macmillan Committee recommended that the legal category of the common prostitute should be abolished. If solicitation was the offence being prosecuted, then, it was argued, it should not matter who committed the act. The evidence presented in this chapter indicates that the morality of prostitution was very much present in discussions about the legal nature of solicitation as an offence. Concerns about how the prostitute should be defined in relation to other women, the degree of influence her presence had over other women and her supposed impact upon urban morality were key features in the Committee's discussions. The pressing nature of these concerns set the parameters of official debate. Though questions were raised about the appropriateness of the term common prostitute, these questions proved problematic in a society where the prostitute woman acquired great cultural significance as an example to other women of how not to behave. With the boundaries being broken down between the 'ordinary' women and prostitute women, it is unsurprising that the Macmillan Committee's

recommendation to dispense with the term common prostitute was ignored by politicians.

There were a number of factors which created the political room for a debate about the solicitation laws. The AMSH, an abolitionist group, managed to publicise their arguments well and they were important in the formation of the Macmillan Committee. At the same time, the application of the solicitation laws by the police had been called into question and marred by scandal. The changing social and economic position of women raised concerns that prostitutes were becoming harder to identify. Additionally, fears about greater sexual freedom meant that the law's definition of a common prostitute was becoming problematic. For some, like Deacon, the use of such a legal category was a hindrance in using the law to target increased immorality. It was therefore quite plausible even for social purity supporters to question the efficacy of the solicitation laws and argue for the elimination of the legal category of the common prostitute.

By the 1920s, the moral anxiety provoked by the figure of the prostitute was deeply associated with concerns over female sexuality and women's use of public space. In deciding how to legally define the parameters between the prostitute and the promiscuous woman, law-enforcers and politicians consolidated dominant moral codes of female respectability and gender order. Even the Committee's attempts to distinguish between private morality and the law proved problematic. As chairman of the Committee, Macmillan tried to rationalise solicitation as both a legal and moral issue, by suggesting that prostitution represented a threat to the moral and therefore national order. Prostitution was considered such a significant moral

misdemeanour that it was tantamount to an offence against social stability. For the Macmillan Committee, this was reason enough to recommend that laws should remain in place to target solicitation, even if these laws did not apply specifically to common prostitutes. However, this did not mean that they recommended that prostitution be treated more leniently, nor that they did not collaborate in creating a sense of the prostitute as other. The evidence of the Women Police Patrol representatives indicates that even where a moral (rather than a legal) response to prostitution was advocated, prostitution was still regarded as a transgression that required informal moral policing. This involved 'respectable' women patrolling the streets and performing moral surveillance duties in a bid to maintain urban order. Even though these patrollers were not particularly interested in using the law to target prostitutes, their moral discourse about prostitution as a social problem and a sign of female disreputability had much in common with the image of prostitution as it was portrayed by purists such as the NVA. Although at the national level purists may well have called for the assistance of law makers in dealing with prostitution, this thesis will show that at a local level many purists were adept at functioning autonomously from the law to enact unofficial policing of prostitution and female sexuality in general.

Analysis of this type of social surveillance will show how the centrality of moral discourses in legal debates about solicitation had implications for the way in which *all* women used public space. The state was not able to resolve the issues with the solicitation laws because it could not resolve the problem of defining the prostitute or the precise nature of her offence. In the indecision that preceded and

followed the Macmillan Committee, social purists continued to take to the streets and proffer informal moral surveillance. They acted as an unofficial police force whilst simultaneously allowing politicians to avoid clarifying the legal status of solicitation. In the next chapter, I detail the practical, ground level work and motivations of various social purity patrols in Liverpool. I suggest that the emphasis their workers placed on prostitution as a moral issue, rather than a social or economic problem, created a sense of urban space a threat to female respectability. The idea that the prostitute was a transgressive other who innocent women needed to be protected against had clear implications for the moral surveillance of the city's streets. Moreover, it meant that all women's use of public space came under moral scrutiny.

Chapter Two

Patrolling the Port: Female Morality and Rescue Work in Early-Twentieth-Century and Interwar Liverpool.

At the start of the twentieth century, Liverpool was home to a number of significant charitable, philanthropic organisations. Some of these groups were noted by contemporaries, and later historians, for their progressive attitudes towards the poor.¹ Moral judgement was to be sidelined in favour of more understanding efforts to help those in poverty or need. However, it was not always easy for philanthropists to intervene in the lives of others without justifying their interest on moral grounds. In this chapter, I explore how nineteenth-century moral discourses about poverty persisted and overlapped with gendered understandings about Liverpool's social problems in the interwar period. It will be argued that for some organisations, particularly those involved in women's rescue work, concerns about the environmental or economic aspects of need were frequently sidelined in favour of their continued emphasis on issues of morality.

In particular, I examine the role of the Liverpool Vigilance Association (LVA), an organisation primarily concerned with overseeing women's role in the city's public spaces. I aim to compare their approach to rescue work with that of the Liverpool Women Police Patrols (WPP), an organisation seemingly performing

¹ Gaynor Diane Williams, 'Women in Public Life in Liverpool Between the Wars,' Unpublished Thesis: University of Liverpool (2000), 85. For another account of the innovative nature of welfare work in the city around the turn of the century see Margaret Simey, *Charity Rediscovered: A Study of Philanthropic Effort in Nineteenth-Century Liverpool* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1992), particularly 124.

similar work, in order to highlight the particular moral philosophy of the LVA.² I argue that despite the increasing significance of new thinking about the poor during the early-twentieth century, fuelled by the emergence of social scientific conceptions of welfare, traditional distinctions between the deserving and undeserving poor proved hard for both of these organisations to leave behind. In particular, Victorian concerns about the corrupting influence of urban spaces on female morality continued to influence welfare interventions into the lives of working-class women in Liverpool before and after the First World War. Significantly, this meant that these organisations acted as moral guardians rather than forces of legal authority. However, in suggesting that there was evidence of a long continuity of nineteenth-century moral welfarism in twentieth-century Liverpool, I do not want to suggest that there was little new about the activities of those women who sought to influence the moral character of the streets. Whilst the LVA had clear links to earlier traditions of moral anxiety and social purity, the WPP attempted to fashion themselves in reference to more contemporary debates about the professionalisation of this type of 'women's work'. Nevertheless, it will be clear that, even where the WPP were concerned, the gendered practice of street-patrolling and the cultural pertinence of discourses of urban female vulnerability was part of a much longer tradition of understanding public space as inimical to respectable femininity.

² For a full account of the history of women police in Liverpool see Williams, 'Women in Public Life in Liverpool Between the Wars,' Chapter Four.

Preventative Work

Before examining the specific origins of the LVA, it is first useful to consider the culture of women's rescue work in Liverpool at the time that the organisation was active. If we are to understand the how these organisations came to be, we first need to understand their motivations and their aims. Crucially, we need to note that the social power wielded by these groups was in excess of their legal powers. Although both the LVA and the WPP undertook patrol work in the city, neither organisation possessed the ability to detain or arrest potential offenders. Despite an active campaign in support of women police, even the female police that worked in the city during the interwar period remained separate to the official police force. Devoid of official status, the WPP promoted their work by emphasising their moral role in urban life; they argued that they helped with the maintenance of "order and decency" in the city. Far from striving to fashion themselves as female equivalents of their male counterparts, Liverpool's women police emphasised the gender specificity of their skills in their campaign for official status. Arguing that they offered a "special contribution" towards resolving the "problem of the streets," the WPP associated their public moral influence with ongoing national efforts to tackle prostitution.³ In their 1928 report, they highlighted the 1928 Street Offences Committee's open acceptance of a "special sphere of usefulness for women police."⁴ By drawing attention to the national recognition of their initiatives, the Liverpool Women Police attempted to construct a positive and successful representation of public womanhood. Playing on pre-existing ideas about women's

³ Liverpool Women Police, Annual Report 1928, LRO 365WOM/18/1-19, p. 4.

⁴ *Ibid.*

supposed moral fortitude, they argued that women were especially suited to patrol work of a moral nature. Their beat work in parks and in key inner-city areas (such as the Scotland Road area, Lime Street and Church Street) meant that their patrollers could keep watch over children, teenagers and young couples. As a result, they believed that their work helped keep Liverpool's streets and parks more respectable:

Undoubtedly the presence of uniformed women has a deterrent effect in the prevention of indecent offences against young people, gutter-crawling by men in cars, persistent picking up of, or by young girls, etc.⁵

However, the WPP believed that it was only through becoming "an integral part of the Police Force" that they could "prove their full value."⁶ It was an aim that was not to be achieved until 1948.⁷ In the interim, they were subsidised by modest grants from the local Watch Committee, an arrangement established after the First World War.⁸ Marginalised by the local council, Gaynor Williams has argued that "[i]n some ways patrol work became a form of street-centred social work."⁹ The work of WPP officers saw them offer counselling to local parents, perform home visits and help vulnerable girls into hostels.¹⁰ Consequently, their approach had much more in common with the strategies of surveillance practiced by social purity

⁵ Liverpool Women Police, Annual Report 1929, Unpublished, LRO 365WOM/18/1-19, p. 5.

⁶ Liverpool Women Police, Annual Report 1928, p. 5.

⁷ Williams, 'Women in Public Life,' p. 119.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

groups than it did with official police work. Just as the National Vigilance Association performed unofficial duties that complemented the activities of the Metropolitan Police in London, women police in Liverpool operated in a similar way to female-dominated voluntary organisations, such as the LVA, in their work alongside the Liverpool police force.¹¹ Certainly, the WPP were aware of and in contact with the LVA: Edith Rose, Secretary of the LVA sat on the WPP's Committee throughout the interwar years.¹² Indeed, there were a number of figures who maintained interests in both organisations. Sir J. Sandeman Allen M.P. was both vice-chairman of the LVA and a member of the WPP's General Council. Both organisations also shared a number of high status figures drawn from the local religious community. The President of the Free Church Council was a vice president of the LVA and WPP, as was the Rev. Frampton, a senior Jewish minister. Additionally, the Anglican Lord Bishop of Liverpool and the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Liverpool took up vice president roles in both organisations.¹³

Though their patrols were distinct from one another, the presence of both women police and the Liverpool Vigilance Association workers on the streets of Liverpool during the interwar period suggests that there was a significant degree of shared concern about the moral order of the city's public spaces. Together, these two organisations promoted a specific moral optic, and their watchfulness on the streets enacted a distinctive form of control over the activities of young women. For

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

¹² See Liverpool Women Police, Annual Reports, Unpublished, LRO 365WOM/18/1-19.

¹³ See Liverpool Women Police, Annual Report 1928 and LVA Annual Report 1928-1929, Unpublished, LRO M326 VIG/3 Box 2. This plethora of religious representation suggests that despite being influenced by Judeo-Christian moral traditions, women's preventative work in Liverpool was not necessarily used to promote or convert those that were 'saved.'

the LVA, girls travelling alone or without adequate supervision were of paramount importance. It was feared that many girls who arrived in the city, especially those from Ireland, were not experienced in dealing with city life. Without sufficient funds, geographical knowledge of the city or familial support, such young women were believed to be especially vulnerable to being accosted by unscrupulous characters seeking to recruit them into vice and criminality. In their efforts to prevent this, the LVA set up patrols at the docks and at Lime Street train station, where representatives would approach women as they disembarked from boats or trains. LVA workers would enquire what the purpose of the woman's visit to the city was; if they were intending to stay, they would ask women whether they had secured 'respectable' accommodation and a 'respectable' job. If any of these things were found to be lacking from the woman's plans then the LVA would offer its assistance by, for example, taking her to a hostel, arranging job interviews or planning for her to return home to her family.

Of course, some of the women approached did try to refuse the LVA's assistance or thwart their surveillance. In 1939, for example, a couple of teenage "runaways" left their Manchester homes and walked and caught lifts to Liverpool.¹⁴ The LVA said that the girls "wanted work as waitresses, and had at one time been in Pantomime at a Liverpool theatre."¹⁵ They were placed in a hostel while work was sought for them but, according to the LVA, the girls "soon proved to be dishonest, stealing money and running away" and it transpired that they had provided false

¹⁴ LVA Annual Report 1938-1939, Unpublished, LRO M326 VIG/3 Box 2, p. 10.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* As will be explored in more detail in Chapter Five, the LVA showed extra concern about the moral vulnerability of young girls who were interested in theatrical work.

addresses for their parents.¹⁶ The LVA subsequently had to report the girls to the police as “missing.”¹⁷ However, the LVA’s persistence with reluctant girls often paid off. In 1918 the LVA found two girls, aged seventeen and fourteen, alighting the Holyhead train in the company of a soldier and a sailor.¹⁸ The LVA worker who spotted them asked a ticket collector to “detain the girls and allow the men to go on.”¹⁹ This gave the LVA worker an opportunity to speak to the girls alone, an intervention that the girls were “most indignant” about and they “refused to give any information at first.”²⁰ Nevertheless, the LVA worker persisted and eventually found that the girls had met the men at Holyhead. The men “asked the girls to come to Liverpool” and told them “they would see them right.”²¹ In actual fact the girls were supposed to be travelling to Manchester where the elder girl worked in a house. The LVA worker placed the girls on the train to Manchester but only “after talking seriously to them” about their behaviour.²² As this case shows, the LVA was persistent in its efforts to help young women and its workers were comfortable disciplining girls who resisted their efforts.

That the LVA were able to convince young women to follow their instruction speaks to the determination of their workers and their shrewd use of culturally recognisable tropes of authority and officialdom. Despite having no legal powers over those whose journeys they intervened in, their references to their patrol

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ LVA Annual Report 1917-1918, Unpublished, LRO M326 VIG/3 Box 2, p. 9.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

work as a “duty” gave the LVA’s work a veneer of officialdom.²³ They took steps to project their importance visually by casting themselves in the light of other recognisable authorities. Unlike the women police, who sometimes undertook uniformed patrols, the LVA workers had no uniform. However, their use of a badge, imitating the insignia of the police force, provided the LVA with a version of symbolic, cultural power by proxy [Figure 2.1].

Figure 2.1: LVA Badge²⁴



Though the badge held no official significance because it did not connote any form of objective authority, it served to differentiate LVA workers from ordinary members of the public. As an emblem of trust and guardianship, it conveyed a sense

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

²⁴ Source: LVA Annual Report 1916, p. 16.

of the LVA workers as experts in matters of urban guidance, local transport and, most importantly, morality.

Indeed, though the women involved in the LVA understood Liverpool's streets as spaces of special danger for young women, their own presence within the city's spaces as part of the LVA patrols implicitly suggested that it was perfectly possible for some women to possess the ability to navigate these dangers, in order that they might serve others. The LVA workers' public position as knowledgeable urban guides did not, therefore, detract from their own respectability as women. Just like the Liverpool Women Police, the LVA workers presented themselves as having gender-specific skills in the associated fields of welfare and moral rescue. Unlike the professional prostitute, or the street-walker, LVA workers were drawn into urban spaces because of the moral version of femininity that they embodied: patrol work enabled them to make use of their feminine care-giving skills and exercise their maternal instincts towards women and children in need.

The Establishment of the LVA

The Liverpool branch of the National Vigilance Association (NVA) was founded in 1908. Set up to address the linked issues of female vulnerability and sexual morality in the port, the LVA's work was an extension of the NVA's agenda.²⁵ The NVA had been formed in the wake of mass demonstrations in 1885 calling for a new Criminal Law Amendment Act to raise the age of consent to eighteen and give police more powers over brothel keepers. The protection of women was at the

²⁵ See Typed Notes on the History of the LVA, N.D., LRO 326/VIG/9.

centre of the NVA's campaign²⁶. From its inception, the NVA promoted the didactic potential of legislation and instructive guidance concerning moral matters and, in Liverpool, a similar concern with moral education as a means to preventing moral degradation was evident in the work of the LVA. Just three years after the formation of the LVA, the *Catholic Herald* published an article entitled 'Dangers to Girls', in which the Bishop of Liverpool, and LVA vice president, congratulated his organisation as a "class of charity superior to others."²⁷ The elevated status he afforded the Association was born, according to the Bishop, from the LVA's explicit interest in thwarting "moral evil."²⁸ A social problem for the "community as well as the individual", the article suggested that "the soul affected by moral evil was more important than the body affected by physical evil."²⁹ By way of a solution to this ethical dilemma, it was argued that "prevention" was needed over cure and that this prevention should take the form of a "moral training," instilling in "the young" the virtues of honesty, purity and "reverence to authority."³⁰ For both the LVA and NVA, their special moral custodianship was vital in this respect. The *Catholic Herald* article contrasted two classes of individuals that the NVA regularly encountered. The first group was made up of:

...young women, innocent and virtuous, who, through necessity or otherwise, had to travel, and to whom danger came in the utter loneliness

²⁶ Frank Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities: Medico-Moral Politics in England since 1830*, Second Edition (London: Routledge, 2000), 81-82. See also Edward Bristow, *Vice and Vigilance: Purity Movements in Britain since 1700* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1977).

²⁷ 'Dangers to Girls,' *Liverpool Catholic Herald*, 21st October 1911. Cutting preserved in Liverpool Vigilance Association: Newspapers, LRO M326 VIG 5/1.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

and helplessness of foreign cities, want of means and difficulties as to destination.³¹

Abroad in urban settings that were strange and new to them, it was felt that the innocence of such girls left them without the appropriate social and economic tools to negotiate the moral dangers presented by city life. At the same time, their naivety meant that they were open to unscrupulous characters who would seek to manipulate them. It is in this regard that the article presented the second class of individuals dealt with by the NVA and LVA workers. These were the “victimisers – men and women of infamous character,” who sought out “the young and innocent” and “determined to ruin [them],” and in fact “cared very little if they ruined them body and soul.”³² Situating the fragility of feminine decency in dichotomous opposition to such predatory characters, organisations such as the NVA and its local counterpart, the LVA, effectively established themselves as moral arbiters, there to identify the good and the vulnerable and protect them from the bad and impure. By their own estimations, members of the LVA worked morally and practically acted to prevent the pollution of female respectability in urban public spaces.

That the city received its own branch of the Vigilance Association in 1908 indicates the extent to which Victorian conceptions of vice and moral danger still persisted into twentieth-century thinking about women’s urban welfare. Just months before the establishment of a local branch in the city, in late 1907, the NVA had held a meeting in Liverpool on the trafficking of women and the international white

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

slave trade. Though the international and national movement of women working as prostitutes did not usually involve kidnap or force during the early-twentieth century, the issue nonetheless provoked great anxiety about vulnerabilities of the nation's young women as a whole.³³ Hosted in a drawing room at the Liverpool Town Hall, the Deputy Lord Mayor, Alderman Menlove, presided over the meeting in place of the Lord Mayor. Other notable local figures in attendance included the Lady Mayoress, a number of religious figures (including the Bishop of Liverpool) and the Hon. J.L. Griffiths, the American Consul in Liverpool³⁴. Griffiths allied his support for the NVA's campaign against vice with his wider fears about the moral degradation of modern society. He argued that "Civilisation...rested upon the sanctity of the home, the innocence of childhood, and the purity of womanhood."³⁵ To "[d]estroy that sanctity, innocence, and purity" would, he argued, bring about "chaos."³⁶ Concerned about the moral dangers of the city's "cheap attractive music-halls" and the "well-dressed scoundrel[s]" who frequented such establishments for the purpose of luring girls into the "maelstrom of vice," Griffiths played upon contemporary understandings of feminine naivety and urban contamination.³⁷ He feared that were it not for the crusades of organisations such as the NVA and its affiliates, even greater numbers of young girls, especially those "from the peace and quiet of the country", would become corrupted by the "tumult and glamour of a

³³ Shelia Jeffreys, *The Idea of Prostitution* (North Melbourne: Spinifex, 1997), 8.

³⁴ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 19th October 1907. Cutting preserved in Liverpool Vigilance Association: Newspapers, LRO M326 VIG/5/1.

³⁵ *Liverpool Courier*, 19th October 1907. Cutting preserved in Liverpool Vigilance Association: Newspapers LRO M326 VIG/5/1.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Daily Dispatch*, 19th October 1907. Cutting preserved in Liverpool Vigilance Association: Newspapers, LRO M326 VIG/5/1.

great city”³⁸. Drawing direct reference to the role of Liverpool in the white slave trade, Rev. John Wakeford, spoke at the same meeting. He suggested that the NVA’s agents “had found that young girls were being waylaid on their way to Liverpool, and shipped from here to Buenos Ayres [sic] at £200 a head.”³⁹ Whilst Wakeford called for “all the forces of Christian charity” to be pitted against the immorality of the traffickers, he also noted the practical importance of challenging organised trafficking through a counter-strategy.⁴⁰ In this sense, ongoing panic about young, British girls becoming embroiled in an international vice ring allowed organisations such as the NVA to claim legitimacy and authority as protectors of the nation’s young women.

It was against this backdrop that Liverpool found itself playing host to its own branch of the NVA. In January 1908 a number of Liverpool’s religious and political leaders again found themselves in the company of NVA members at the city’s Town Hall. This time it was the Lady Mayoress who presided over proceedings. The meeting had been called at the behest of the Liverpool branch of the Traveller’s Aid Society to discuss the establishment of a local branch of the NVA in Liverpool.⁴¹ In an effort to promote the virtues of his organisation and curry favour for the proposed Liverpool branch, the NVA Secretary, Mr. W. A. Coote, addressed those present. The “object” of the new organisation, he proposed, was to “consolidate their work in Liverpool by placing qualified workers in the city

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 19th October, 1907. Cutting preserved in Liverpool Vigilance Association: Newspapers, LRO M326 VIG/5/1.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ From an article in an unidentified Catholic newspaper, published 17th January 1908. Cutting preserved in Liverpool Vigilance Association: Newspapers, LRO M326 VIG/5/1.

to assist the local committee to look after girls who were leaving or arriving here from other parts of the world.”⁴² Coote was subsequently praised for his “wonderful spirit of earnestness and wisdom” by the Rector of Liverpool, who gave his full support to the initiative.⁴³

The creation of a local branch of the NVA in Liverpool proved popular with the other religious figures in attendance at the start-up meeting. The Rev. Canon Kempthorne volunteered his support, arguing that greater steps were needed in the “organised attack upon a strongly organised evil – an organisation managed with Satanic ingenuity and persistency.”⁴⁴ Also in favour was the Catholic Rev. Father W. Pinnington, who took the opportunity to welcome the Liverpool branch “on behalf of the Catholics of Liverpool.”⁴⁵ Pinnington echoed the concerns about the vulnerability of naive young women raised by Griffiths at the Town Hall meeting in late 1907, just three months prior. Pinnington commented that the formation of the Association had come at a time when Liverpool found itself increasingly playing host to “simple and unsuspecting girls from country towns and villages”, particularly those from rural Ireland.⁴⁶ With these girls in mind, Pinnington emphasised that the focus of the new local Vigilance Association would be on the uncorrupted, saveable girl. Though Pinnington acknowledged the efforts of organisations that dealt with the “poor wrecks of humanity” and already “fallen women,” he stressed that the “excellence of this Association consists in this - it is

⁴² *Liverpool Courier*, 11th January 1908. Cutting preserved in Liverpool Vigilance Association: Newspapers, LRO M326 VIG/5/1.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ From an article in an unidentified Catholic newspaper, published 17th January 1908. Cutting preserved in Liverpool Vigilance Association: Newspapers, LRO M326 VIG/5/1.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

preventative.”⁴⁷ With such points having been discussed, support for the proposed local branch was unanimous, and Pinnington found himself appointed as a member on the new committee.⁴⁸

By the end of the meeting, a number of other significant local figures had been appointed to the board of the new branch of the Vigilance Association. The Lord Mayor of Liverpool was made president, whilst the Mayors of Birkenhead, Bootle and Southport were appointed as vice presidents.⁴⁹ Others given positions on the committee included the Liverpool, Birkenhead, Bootle and Southport Mayoresses, the Rev. J. Collins Odgers, two Free Church Council representatives and a representative of the Travellers’ Aid Society.⁵⁰ As Travelling Secretary of the NVA, Miss Edith Rose was also heavily involved in the activities of the Liverpool branch. A recipient of the O.B.E. following the First World War, Rose was an active member of the LVA during both World Wars.⁵¹ Indeed during the Second World War she was singled out for praise by the Rector of Liverpool, the Rev. R. Ambrose Reeves, who proclaimed that “were it not for the untiring zeal and energy of Miss Rose it is difficult to see how the work of the Society could have been preserved these last years.”⁵² The membership of the new LVA revealed that it was members of the middle and upper classes, particularly those with religious affiliations, who took the lead in maintaining moral purity in Liverpool. This narrow social group took it upon themselves to uphold respectability on the city

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Liverpool Courier*, 11th January 1908. Cutting preserved in Liverpool Vigilance Association: Newspapers, LRO M326 VIG/5/1.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ LVA Annual Report 1919-1920, Unpublished, LRO M326 VIG/3 Box 2, p. 2.

⁵² LVA Annual Report 1942-1943, Unpublished, LRO M326 VIG/3 Box 2, p. 2.

streets and, significantly, it was this privileged group who decided that women and girls of lower social status were vulnerable to falling into immoral lifestyles.

In some ways, the nature of upper- and middle-class philanthropy and moral welfare had changed during this period. Margaret Simey has argued that the welfare movement was characterised at the start of the twentieth century by a sense of “change and transition.”⁵³ A new, democratic conception of welfarism emerged, encouraging those within the sector to reassess their understandings of poverty and the destitute. Condemnation of the poor as morally dubious was supposedly replaced by interest in the social scientific study of the conditions of poverty.⁵⁴ Moreover, Simey has argued that Liverpool was a key site in the development of these new approaches towards the poor during the early-twentieth century.⁵⁵ At the end of the nineteenth and start of the twentieth century, she has noted that the city attracted welfare workers with innovative approaches towards the poor. For example, she has suggested that social policy pioneer Frederic D’Aeth, a cleric who came to reside in the city in 1905, had a “key role in winning for the city its status as the flagship of social advance in the early twentieth century.”⁵⁶ However, this new approach to welfare was not universally employed by charitable organisations and often the theory struggled to emerge in practice. Workers soon found that their idealism undone by the “trickery of the scrounger,” and the notion that principles and good will would transform the lives and attitudes of the working class was

⁵³ Margaret Simey, *Charity Rediscovered: A Study of Philanthropic Effort in Nineteenth-Century Liverpool* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1992), 124.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 124

⁵⁵ Margaret Simey, *From Rhetoric to Reality: A Study of the Work of F.G. D’Aeth, Social Administrator*, edited by David Bingham (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005), 5.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

shown to be naive.⁵⁷ That the NVA was able to continue expanding into new, localised settings such as Liverpool indicates that any new, progressive social work discourses about the poor had to at the very least co-exist, if not compete, with traditional Victorian discourses about vice and female morality.

Fully able to wield political influence during the early-twentieth century, these older strategies of moral welfare continued to shape legislative debate, particularly where prostitution was concerned. For example, the sensationalist journalist W. T. Stead had been part of a successful campaign to enact the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Bill raising the age of consent to sixteen when he published an exposé of child prostitution in London. The sudden death of Stead on the *Titanic* in 1912 gave a significant boost to a new, much debated “White Slave Traffic” Bill, with calls to enact the Bill in tribute to his work.⁵⁸ When it was passed in December 1912, the new Criminal Law Amendment, which included the NVA among its supporters, proscribed that those suspected of procuring women could be arrested without a warrant.⁵⁹ However, its clause that landlords must evict women convicted of prostitution in their dwellings was less welcomed amongst feminists.⁶⁰ Overall, the new Act’s deployment against trafficking, which again received much strategic support amongst feminists, disappointed once it was enacted. Many women were concerned about the extent to which the Act simply gave police further powers to increase their surveillance of prostitutes.⁶¹ But neither the NVA nor the

⁵⁷ Simey, *Charity Rediscovered*, 129.

⁵⁸ Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast: Feminism, Sex and Morality* (London: Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 2001), 297-298.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 302.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 302-303.

LVA were overly concerned with the liberty of the prostitute in their battle against vice; rather their overriding concern was with female moral surveillance. Like the NVA, the LVA had a distinctly Victorian attitude towards female morality and women's relationship to public space. In fact, whilst the early-twentieth century saw changes in women's use of public space, organisations like the LVA, and to a lesser extent the WPP, indicate the persistence of Victorian codes of morality when it came to femininity and urban space.

The First World War: Women and Moral Anxieties in Liverpool

The First World War provided added stimulus to the social purity movement's concerns about female sexual morality and urban space. For organisations such as the NVA, the social conditions of the First World War exacerbated the problems brought about by increased female freedoms and, as a result, strengthened their hand in preventative and rescue work with young women. In Liverpool, welfare organisations responded and, in the case of the women police, were even formed in response to such fears. The LVA argued that despite the number of travellers passing through the city being "much reduced" by the "special conditions and difficulties" of war, their landing stage and railway station patrols "had regularly to be maintained."⁶² They argued that it was a time when "abnormal excitement... accentuated the moral dangers [and] made special vigilance necessary for the safeguarding of girls and young women."⁶³

⁶² LVA Annual Report 1919-20, p. 2.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

Women police patrols were established in November 1914 using “large numbers” of female volunteers, indicating the degree to which moral supervision of the streets was felt to be necessary during wartime conditions.⁶⁴ Funded partly by the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies and partly by public donations, sixty-nine women undertook wartime patrol work with the Liverpool Women Police.⁶⁵ Armed with a card bearing the Chief Constable’s signature, a map, a guidebook, an armlet and badge, they patrolled working-class areas such as Scotland Road (as well as the more middle-class Blundellsands), the city’s public transport districts of the landing stage and Lime Street, as well as the docklands and around various military camps in places like Litherland, Seaforth and Knotty Ash.⁶⁶ The patrol work of the women police overlapped with that of the LVA (particularly in the areas around Scotland Road, Lime Street and the docks) and it appears that the two organisations were in close contact with one another. As was noted earlier, the LVA’s Edith Rose was a member of the Liverpool Women Police Patrol’s Central Committee during the interwar years and it was not unusual for the women police to rely on the same networks of voluntary welfare as the LVA.⁶⁷ The Liverpool House of Help (formed in 1890) worked with both organisations during the twentieth century. As Williams has argued, the House of Help maintained traditional gender distinctions in the prosecution of welfare initiatives and moral reform. Save for the emblematic presence of male civic and religious figures as patrons and vice presidents, the House of Help was run mainly by women for

⁶⁴ Liverpool Women Police, Annual Report 1933, Unpublished, LRO 365WOM/18/1-19, p. 5.

⁶⁵ Williams, ‘Women in Public Life,’ p. 123.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Liverpool Women Police, Annual Report 1928, p. 2.

women.⁶⁸ The female-centric nature of the organising committee was born from the organisation's interest in "issues affecting women and children, particularly those of health and morality."⁶⁹

Whilst this network of moral welfare and surveillance strengthened the control that these organisations could claim over areas such as the docks and the central railway station, politically it presented a particular problem for the women police. Unlike the LVA and other voluntary purity organisations, members of the Women Police Patrols were part of an organised campaign to receive official policewoman status. Yet by conducting themselves in very similar ways to the voluntary bodies during the war, the women police, themselves, inadvertently hindered the assertion that their work should be official and attested. The 1924 Report of the Departmental Committee on the Employment of Policewomen suggested that there still existed "a great difference of opinion as to whether the work [of women police] can be better done by policewomen than by members of voluntary organisations."⁷⁰ Their war work did not go completely unrewarded, however. During 1918, their patrols were granted a £200 expenses grant by the Liverpool Watch Committee and this was increased to £600 in 1919 and £2000 in 1921.⁷¹ That the local authority was willing to partly fund these patrols indicates the extent to which the moral concerns promoted by the LVA and utilised by women police campaigners were recognised at the level of the local state.

⁶⁸ Williams, 'Women in Public Life,' p. 97.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

⁷⁰ *Report of the Departmental Committee on the Employment of Policewomen*, Cmnd 2224 (1924), Home Office, p. 6. Preserved in *Employment of Women Police: Publications, 1908-1948*, WL 3AMS/B/12/04.

⁷¹ Liverpool Women Police, Annual Report 1933, p. 5.

Anxieties about working-class women engaged in a spectrum of prostitutions, from the amateur to the professional, were increased when the gendered geographies of urban space were partly broken down as a result of the First World War. Judy Giles has called for historians to take note of the gendered experiences of social change.⁷² She has argued that women were an increasingly noticeable part of urban life in the years during and after the War. She writes, “[f]inancial independence, increased job opportunities, educational opportunities and the mobilities occasioned by the First World War had made women visible as never before in the public spaces of all large cities.”⁷³ As women entered these new sectors of social and economic life, the networks that they used in order to negotiate the city expanded. ‘Respectable’ women were able to make independent use of public transport and the streets in order to move around city spaces. In doing so, they challenged and changed the meanings attached to particular spaces, destabilising previously held assumptions and the supposed absolutisms about the gendered nature of the city. According to Giles, this proved to be an “exhilarating” experience for many middle-class women.⁷⁴ The public and private distinction that had once confined them to the domestic sphere became partly undermined.⁷⁵

However, with this freedom came renewed anxieties and calls for the increased restriction of women’s movement in public spaces. While middle-class women were able to negotiate these urban freedoms successfully, for those women thought to be most at risk of moral degradation these developments were less

⁷² Judy Giles, ‘Narratives of Gender, Class and Modernity in Women’s Memories of Mid-Twentieth Century Britain,’ *Signs, Gender and Cultural Memory*, 28, 1 (2002): 21.

⁷³ Judy Giles, *Women, Identity and Private Life in Britain, 1900-50* (London: Macmillan, 1995), 102.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

enabling. The idea that there existed only a fine line between the promiscuous and the prostitute began to permeate the thinking of the public, purity campaigners and even the state.⁷⁶ The war gave extra impetus to the idea that the promiscuous female represented a moral danger to the social order. With wartime propaganda working to associate an idealised female citizenship with “patriotic motherhood” (the notion that the female domestic and maternal role could and should sustain the nation’s military) female citizenship was still primarily understood as a preserve of the private sphere.⁷⁷ Alongside the image of the British Tommy as a chivalrous protector of women and the home sat his feminine counterpart, the dutiful, virtuous and domesticated female.⁷⁸ Women who contravened this ideology were accordingly positioned as a threat to British masculinity and to the nation. A wave of panic surrounding young women’s supposed efforts to sexually “entice dutiful and sober soldier-men” in a frenzy of “khaki fever” illustrated the extent of Britain’s cultural anxiety about the immoral practices of its youth.⁷⁹ The attention that these young females lavished upon soldiers produced new categories of sexual transgression, as the boundaries between promiscuity and prostitution became less and less distinct.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Julia A. Laite, ‘Taking Nellie Johnson’s Fingerprints: Prostitutes and Legal Identity in Early Twentieth-Century London,’ *History Workshop Journal*, 65 (2008): 103-104.

⁷⁷ For more on “patriotic motherhood” see Nicoletta F. Gullace, *“The Blood of Our Sons”: Men, Women, and the Renegotiation of British Citizenship During the Great War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), Chapter Three.

⁷⁸ See Gullace, *The Blood of Our Sons*, 54.

⁷⁹ Philippa Levine, “‘Walking the Streets in a Way no Decent Woman Should’: Women Police in World War I,” *Journal of Modern History*, 66 (1994): 43; Angela Woollacott, “‘Khaki Fever’ and its Control: Gender, Class, Age and Sexual Morality on the British Homefront in the First World War,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, 29 (1994): 325-347.

⁸⁰ Helen J. Self, *Prostitution, Women and Misuse of the Law: The Fallen Daughters of Eve* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), 53.

This sense of heightened moral anxiety did not produce new approaches to regulation on the part of the NVA and the LVA; I argue throughout this thesis that the work undertaken by these organisations was a continuation of Victorian discourses and strategies. Instead, these new panics were incorporated into their work and used to legitimate their existing concerns and activities. In Liverpool, fears about khaki fever were certainly evident, with suspicion surrounding young women who made the acquaintance of soldiers. Perhaps fearing that girls experiencing khaki fever would be less amenable to their approach, the LVA workers would sometimes approach the young woman's male company in a bid to intervene in the girl's journey or verify her respectability. When one LVA patroller met two girls disembarking from an Irish boat on their way to a Midlands munitions factory, she made it her duty to prevent the girls from fulfilling their intention to continue on their journey in the company of soldiers that they had met on the boat.⁸¹ Approaching the soldiers, rather than the girls, the worker made sure that they "promised that they would not detain the girls on the journey," a guarantee that they apparently upheld.⁸²

In a similar case, an LVA worker intervened in the journey of two Irish girls, aged seventeen and fourteen who arrived in Liverpool from the Holyhead train in the company of a soldier and a sailor. Rather than attempting to stop the girls herself, the LVA worker asked the ticket collector to "detain the girls and allow the men to go on."⁸³ With local port and railway co-operation often aiding the LVA in

⁸¹ LVA Annual Report 1917-1918, p. 6.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

their duties, the ticket collector carried out the request.⁸⁴ Once alone, the LVA spoke to the girls and found that they were “most indignant and refused to give any information at first.”⁸⁵ After a time the younger girl confessed to the LVA worker that they had met the men at Holyhead. Despite having tickets to Manchester, where they had originally intended to stay in a house where the elder girl worked, the girls had taken the men up on an offer to travel with them to Liverpool. With the girls separated from the sailor and soldier, the LVA worker was able to see them on the train to Manchester, but not before “talking seriously to them.”⁸⁶ For the LVA, these incidents were a clear indication that young girls were too ready to make the acquaintance of servicemen. The organisation’s efforts to keep soldiers and young girls apart reflected social purity concerns that young girls were at risk of indulging in promiscuous behaviour when in the company of these men.

Moral Surveillance and the Liverpool Vigilance Association after the Great War

Never were our boys and girls given so much liberty (not to say licence) as at the present time; never were our parks and gardens so much frequented; never were there such large numbers of unemployed men and women, youths and maidens, walking our streets and lounging in public spaces;

⁸⁴ The LVA suggested that their work was appreciated by “Shipping Offices Staff, the Railway Staff, and the Police, as well as by the travelling public.” LVA Annual Report 1927-1928, Unpublished, LRO M326 VIG/3 Box 2, p. 5.

⁸⁵ LVA Annual Report 1917-18, p. 9.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

never were there such temptations and problem plays, suggestive pictures, dances...⁸⁷

The above quote from one Liverpool commentator in 1927 indicates that moral anxieties about the relationship between gender, sexuality and urban space remained significant in Liverpool after the First World War. Across the nation, idleness amongst the young, time spent socialising on the streets and the influence of more glamorous aspects of consumer culture, such as the cinema, were seen as significant threats to morality. In an effort to strengthen moral order, young working-class women were encouraged to retreat into feminine positions in domestic service and the ideal of domesticated womanhood was reasserted.⁸⁸ In Liverpool, the LVA certainly held the same anxieties about the moral condition of the nation, though they expressed them with their own local inflection. During the early 1920s, the city itself was as an acute source of concern for the LVA. Acting as chairman of the LVA's organising committee, G.W. Hockley, the Rector of Liverpool, wrote:

The conditions of a great seaport such as Liverpool demand increasing watchfulness on the part of those concerned for the moral welfare of the women and girls passing through its gates...⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Unidentified newspaper, July 7th 1927. Cutting preserved in Newspaper Cuttings Relating to Women Police, LRO 365WOM/17/1-15.

⁸⁸ Susan Kingsley Kent, *Gender and Power in Britain, 1640-1990* (London: Routledge, 1999), 298 - 299.

⁸⁹ LVA Annual Report 1923-1924, Unpublished, LRO M326 VIG/3 Box 2, p. 3.

Much to their chagrin, the LVA believed Liverpool to have a popular appeal among the young as the “gateway to adventure.”⁹⁰ For naive youngsters, Liverpool was believed to act as “a sort of magnet to them, and [excite] their imaginations.”⁹¹ The LVA’s concern with “runaway girls” intent on “stowing away on some outgoing steamer, or to find employment” or “pleasure” focused the dangers of Liverpool’s role as a port city.⁹² In this way, the discourse of the city drawn on by the LVA was fundamental to the organisation’s justification for its own existence.

The LVA concentrated its efforts on preventative measures in the battle over vice. They concerned themselves primarily with the moral education and supervision of young girls, who were feared vulnerable to those who would lure them into prostitution. Though all young women who passed through the docks and station were potential subjects of the LVA’s watchfulness, there were a number of clues that the organisation looked for when deciding upon whether or not they considered a girl to be in need of help. Typical signs of vulnerability included their youth, any evidence of economic hardship, or a readiness to talk to strange men. Girls who were found upon further investigation to be estranged from family members were of particular concern and the LVA undertook regular work to reunite young female runaways with their parents.

In their 1928-1929 report, the LVA recounted the case of two young girls named Mollie and Dorothy. Aged just 14 and 15, the story of these girls embodied the nature of the LVA’s work at this time.⁹³ Having run away from their home town

⁹⁰ LVA Annual Report 1927-1928, p. 3.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² LVA Annual Report 1929-1930, Unpublished, LRO M326 VIG/3 Box 2, pp. 6-7.

⁹³ LVA Annual Report 1928-1929, p. 6.

in the Midlands, the girls had developed an elaborate plan to stowaway in a liner's lifeboat and seek out domestic work abroad.⁹⁴ After sending postcards to each of their parents explaining their intentions to leave the country, the girls dressed themselves in boys' clothing and set off on their foreign adventure.⁹⁵ By cloaking themselves in a masculine disguises, the girls' plan reflected the ongoing cultural significance of gender in young women's negotiation of Britain's cities during the period. Dressed as boys, the girls intended that their movements would be far less conspicuous, although women denying their femininity and dressing in masculine clothing was considered "profoundly disturbing" during the mid-twentieth century.⁹⁶ However, although it is unlikely that those who paid close attention to the girls would have been fooled by their attire, the girl's plan nevertheless shielded them from close scrutiny. At least one of their fellow travellers had been taken in by their disguise. The LVA noted that the girls had been "quite elated when an elderly gentleman in the same carriage said to one 'Hop out, Sonny' on arrival at Central Station about midnight."⁹⁷

Their new masculine identities allowed Mollie and Dorothy unhindered access to sites that would otherwise have been denied to them, as two young girls travelling unaccompanied. Their experience exemplifies the extent to which public spaces were still understood as sites of masculinity. At the same time, their plan was indicative of an increasing dissolution of the boundaries between the masculine and the feminine. Trends in post-First World War fashion focused attention on women's

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Penny Summerfield, 'Gender and War in the Twentieth Century,' *The International History Review*, 19, 1 (1997): 7.

⁹⁷ LVA Annual Report 1928-1929, p. 6.

clothing as a symbol of transgression and modernism. The short hair and boyish-figure of the flapper, the most famous of female cultural archetypes from the period, created a sense of the modern woman as freer from the ideological gender constraints of earlier generations.⁹⁸ Though neither Mollie nor Dorothy were dressed as flappers, their plan to assume male identities through disguise was probably inspired by this new sense of fashionable androgyny.

The girls' plan to leave the country was ultimately ended in Liverpool. How they found themselves under the charge of the LVA is not clear, though it is significant that Mollie and Dorothy were only subject to adult intervention once they had dispensed with their masculine disguises and given their clothes to some poor young boys.⁹⁹ This gesture of generosity and care for those possibly less fortunate than themselves influenced the sympathetic light in which the LVA viewed the girls. For the LVA the transgressive activities of Mollie and Dorothy did not signify any irredeemable or unscrupulous ambitions. Said to be "well-educated, nicely spoken and well mannered," the LVA received the girls with sympathy and understanding.¹⁰⁰ They were not considered to be immoral or boisterous girls, rather they were presented as naive individuals who had acted out of a desire to "show they could be self-reliant and independent of their parents."¹⁰¹ Furthermore, the LVA did not unilaterally judge women who wanted or needed to work outside the home, so long as the employment that they sought was suitably respectable. Both girls explained that they intended to take up posts in domestic service to fund their

⁹⁸ See Kingsley Kent, *Gender and Power in Britain*, 286. See also Adrian Bingham, *Gender, Modernity and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 48.

⁹⁹ LVA Annual Report 1928-1929, p. 6.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

ambitions to become nurses.¹⁰² This perhaps mitigated any unease that the LVA workers might have felt about the determined ambition of these two young girls. Domestic service and nursing could be reconciled with traditional ideas about women's social roles emanating from the private sphere, relying as they did on the feminine attributes of home management and philanthropy. As welfare workers themselves, the workers of the LVA may even have been able to identify with the ambitions of Mollie and Dorothy. Where the LVA representatives considered themselves different to such girls, of course, was in their age and experience. In the fight against vice, the LVA placed a premium upon their interactions with characters like Mollie and Dorothy. Both attractive girls who "looked several years older" than their actual age, the LVA feared that they would be prime candidates for an "undesirable man or woman" seeking to trap innocent young women into immorality.¹⁰³

Conclusion

In early-twentieth-century and interwar Liverpool, patrol work was used as an important means of policing the city's public spaces. Believed to have a vital role in the maintenance of moral order, the women who patrolled Liverpool's streets were afforded informal, if not legal, powers over the actions young women who were thought to be in need of moral protection. Authoritative and 'respectable', the presence of these women upon Liverpool's streets was intended to deter naive

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

females from engaging in disreputable sexual practices or venturing into notorious areas.

For some organisations, particularly the Liverpool Women Police, the exercise of patrolling was about their own social politics as much as it was about women's welfare. Campaigning for official status, the women police worked to use their patrol work to stake a claim for themselves in the public sphere, without necessarily identifying as feminists. In this sense, patrolling was culturally significant as a simultaneously public and feminine endeavour. However, as Williams has convincingly argued, the drives towards professionalised forms of intervention in the lives of the poor did not diminish the local importance of voluntary welfare.¹⁰⁴ The LVA is an important example of one such voluntary organisation already performing work that was similar to that which the women police were arguing would be better performed by professional bodies. The LVA's patrolling represented a form of public womanhood that was far less controversial than that exhibited by the young working-class woman who used the streets for entertainment and display. By concentrating on the welfare of travellers in need, female morality and the fight against the white slave trade, the LVA set themselves up as bastions of purity in Liverpool. Yet paradoxically, their feminine presence on the city's streets reaffirmed the notion that public space represented a threat to the moral purity of young women. The next chapter will examine the ways in which these anxieties about urban space and public morality were played out in the city in relation to the specific problems posed by prostitution.

¹⁰⁴ Williams, 'Women in Public Life,' p. 96.

Chapter Three

White Slavery, Female Vulnerability and the LVA in the Interwar Period

This chapter considers what social purists' fears about white slavery during the interwar years can tell us about their notions of female moral vulnerability on the streets of Liverpool. Specifically, I will show how the LVA used the threat of the white slave trade to justify and frame the scope of their preventative work on Liverpool's streets. Despite being set up to tackle white slavery and prostitution, I want to make clear that the LVA was mainly concerned with preventative work and with helping women on an individual and opportunistic basis. The Annual Records of the LVA show very little direct engagement with prostitutes, brothels or suspected pimps and traffickers, with the bulk of their work taking the form of chaperoning young women as they arrived in the city from boats and trains. As such, I begin the chapter by showing that the LVA possessed the same "messier mingling of good intentions and blinkered prejudices" that had been characteristic of many a charitable effort for at least half a century.¹ Indeed, in the first section of this chapter I give an overview of the continuity between earlier purists and the LVA and argue that the LVA took a nineteenth-century fear of white slavery and applied it to Liverpool during the interwar period. This was significant because it meant that the LVA drew on fears about white slavery to justify the continuation of preventative patrol work as a means of maintaining moral order. It also meant that

¹ Seth Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and social politics in Victorian London* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 3.

the LVA were able to take up and perpetuate the idea that female morality was fragile and in need of protection.

In the previous chapter I argued that anxieties about the white slave trade were a fundamental part of the LVA, having fuelled the establishment of the organisation in 1908. The Association even went so far as to reassert their interest in the problem of trafficking through the adoption of a new official title after the First World War. Though they continued in their co-operation and affiliation with the NVA, in 1921 the organisation decided to follow “other provincial centres” in setting themselves up as an “independent society.”² In real and practical terms, the greatest change that this brought about was a change in name. Up until this point, the association had officially acted under the title “National Vigilance Association (Liverpool Branch).”³ From 1921 their official title changed to “The Liverpool Society for the Prevention of International White Slave Traffic,” though for clarity they are referred to throughout this work under their common title of the LVA.⁴ This choice of moniker indicates that notions of white slavery or trafficking were still a source of moral currency during the interwar period. Yet it is important to be clear that the scope of the LVA’s activities and moral campaigning meant that they did not pursue the abolition of white slavery as a single issue consideration. It will be evident in this chapter that the LVA’s implementation of a discourse about female traffickers was intended to increase the authority of their patrol workers as

² LVA Annual Report 1922-1923, Unpublished, LRO M326 VIG/3 Box 2.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.* The organisation had officially adopted the name ‘Liverpool Vigilance Association’ by the late 1940s. The similarity between this name and their first title, “National Vigilance Association (Liverpool Branch),” means that the LVA is the name most associated with the organisation, even during the interwar years.

respectable females and therefore legitimise their surveillance of travelling women. In practice, this meant that the LVA frequently intervened in the lives of women with no obvious connections to prostitution of any kind. Women were scrutinised as *potential* traffickers or *potential* prostitutes. In fact, in arguing that the LVA had little contact with prostitutes or the traffickers believed to be operating a white slave trade, I suggest that the organisation's fears about trafficking of this kind appear to have outweighed the threat that this trade actually posed to women in Liverpool. The LVA records show little evidence of serious organised trafficking in the city.

I do not want to suggest that the LVA wilfully misled the public about the threat of white slavery in order to win support. The urgency with which the LVA discussed this issue indicates that the organisation considered white slavery to be a genuine problem and that they believed their work to be vital. Acting with sincere intentions to protect young women, the motivations of the organisation are best interpreted as a complex mix of altruism and moralism. The campaigns that the LVA engaged in were carefully pitched in order to draw attention to the care and protection that they believed vulnerable young (particularly working-class) women required. The notion of white slavery that the LVA proliferated eroticised young female travellers in such a way that their innocence and purity became matters of contestability and anxiety.⁵ Young women's virtue became something to monitor and protect.

⁵ Similarly, Maria Luddy suggests that, in early-twentieth-century Ireland, "For the reading public the appeal of white slavery was its lurid and melodramatic stories of intrigue, crime, seduction and sex. Such tales provided virtually pornographic entertainment to the reading audience." Maria Luddy, *Prostitution and Irish Society 1800-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 163.

At the same time, it will be shown that the LVA's emphasis on the need to secure funding for their activities and about the local importance of their moral and social roles were frequently expressed in relation to the threat of white slavery. In their efforts to help women, the LVA had to present itself as the antithesis of white slavery. The organisation claimed it had the power to define white slavery, identify what constituted an urban danger and explain how female immorality could be prevented. Furthermore, discourses of white slavery allowed the LVA to advertise themselves as an internationally significant organisation and, consequently, as experts in the protection of vulnerable women.

The ways in which white slavery was discussed and understood in Liverpool shows that historians must move beyond perceptions of white slavery as a discourse that was focused upon kidnappers and the kidnapped. The "archetypal white slave story" revolved around young white women being abducted by "secret foreign syndicate[s]," with the help of immoral women acting as "agents" in the spread of vice.⁶ This "media and popular perception" of a "helpless innocent victim decoyed by procurers" undoubtedly informed the LVA's keen emphasis on the vulnerability of naive young girls and the threat of the immoral female agent, but in general the LVA regarded the threat of white slavery in much more subtle terms than this.⁷ As the case studies in the latter part of this chapter will show, the idea that women were being taken by 'foreigners' and "forced into brothels" was not especially prevalent

⁶ Marek Kohn, *Dope Girls: The Birth of the British Drug Underground* (London: Granta Books, 1992 [2001]), 4-5.

⁷ Lesley A. Hall, *Sex, Gender and Social Change in Britain since 1800* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 2000), 87. Sheila Jeffreys also suggests that that in the "popular mind, the traffic was understood to involve force and violence and to be carried out against the victim's will," although she acknowledges that this was not usually the case. Sheila Jeffreys, *The Idea of Prostitution* (North Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 1997), 8.

in Liverpool and, significantly, myths about girls being drugged with flowers and handkerchiefs were not focused on by the LVA.⁸ Instead, the type of trafficking that the LVA mostly dealt with involved more measured forms of coercion on the part of individuals who, for example, persuaded young girls to travel with them to cities that they were not familiar with. Moreover, the LVA's broad interest in trafficking as coercion, rather than kidnap, gave women who were believed to be out to corrupt other women particular potency within the LVA's overall discourse of sexual immorality. By associating these women with the moral panic about white slavery, the LVA was able to claim legitimacy in differentiating corruptible girls from corrupting women.

Finally, this chapter heeds Stefan Slater's recent assertion that the "remarkable endurance" of a Victorian and Edwardian "myth" about white slavery during the interwar years has been "neglected" by researchers.⁹ The work presented here will help towards overcoming this gap in the historiography by showing how discourses of white slavery were used to justify the activities of the LVA and their interventions into the lives of young female travellers during the early-twentieth century and throughout the interwar years. I also want to make clear that though there may have been little evidence of serious organised trafficking in the city, the threat of white slavery was nevertheless taken seriously by the LVA. Their emphasis on the dangers of white slavery acted as a conduit for the organisation's more general fears about urban immorality, whilst the LVA's sense of themselves as experts in the protection of young women and the prevention of prostitution

⁸ See Hall, *Sex, Gender and Social Change*, 87.

⁹ Stefan Slater, 'Pimps, Police and Filles de Joie: Foreign Prostitution in Interwar London,' *The London Journal*, 32, 1 (2007): 55.

depended upon their patrol workers fully believing that urban public spaces were indeed sites of immorality. In repeatedly telling themselves and their supporters about the fragility of the boundary that separated vulnerable from fallen women, the immoral dangers that the LVA hoped to prevent grew ever more potent in the organisation's own collective imagination. Consequently, the myth of white slavery ultimately proved to be extremely long-lasting.

The LVA and the Earlier Purity Movement

This chapter takes up the work of a number of historians, such as Seth Koven, Paula Bartley and Lucy Bland, who have looked at Victorian philanthropy and finds a number of parallels in the twentieth-century activities of the LVA. Koven's argument that Victorian philanthropists played imagined fears about the sexual immorality of the working-class off against their own proclamations of moral purity has an early twentieth-century and even interwar relevance.¹⁰ For example, Koven suggests that in the late-nineteenth century Dr Barnardo was adept at publicising the "tension between sexual innocence and sexual experience" of "ragged girls" in his efforts to win over public sympathy to their plight.¹¹ Barnardo's strategy hinged, on the one hand, on his ability to alert the public to the dangers of the sexual immorality that he believed these girls faced and, on the other hand, on his ability to distance himself from and condemn any such depravity.¹² In a similar way, the LVA

¹⁰ Koven, *Slumming*, 138. Walkowitz makes a similar point to Koven when she suggests that W. T. Stead's 1885 'Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon' expose of prostitution in London "simultaneously helped to amplify the fear of sexual danger for women and to mobilize public outcries against it." Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 95.

¹¹ Koven, *Slumming*, 130.

¹² *Ibid.*

had to make sure that they disassociated themselves from urban immorality while at the same time publicly highlighting its existence. This process of articulating moral fears served to reinforce the LVA's belief in urban moral danger as much as it helped them to galvanise support for their efforts to offer young girls protection from the threat of white slavery.

There are similarities too in the overall aims of the late-nineteenth-century philanthropists and the LVA, insofar as both groups tended to take a 'micro approach' to the problems that they sought to combat. As Koven has argued, the philanthropic efforts of late-nineteenth-century child-savers, however well intentioned, failed to address and maybe even discouraged any sustained critique of the structural and societal inequalities that caused child poverty.¹³ Indeed, the aims of the LVA were still very much in-line with that of the late-nineteenth-century social purity movement, out of which its parent organisation, the NVA, grew.

Yet to argue that the LVA simply mimicked nineteenth-century practices, or that they were simply a localised unit of the NVA would be incorrect. Paula Bartley's assertion that "social purists endorsed a more or less consistent policy of repression, even though their stated intentions were protective" is too simplistic to be applied to the workings of the LVA.¹⁴ Themes of protection and prevention, however misplaced or prejudicial, remained firmly on the LVA's local agenda even if, at the national level, the social purity movement was advocating more straightforwardly repressive policies, such as closing down brothels and arguing for

¹³ Koven *Slumming*, 133.

¹⁴ Paula Bartley, *Prostitution: Prevention and Reform in England, 1860-1914* (London: Routledge, 2000), 155.

legal forms of moral regulation.¹⁵ That is not to say that the work of the LVA did not have repressive outcomes. Certainly, their practices were intended to discourage young women from using public space on the same terms as men because they believed women to be especially vulnerable to the immoral lifestyles and shady characters that shaped the urban world. However, this discouragement was motivated by a general desire to protect women rather than simply regulate them. In this sense, they had much in common with other preventative organisations such as the Ladies' Associations for the Care of Friendless Girls, who sought to prevent girls from turning to prostitution by providing moral guidance.¹⁶

The most obvious links between the LVA and the wider social purity movement came from their use of moralising discourses in their preventative strategies and in their receptiveness to the moral panics that resonated through organisations such as the NVA. Both Paula Bartley and Lucy Bland have suggested that white slavery became an important part of the social purity movement's agenda from the early-twentieth century and this chapter will demonstrate that the LVA was no different in this regard.¹⁷ Bartley notes that during this time the NVA showed a great deal of concern about foreign prostitutes frequenting Piccadilly and London's West End.¹⁸ She suggests that the "tension between repression and protection was all too evident" as purists lobbied for restrictions on immigration as a means of protecting young women. Moreover, this lobbying was fundamental to the

¹⁵ Trevor Fisher, *Prostitution and the Victorians* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1997), xi and Bartley, *Prostitution*, 155-157.

¹⁶ See Bartley, *Prostitution*, Chapter Three and Frank Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities: Medico-Moral Politics in England since 1830*, Second Edition (London: Routledge, 2000), 88.

¹⁷ Bartley, *Prostitution*, 170; Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast: Feminism, Sex and Morality*, (London: Tauris Parke, 2001), 297.

¹⁸ Bartley, *Prostitution*, 170. Bland also suggests that there was also growing concern from purists about French, Belgian and Jewish prostitutes and brothel-keepers. Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, 109.

organisation of international conferences on white slavery. At a 1902 conference in Paris an International Convention for the Suppression of the White Slave Traffic was set up, involving the appointment of officials whose job it was to guard port and railway stations.¹⁹ Hull, Folkestone, Dover and various railway stations in London soon found themselves playing host to a “social purity network” that helped over 12,000 women between 1903 and 1908.²⁰ The formation of the LVA had its roots in this campaign, although the LVA was not itself set up until 1908. Moreover, the establishment of the LVA shows how, in Liverpool, the wider social purity movement’s fears about white slavery were channelled into preventative work on the ground. The patrol work that the LVA focused on was a routinised part of their preventative strategy. During the interwar years discourses of white slavery were not simply about prostitution. Fears about the threat of white slavery were felt most strongly by social purists because they believed that all young women, especially those from the working class, were vulnerable to corruption, exploitation or temptation when it came to sexual immorality.

Sheila Jeffreys’ suggestion that “[t]he traffic which feminists were concerned with in the 1920s and 1930s was one in which women were transported to other countries to be prostituted” is only part of the story.²¹ What is not fully appreciated is the extent to which anxieties about the safety of women centred on inward migration into Britain and female travel within the country. An analysis of the LVA’s work during the interwar period reveals that, despite this organisation being set up to deal with the white slave trade, much of the ground-level work

¹⁹ Bartley, *Prostitution*, 170.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 171.

²¹ Jeffreys, *The Idea of Prostitution*, 8.

undertaken by the organisation had less to do with women and girls being taken away but with girls arriving into the city. Whole groups of women, particularly the working class and immigrants from places such as Ireland, were therefore liable to find themselves under the gaze of the LVA's inspection. Individuals deemed to be living or embarking upon transient lifestyles came under close examination from the LVA. Their breaking down of geographical borders raised questions about their motivations for changing localities and created a sense of anxiety about their immediate intentions and longer-term ambitions. The reasons why women travelled to Liverpool, where they travelled from, and what they hoped to achieve in the city all informed the LVA's assessment of their supposed vulnerability to being caught up in the white slave trade.

Charity and Class

It was shown in the previous chapter that the 'white slave trade' was believed to be in evidence in Liverpool and that this belief was significant in the establishment of a local branch of the National Vigilance Association in the city in 1908. Promoted by and amongst influential elites and religious leaders in the city, the Liverpool branch of the NVA found that significant numbers of its supporters came from women drawn from the middle and upper classes. In this respect the organisation closely mirrored its social purity heritage closely. According to Paula Bartley, the social purity movement of the later-nineteenth century had a definite class character, with working-class women in particular being subject to the close scrutiny of middle-

class purists.²² As Figure 3.1 reveals, the main figures leading to the creation of the LVA were of a higher status than the women that the organisation envisaged itself protecting. Indeed, the image that surrounded the LVA in its early days was focused on the organisation's anti-white slavery stance, as well as on the organisation's influential female advocates. Published in the *Daily Dispatch* on 5th November 1908, Figure 3.1 shows the newspaper's report on a forthcoming Charity Dinner to be held on behalf of the "National Vigilance Association, For the Suppression of the White Slave Traffic."²³ Held at the prestigious Adelphi Hotel and featuring the Earl of Aberdeen as "chief guest," the notice is particularly revealing about the class background of the purity movement's supporters.

²² Bartley, *Prostitution*, 157.

²³ This was the title used on a pamphlet produced by the NVA to promote the event. LRO M326VIG/5/1.

Figure 3.1: Liverpool and the White Slave Traffic²⁴



The headline 'LIVERPOOL AND THE WHITE SLAVE TRAFFIC' sat somewhat oddly with the accompanying photographs of well-groomed and elegantly-dressed middle-aged women. Yet these images represented an integral part of the white slave campaigns of these local purists. The women depicted were the very antithesis of white slavery, not simply because of their opposition to the trade but because of their backgrounds. As representatives of white, middle-class respectable femininity they epitomised everything that the potential white slave was

²⁴ Source: *Daily Dispatch*, 5th November 1908. Cutting preserved in Liverpool Vigilance Association: Newspapers, LRO M326VIG/5/1.

not. Unlike vulnerable Lancashire “mill girls”²⁵ or the “failures” found in “common lodging houses”²⁶, their jewellery and ostentatious hats also suggested their fashionability was underwritten by money. Their well-maintained and carefully-constructed hairstyles showed that these women spent considerable time on their public presentation and appearance.

This prominent role played by local middle-class women as opponents of white slave traffickers was part of the historical class dynamics that surrounded philanthropic work. Writing about the nineteenth century, Beverley Skeggs has interpreted upper- and middle-class efforts to monitor the morals of working-class women as efforts to maintain social stability.²⁷ Skeggs has argued that throughout the period social order was linked to moral order, with women carrying the responsibility for keeping society respectable:

The concerns about the potentially polluting and dangerous working class were seen to be resolvable if mothers were educated to civilize, that is, to control and discipline themselves and their husbands and sons who were likely to be the cause of anticipated problems.²⁸

Thus the moral sanctity of women was seen as a barometer of social order.

According to Skeggs, this gendering of morality and class had one obvious

²⁵ ‘Liverpool’s Darker Side: How Lancashire Girls are Lured to their Ruin,’ *Daily Dispatch*, 19th October 1907. Cutting preserved in Liverpool Vigilance Association: Newspapers, LRO M326VIG/5/1.

²⁶ Press cutting from unidentified local Catholic newspaper, 17th January 1908. Cutting preserved in Liverpool Vigilance Association: Newspapers, LRO M326VIG/5/1.

²⁷ Beverley Skeggs, *Formations of Class and Gender* (London: Sage, 1997), 42.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 43.

advantage for the middle and upper classes insofar as it allowed them to turn class conflict into an issue of morality and ethics, thereby avoiding questions about wider structural issues within society.²⁹ More importantly, Skeggs has argued that by teaching working-class women “to take pleasure from bourgeois domesticity” they could be encouraged to accept its mores “without direct, obvious control.”³⁰ She goes on: “...if pleasure can be gained from that which is oppressive it is far easier not to notice the oppressive features of it.”³¹ By teaching women to enjoy the regulated lifestyle of bourgeois domesticity, Skeggs has argued that these women could essentially “produce themselves as acquiescent, rather than being produced by state regulation”.³² However, the ground-level activities of the LVA suggest that this sort of moralising class politics was only an implicit rather than explicit part of their practice. The LVA’s work did indeed focus attention onto moral rather than structural issues in gender and class relations, but it is not clear that this was something that the organisation deliberately or even consciously set out to achieve. The LVA did not overtly claim to be interested in helping working-class girls specifically, although this appears to have been what happened.

Moreover, there were practical as well as ideological reasons for the LVA to present itself as an institution with middle- and upper-class support. The task of advertising the city’s local purists as respectable, high-status women was not simply about emphasising dominant relationships between gender, class and morality. At a practical level, the presentation of the 1908 fund-raiser as decidedly middle- or

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 46.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

upper-class was motivated by the need for the organisation to network with individuals who would be willing to make donations to their cause. This was all the more necessary because the LVA made no charge to the girls who it helped.³³ Indeed, money was to be a frequent cause for concern amongst the LVA's Committee during the interwar period. In 1920 G. W. Hockley, Rector of Liverpool, suggested that the work of the National Vigilance Association had "long passed beyond the stage of criticism or experiment and [had] won the cordial approval of all who have the moral interests of the community at heart."³⁴ So it was that Hockley, in his position as chairman of the LVA Committee, proclaimed "We feel that we ought to be able to look with confidence to the public to see that its operations shall not be crippled for lack of funds".³⁵

Yet further appeals made by the LVA Committee suggest that funding continued to be a challenge. In 1928, Hockley's successor as both Rector of Liverpool and chairman of the LVA Committee, John C. H. How, made a more urgent appeal for funds. In his preface to the organisation's Annual Report he wrote:

We badly need more regular subscribers, and I hope that this Report may be given a wide circulation by our present sympathisers, and that many more may be convinced by it, that the work is one that really deserves a much bigger support than it receives at present. I wonder whether it is as widely

³³ LVA Annual Report 1916, Unpublished, LRO M326 VIG/3 Box 2, p. 3.

³⁴ LVA Annual Report 1919-1920, Unpublished, LRO M326 VIG/3 Box 2, p. 3.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

known as it should be? That is a matter which may help. Please MAKE IT KNOWN.³⁶

This statement, particularly How's suggestion that the Report be distributed widely, makes explicit that one of the key functions of the organisation's Annual Reports was to promote to subscribers the importance of the LVA's work so that they might secure their financial assistance. The focus on white slavery evident in the LVA's reports was inevitably tied up with this promotional strategy. In their 1927-1928 Report, the Committee noted that the League of Nations had left "no doubt whatever of the existence of a terrible amount of traffic in many countries," but went on to claim that traffickers' "progress" in Great Britain had been "impeded and frequently frustrated by the work of this Society and other Vigilance Associations in this country."³⁷ The Report hoped to win support and financial backing by fostering an image of the LVA as an organisation that had a real impact upon the activities of traffickers.

However, the techniques that the Reports used to sell the organisation were not always so positive. Other reports contained more negative messages about white slavery. In 1936, David Railton, Rector of Liverpool and chairman of the Committee, wrote in his preface to that year's report: "The sharks that make our work so difficult are lurking – more cleverly concealed than ever, close to the surface of our social life, waiting their chance."³⁸ Ultimately, the organisation's

³⁶ LVA Annual Report 1927-1928, Unpublished, LRO M326 VIG/3 Box 2, p. 3. [Original emphasis.]

³⁷ LVA Annual Report 1927-1928, p. 4.

³⁸ LVA Annual Report 1935-1936, Unpublished, LRO M326 VIG/3 Box 2, p. 3.

declarations that vice could be repressed were shadowed by their insights into a dark underworld of vice. In a manor similar to the nineteenth-century philanthropists explored by Seth Koven, the process of articulating their anxieties about the experiences of those they saw as vulnerable “tapped into the unruly passions of the moral imagination and into attempts to reconfigure class and gender relations and sexuality.”³⁹ However, whereas Koven has written about the “moral imagination” of philanthropists, I highlight aspects of the *urban imagination* of the LVA. I want to make clear that the moral interventions that the organisation made into the lives of travelling women and the moral codes that they upheld through their efforts to protect them were fundamentally tied to notions of public space. Female sexuality, vice and vulnerability were concepts that all informed and were informed by understandings of the corrupting nature of public space. The LVA’s fears about white slavery crystallised their sense that women needed protecting from these forms of urban disorder.

The LVA’s efforts to publicise their desperate need for funds was apparently successful. Having convinced their supporters of the threat white slavery posed locally, the LVA managed to maintain financial stability during the 1920s and 1930s. According to their revenue accounts the organisation’s income was the same as its expenditure in the years throughout the interwar period. For example, in the year between 1st May 1922 and 30th April 1923, the organisation received an income of £812, 12s. This income was, in part, made up of £260, 15s in subscriptions and a further £41, 16s, 5d in donations. The vast majority of this was used to pay staff salaries (£494, 16s, 7d to be precise), but other expenses included

³⁹ Koven, *Shumming*, 285.

rent (£64, 18s, 7d), a telephone bill (£16), travelling expenses for workers (£24, 3s, 11d), food and travelling expenses for the girls (£7, 9s) and an affiliation fee of £1, 1s that was paid to the NVA. Indeed, a number of the items listed as expenses present a more detailed picture of the character of the LVA's work and how and where it was conducted. As we have seen, in their efforts to deal with the perceived threat of the white slave trade, the LVA sent its patrols out onto the streets of Liverpool where they monitored the city's docks and railway station. Their work at the Landing Stage at the Pier Head was conducted from an office and, given the early morning nature of their patrols, it is no surprise to find that the organisation declared expenditures in 1924 for a gas stove for the office (£3, 1s, 4d) and an electric radiator (£1, 13s, 8d).⁴⁰ In addition to their patrol duties, the LVA also undertook office-based work and, again, their expenses reflect this. A £10 payout for a Remington Typewriter was recorded alongside regular payments of telephone bills, postage and telegram bills, stationary and printing fees.⁴¹ These costs would have been incurred by the LVA's practice of contacting the prospective employers of young women in order to trace runaways and liaising with other Vigilance Associations around the country.⁴² Despite receiving upper- and middle-class support, then, the LVA had to work to generate enough money. White slavery was both the organisation's greatest fear and its greatest campaign tool where fund-raising was concerned. By repeatedly referencing this one issue, the LVA had found

⁴⁰ LVA Annual Report 1923-1924, Balance Sheet, Unpublished, LRO M326 VIG/3 Box 2.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² For a discussion of correspondence work conducted by the LVA see LVA Annual Report 1928-1929, Unpublished, LRO M326 VIG/3 Box 2, p. 10.

a concise and efficient way to explain, justify and publicise the importance of its work.

Internationalism and Expertise

The expenses listed by the LVA were a clear sign that they did more than simply patrol the streets. Though the organisation was not officially sanctioned and had no legal powers to regulate individuals, the LVA nonetheless believed their work to be both skilled and vital. During the early 1920s the Committee remarked that even their “office work” was “varied and difficult”: “It must be carried on frequently in a foreign language, and it often involves questions of law and practice.”⁴³ Very deliberately, the organisation emphasised its credentials and professionalism in dealing with newcomers to Liverpool from around the world and presented itself as a leading authority on preventative patrol work. In an effort to define themselves as important players in the prevention of international white slavery, the LVA took every opportunity to assert its international connections and relevance.

In a move that would have bolstered the confidence of the Committee, the Rev. Canon Hockley (chairman of the Committee) suggested in 1924 that it was “gratifying to know that our Liverpool Society is to be represented at the important International Congress to be held at Graz, Styria, Austria, in September of this year.”⁴⁴ The Congress, on the “suppression of Traffic in Women and Children” was, according to the LVA, to be attended by “nearly all countries of the world.”⁴⁵ Eager to take advantage of such opportunities to discuss the international significance of

⁴³ LVA Annual Report 1922-1923, p. 10.

⁴⁴ LVA Annual Report 1923-1924, p. 3.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

their work, the LVA was again in attendance at the International Congress when it was held in Warsaw in 1930, when Miss Edith Rose, Secretary of the LVA, travelled there to represent the Liverpool and Irish Committees.⁴⁶ These Congresses appear to have been organised by The International Bureau for the Suppression of Traffic in Women and Children, an organisation that was, in the words of Sheila Jeffreys, the “sister organisation of the National Vigilance Association.”⁴⁷ By remaining in contact with its affiliates within the worldwide social purity movement, the LVA joined forces with others who endorsed the same moral threats as they did and who shared the same social anxieties. By situating their work within the context of international debate on trafficking, the LVA was able to present itself as a source of expertise and professionalism with a British interest.

The organisation attempted to promote the wider significance of its expert status by arguing that their work had a direct relevance to issues of immigration and international travel. Although the LVA did not make a point of openly criticising governmental policies and though they also tended to discuss policy measures without reference to any party political agendas, they nonetheless suggested that their work was shaped as a response to official directives. For example, in 1923 the LVA suggested that a policy by the United States government of preventing entry into the United States of passengers with poor standards of cleanliness meant that:

...our Workers have very frequently been called in to help and advise
unfortunate girls who, having been rejected, have found themselves in great

⁴⁶ LVA Annual Report, 1930-1931, Unpublished, LRO M326 VIG/3 Box 2, p. 4.

⁴⁷ Jeffreys, *The Idea of Prostitution*, 19.

distress, being prevented from embarking on the steamer for which their passage was booked. In some cases the girls had not sufficient money to return to the place from which they came or even to pay their lodgings in Liverpool....⁴⁸

By citing how they dealt with the effects of international travel sanctions, the organisation was able to further the idea that it had particular skills relevant to the prevention of international trafficking for the purposes of prostitution.

In placing their own work in the context of external and formal controls upon international travel, the LVA presented themselves as having the capacity to act alongside officials in the policing and monitoring of travel. Just after the war, the LVA suggested that “Perhaps the highest recommendation that we can record of our work is the fact that the Home Office, Naval and Military Authorities permitted us to continue this work at the Boats right through the years of the Great War without hindrance.”⁴⁹ Similarly, in 1924, the Committee used its Annual Report to:

...record the gratitude it feels to His Majesty’s Alien Officers, to the Canadian and American Government Authorities, to the Mersey Dock and Harbour Board, and to all the Shipping Officials with whom the Committee’s Workers are in constant touch, and who assist so courteously and cordially in the difficult matters which arise from time to time.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ G. W. Hockley, Rector of Liverpool and Chairman of the LVA Committee, in LVA Annual Report 1922-1923, p. 4.

⁴⁹ LVA Annual Report 1919-1920, p. 7.

⁵⁰ LVA Annual Report 1923-1924, p. 6.

By acting in co-operation with these agencies cited above, the LVA intended to achieve status and legitimacy by proxy. There is also evidence to suggest that the LVA had some success in this regard, with officials such as the local police occasionally directing stranded or vulnerable young women towards the care of LVA workers.⁵¹

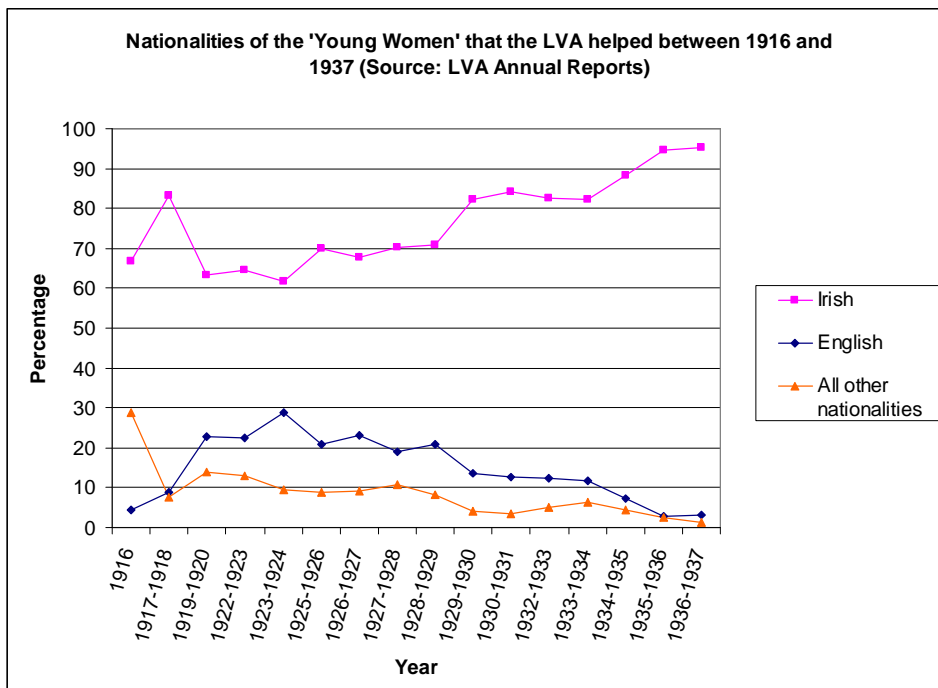
The LVA even sought to bring their much vaunted expertise in international transience to their localised, everyday patrol work. In 1922, the organisation described itself as “fortunate” to have “secured the services of Lady Workers whose knowledge of languages comprise French, Italian, Spanish, German, Japanese, Arabic, Yiddish and Russian.”⁵² The implication behind this claim was that the LVA had representatives who would be able to engage in dialogue with stranded women from a range of international backgrounds and, as a result, keep larger numbers of women safe from traffickers. However, the real value of these skills does not appear to have been integral to the organisation’s ability to function. In the same report as they issued this statement about their linguistic capabilities, the LVA published figures suggesting that they had very little need to draw upon their knowledge of foreign languages. Out of the 506 young women who they “dealt with” in the twelve months between 1922 and 1923, just one was French, one was Japanese, and they met no Germans, Italians, Spanish, Russians, and no-one from any countries where Yiddish or Arabic was spoken in significant numbers. In fact, 97.4% of the women that they met came from regions where English was spoken as a first or second language (America, Canada, England, Ireland, Scotland and

⁵¹ LVA Annual Report 1923-1924, p. 13 and LVA Annual Report 1925-1926, Unpublished, LRO M326 VIG/3 Box 2, p. 13.

⁵² LVA Annual Report 1922-1923, p. 6.

Wales). Yet even this figure presents too varied a view of the nationalities of the women that the LVA assisted during the year 1922-1923. The vast majority of their time was actually spent dealing with Irish immigration, with 64.43% of all the women that they met being Irish, and a further 22.53% of all the women they met classed as English. Their own figures therefore suggest that the LVA actually had little interaction with non-English speakers.

Figure 3.2⁵³



An analysis of the figures provided by the LVA on the nationalities of the women who it helped between 1916 and 1930 reveals that the organisation's tendency to deal mainly with Irish women was not specific to the year 1922 to

⁵³ LVA Annual Reports 1916-1937, LRO M326 VIG/3 Box 2. See Appendices 1 and 2 for raw data.

1923. The graph above (Figure 3.2) indicates that in all years between 1917 and 1937 for which figures are available, the LVA interacted mostly with Irish women and, to a lesser extent, English women. The figure for 1916 only bucks this trend because of an influx of women from the Isle of Man in that year (see Appendix 1). The graph shows that from 1930 onwards the proportion of Irish women dealt with by the LVA rose steadily. This may have reflected an increase in the organisation's already considerable concentration on Irish female immigrants, a point that will be explored in more detail the following chapter.

The LVA's lack of significant interaction with women from a range of international backgrounds suggests that the discourse of internationalism that the organisation deployed was, in large part, an exercise in political posturing. By emphasising their international credentials, the LVA promoted the idea that the city of Liverpool needed their protection from would-be international traffickers. Yet their records provide little evidence of serious organised international trafficking in Liverpool during the interwar period. Instead, the LVA's belief in the existence and threat of traffickers was the result of their more fundamental concerns about the dangers of public space and the frailty of female morality. They believed Liverpool to be a city of interest to traffickers because of their wider concerns about female transience. By interpreting moral danger in this way the female trafficker emerged as a moral counterpart to the women of the LVA. Female traffickers were themselves rather loosely or broadly defined, with 'immoral' or prostitute women being classed as potential traffickers. This idea of the female trafficker consequently fed into the LVA's surveillance activities and moral pronouncements insofar as she

encouraged the LVA's belief that immoral women could have a negative influence over vulnerable women.

Trafficking and Urban Femininity

The LVA did not just engage with the women and girls suspected of being trafficked or otherwise manipulated. According to their annual reports, their work also brought them into contact with suspected traffickers who, it was feared, had travelled to Liverpool in search of vulnerable women. These reports suggest that many of the 'traffickers' that they encountered at Liverpool's landing stage operated in an ad hoc fashion and with few, if any, accomplices, rather than being part of a highly organised vice ring. Of these individuals, the LVA showed particular concern with women suspected of being traffickers. Such cases were used by the LVA to illustrate the potential effects of disreputable womanhood upon the gullible and immature. For the LVA, these cases served to highlight the need for their own particular brand of respectable womanhood as a positive counter-influence. In 1926 the LVA stated that it had been closely involved in a case which had resulted in the authorities preventing a potential female trafficker from remaining in the country.⁵⁴ The authority that the organisation sought over this woman was clearly influenced by the interventionist tropes of earlier philanthropic work. In particular, the practice of infantilising the women who needed saving, a characteristic of the Victorian Ladies Associations, was very much in evidence in interwar LVA discourse.⁵⁵ Described by the LVA as a "young girl," the woman in question was actually

⁵⁴ LVA Annual Report 1925-1926, p. 8.

⁵⁵ Bartley, *Prostitution*, 75.

twenty five years old.⁵⁶ She had entered Liverpool from the United States where she was investigated by the Authorities and the LVA.⁵⁷ Yet this woman's status as a trafficker was far more complicated than the LVA suggested. The woman explained that she had been "persuaded" to travel to England by an Englishman who "lived a double life;" having brought her there, the man had offered to marry her when her entry into the country was halted on "medical grounds."⁵⁸ Though this aspect of her story was not challenged or doubted by the LVA, they did not address the possibility that this woman may have been manipulated, or coerced by her male companion or that he might have intended to traffic this woman. Instead, the woman was presented straightforwardly as a trafficker herself.

By highlighting her case in their Annual Report, this woman's story was used by the LVA as a warning about how a once vulnerable woman could ultimately become 'fallen'. In narrating her story, the LVA went on to mobilise evidence of the woman's perceived moral frailty. They noted that she was the mother of a nine year old son, who she had left in the USA, that she had been married at fifteen and that she was believed by the LVA to be "suffering from drug taking."⁵⁹ According to the organisation, the woman had arrived in the city with dubious ambitions to find work "dancing in a Night Club" before continuing her transient lifestyle by travelling on to East Africa.⁶⁰ The LVA reported that the woman had told them that there "was nothing in the "Underworld" she did not

⁵⁶ LVA Annual Report 1925-1926, p. 8.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

know and had not been through in the United States.”⁶¹ The LVA argued that there was “very little question left in our mind that she was coming with a purpose of “trafficking” girls.”⁶² This woman was a prime example of the type of moral degradation that the organisation hoped to prevent. When the organisation encountered female traffickers their main concern was with preventing their access to and diminishing their influence on vulnerable girls and women. The LVA did not usually attempt to ‘save’ female traffickers themselves; such women were treated as ‘fallen’ women who were beyond redemption.

Despite not targeting these women for help, ‘fallen’ or immoral women nonetheless played a significant role in the LVA’s discourse on trafficking. They resonated in the LVA’s urban imagination as prime examples of the danger that public space held for respectable womanhood. Older women were presented as especially dangerous. Their experience and determination was placed in direct contrast to the naivety and insecurities of the younger women who they were thought to target. The older woman who sought to traffic women for prostitution was placed in direct moral opposition to the women who conducted LVA patrols. As part of their advertising campaign for the 1908 charity dinner mentioned earlier, the organisation produced an illustration (Figure 3, below) which quite literally depicted the young, naive, female traveller as caught between the caring gaze of a patrol worker and the insidious stare of a suspicious-looking female with her male companion who lurked around the corner.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

Figure 3.3 “Stranded”: An LVA Illustration



Source: LVA Charity Dinner Pamphlet, 1908. LRO M326VIG/5/1

We can be sure that the woman on the far right represents an LVA patrol worker because of the badge that she wore on her coat (see previous chapter for a picture of the badge worn by patrol workers). In fact there are a number of differences between the clothes worn by the LVA worker and the couple on the left. The LVA worker's clothes are feminine but also simple and practical; her hat, gloves and scarf are less an indication of an interest in fashion than a symbol of the early-morning, outdoor nature of the work that she performed. Her attire contrasts with that worn by the ostentatious couple on the left of the picture. The man is dressed in fine clothes. His tailored overcoat and trousers are complemented by a detailed waistcoat and smart hat. The woman next to him is even more flamboyantly turned

out. Her travelling coat, with its large, ruffled sleeves, hangs open to reveal a frilled blouse. She wears a large, ornate bonnet with decorative flowers arranged around its brim. These garments were a sign that the couple had access to money, though their surreptitious positioning just out of the young girl's sight invited the viewer to question the character of these individuals and, consequently, the means through which they acquired their wealth. The accompanying caption, "A perilous moment!!" leaves no doubt that the couple in question have dangerous intentions towards the girl. Peering around a corner, the man's stern expression and the woman's furrowed brow contrast markedly with the smiling face and open stance of the vigilance worker. It is interesting to note that the woman does not hold on to the man's arm in a passive fashion; instead, she pulls him back in order to warn him of the LVA worker's presence. In this sense, the woman in the picture is endowed with a knowing and active role in the targeting of young girls. She is presented as being as equally dangerous as her male counterpart.

This image of the finely-dressed but highly dangerous older woman remained part of the LVA's anti-vice discourse throughout the interwar years. In 1932 the LVA argued that it was "not only men" who presented a "danger to young girls travelling alone."⁶³ They suggested that "a well-dressed woman" could "also exercise an amount of confidence with inexperienced girls coming to Liverpool for the first time."⁶⁴ It was feared that such women could, by virtue of their appearance alone, persuade young girls to trust or admire them. In a case from the year 1933-34, a "flashily dressed much older woman" was said to have made the acquaintance

⁶³ LVA Annual Report 1932-1933, Unpublished, LRO M326 VIG/3 Box 2, p. 9.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

of a young Irish girl travelling to a destination in London by offering her “refreshments” whilst aboard a boat to Liverpool.⁶⁵ However, as this particular case also illustrates, the LVA patrol workers were adept at winning the trust of vulnerable girls. The young girl opted to leave the scene with the patrol worker, explaining that her sister had been helped by the LVA “some months previously” and had told the girl “to look out for the lady wearing the badge and be advised by her.”⁶⁶ After making enquiries at the railway station, the LVA reported that the woman who had approached the girl had been drinking and that “her attitude and behaviour had been altogether undesirable.”⁶⁷ Such was the level of concern about the intentions of this woman that the patrol worker arranged for an NVA representative to meet the girl in London to ensure that she completed her journey safely.⁶⁸

It was not uncommon for the patrol workers to go to considerable lengths to monitor interactions between suspicious women and young girls. Part of their surveillance techniques involved following women until they were satisfied that they did not present a moral danger to others. In an encounter that had taken place just a few years earlier than the one previously mentioned, an LVA worker had been drawn towards a “pretty, but poorly dressed” sixteen-year-old who had travelled to Liverpool from Ireland.⁶⁹ While the worker spoke to the girl, a “well-dressed woman” approached and claimed that she knew the girl and would “see her to her

⁶⁵ LVA Annual Report 1933-1934, Unpublished, LRO M326 VIG/3 Box 2, p. 6.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ LVA Annual Report 1930-1931, p. 6.

destination.”⁷⁰ Her suspicions roused by this woman, the patrol worker took the same bus as the pair and found that the woman was taking her young companion to Lime Street train station. Knowing that the girl could not get to her destination by train, the worker again approached the pair at the station and enquired as to where they were going. The woman claimed to be simply leaving her luggage at Lime Street station for collection later that day, but the patrol worker insisted that she would see the girl to her destination.⁷¹ The report implied that the woman in question had been lying to the LVA worker; though the woman had been “invited” by the worker to accompany them, the woman “quietly slipped away without a word.”⁷² It also transpired that the woman did not know the girl but had met her only on the boat. The girl, not knowing Liverpool, had accepted the woman’s acquaintance because she had been “glad to find someone to help her.”⁷³ Keen to rectify the girl’s naivety, the LVA worker left her at her destination with a “warning” about “the danger of too easily making friends with strangers, especially, when travelling.”⁷⁴

The LVA also dealt with a number of cases that involved young women being persuaded to travel to new or unknown places by younger women of potentially immoral character. In 1933 the LVA reported the case of a young woman who persuaded another to come to Liverpool. The organisation suggested that Mary, a nineteen-year-old girl, had “induced another to come to Liverpool, promising to take her to a famous seaside resort, where she would secure well-paid

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* p. 7.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

employment during the summer season.”⁷⁵ Upon arrival in the city, the young girl was said to have “found to her horror that Mary was well known in the city as a bad girl.”⁷⁶ Indeed, this was not the LVA’s only interaction with Mary that year; as a result of this case, the organisation was able to prevent her from bringing another “young girl” to Liverpool “under false pretences”.⁷⁷ Though Mary was not labelled a ‘trafficker’ the threat that she was believed to present to other young girls was nonetheless framed, for the LVA, by the same concerns about the potential for immoral women to encourage others into vice and promiscuity. Ideas about women being taken literally and figuratively across borders, about women being encouraged to move to new and unknown areas by other women fuelled the LVA’s belief in the corrupting influence of disreputable women. For the LVA the threat posed by these dangerous women had to be countered by the organisation’s own surveillance strategies and by the positive example of respectable womanhood that the organisation represented.

Conclusion

The LVA’s watchfulness in cases of this kind prevented many young women from being manipulated by dubious and potentially criminal characters. However, the ways in which the LVA understood the help that they offered and the gendered social role that they performed were in large part the product of their own urban imagination. They believed public spaces to hold moral dangers for all women and they argued that lower status (such as working-class and young) women needed

⁷⁵ LVA Annual Report 1933-1934, p. 6.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* p. 7.

special protection and surveillance in order to maintain their moral integrity. The LVA's belief in the widespread existence of white slavery was a product of their overall sense of the fragility of female respectability in urban settings. When the LVA asserted that women needed their protection, the organisation conjured up images of all the moral dangers that they thought women might need protection from.

Though not all the women who persuaded young girls to make dubious journeys in their company were described as 'traffickers,' the organisation's broad concerns with trafficking and traffickers meant that they were likely to have been understood as such. Ideas of disreputability and trafficking were blurred by the LVA, with boisterous behaviour in public and a prolonged presence in certain public spaces, such as railway stations, attracting the constant attention of LVA workers. At the same time, gaudy clothes were taken as a sign of an exaggerated or even grotesque form of womanhood. Far from being respectable, such women were perceived as having been corrupted by their lifestyles. By attempting to stop these women from gaining influence over other (usually, though not always, younger) women, the LVA set out its preventative and protective agenda. They used cases of female traffickers as examples of the sort of dangerous and disreputable womanhood that they aimed to prevent. They also made clear that they thought young women needed their moral protection lest they follow the same path as the female traffickers, madams, prostitutes and promiscuous women. As the mix of cases explored in this chapter indicates, there was often considerable overlap between these different types of women in the LVA's moral discourse. While

Bartley has suggested that in the early-twentieth century “social purists were more repressive than protective in their efforts to curb prostitution,” I want to make clear that, for purists in Liverpool at least, prevention remained paramount over and above repressive policies involving work with women already working as prostitutes.⁷⁸

The LVA saw trafficking as an example of a broad range of urban dangers that they believed all women faced. By concentrating upon the threat of female traffickers and presenting them as manipulative and persuasive, the LVA made it much easier to relate their fears about trafficking to their work in helping women avoid vice and immorality in general. The notion that certain types of women were involved in the organisation of white slavery legitimated the LVA’s broader belief that vulnerable women needed protecting from the influence of these immoral women. The analysis set out here largely concurs with Sheila Jeffries’ argument that white slavery was “about more than the traffic itself.”⁷⁹ She has suggested that “For Feminists, campaigning against the White Slave Traffic was a way of gaining ground in their struggle against prostitution in general.”⁸⁰ I would go further and argue that, for *purists* in Liverpool, the campaign against white slavery was a way of gaining ground in their effort to influence the morals of women in general. The image of the female trafficker represented the sort of sexual and moral corruption that the LVA believed threatened all young women travelling in and around Liverpool. Thus, the female trafficker added extra potency to the LVA’s view that their efforts to protect young girls in public spaces were of paramount importance to

⁷⁸ Bartley, *Prostitution*, 173.

⁷⁹ Jeffries, *The Idea of Prostitution*, 8.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

social morality. In the next chapter, I will consider the implications of this belief in more detail. It will be argued that for the LVA young Irish women functioned as a prime example of feminine naivety and that this made Irish female immigrants a particular target for the organisation.

Chapter Four

Moral Interventions and Irishness: Irish girls and the LVA

The previous chapter argued that members of the LVA did not pursue white slavery as a single-issue concern. Instead, debates about the white slave trade often acted as a repository for more general fears about women's use of public space. The organisation did not go so far as to propose that women should completely refrain from travelling, nor that they should confine themselves to the domestic sphere. Nevertheless, the LVA did display, through their words and actions, considerable doubt about the ability of unchaperoned women to negotiate the urban landscape with their respectability intact. In an effort to ward off the corrupting influence of the women of 'ill-repute' and the would-be white slavers, caution and supervision were repeatedly emphasised. In practical terms, this meant the establishment of regular patrol and surveillance work, with female LVA workers offering protection from exploitation and corruption to vulnerable girls. The LVA prioritised *preventative* strategies as a means of tackling white slavery (and prostitution in general) and the organisation's initial remit of tackling prostitution *per se* became diluted by their overriding efforts to liaise with women who were not necessarily prostitutes, but who were thought to be at risk of becoming either casually or professionally involved in vice. This meant that the LVA's work was not about tackling prostitution so much as it was about managing the moral comportment of any and all women deemed in need of their guidance.

In this chapter I aim to show how LVA patrol work reproduced and amplified pre-existing purity discourses that supposed certain types of women, especially Irish, working-class women, to be more vulnerable to corruption than others. This examination of the relationship between Liverpool's local purists and Irish immigrant women reveals that, for the LVA, Irish girls exemplified the discord between innocence and the streets. The LVA saw Irish women as the embodiment of feminine naivety and their inability to negotiate urban moral danger meant that they needed protective and preventative patrol work in the city. This chapter explores the LVA's perceptions of Irish girls as expressed in their case-work reporting. The organisation's own accounts of their interactions with Irish girls illustrate the close associations that the LVA drew between purity and Irishness. I suggest that, despite valuing the supposed innocence and piety of Irish girls, the LVA regarded women with these attributes to be prime candidates for exploitation by white slavers and other immoral characters. This meant that the Irish girl acted as key figure in the LVA's understanding of preventative patrol work as a means of maintaining female purity in urban settings.

Moreover, by examining the LVA's interest in Irish girls, this chapter highlights the importance of local and regional explorations into the history of vice and immorality. Research by writers such as Philippa Levine has shown the moral policing of women during the early-twentieth century to be an important aspect of women's history and the history of sexuality more generally. However, the specifics of who was policed and how still need further research. Levine's significant research does not address the role of the Irish woman in moral regulation, despite

drawing, in part, upon Liverpool-based sources.¹ Indeed, the prominence of the Irish in this work, suggests that purity fears about vice may have been articulated differently or focused on different social groups in different localities. The contrast between the emphasis placed upon Irish girls by moralists in Liverpool and the image of the immoral or vulnerable immigrant as presented in London-focused histories of vice and immorality is particularly notable.² For example, Stefan Slater's work productively draws out the considerable attention that was devoted to immigrant prostitutes in interwar London; yet Irish women do not feature in Slater's picture of the capital at all.³ This is especially striking when one considers that London was "a prominent destination for second-wave Irish migration following the partition of Ireland in 1922."⁴ It seems, then, that other immigrants to the capital may have received more sensationalist attention than the Irish, a proposition that

¹ Philippa Levine "'Walking the Streets in a Way No Decent Woman Should": Women Police in World War I,' *The Journal of Modern History*, 66, 1 (1994): 34-78.

² See, for example, Seth Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004); Julia Ann Laite, 'Taking Nellie Johnson's Fingerprints: Prostitutes and Legal Identity in Early Twentieth-Century London,' *History Workshop Journal*, 65, (2008): 96-116; Frank Mort, 'Striptease: the erotic female body and live sexual entertainment in mid-twentieth century London,' *Social History*, 32, 1 (2007): 27-53; Stefan Slater, 'Pimps, Police and Filles de Joie: Foreign Prostitution in Interwar London,' *The London Journal*, 32, 1 (2007): 53-74; Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narrative of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (London: Virago Press, 1992).

³ Slater, 'Pimps, Police and Filles de Joie.'

⁴ Colin G. Pooley, 'Getting to know the city: the construction of spatial knowledge in London in the 1930s' *Urban History*, 31, 2 (2004): 216. Pooley goes on to note that young Irish women were "especially attracted to work in London in the mid 1930s" because of the employment opportunities on offer in the region. Moreover, he proposes that the majority of these girls came from the Catholic Republic rather than the Protestant North (also on p. 216).

underlines the need for historians to consider how the myth of white slavery and general fears about vice were regionally nuanced.⁵

This is not to argue that the gendered perceptions of the Irish in twentieth-century Liverpool existed in a vacuum or only in that locality. Recently published research has begun to cast light on the connections between white slavery panics and prostitution in Ireland, whilst Bronwyn Walter has produced an analysis of the way perceptions of Irish women as pure and virtuous have become a part of Irish national identity and femininity.⁶ As such, historians need to consider more closely how this image of the Irish woman was manifested or articulated outside of Ireland and why.

I argue that Irish women were of particular interest to the LVA because they represented moral vulnerability in two distinct ways. Firstly, on the British mainland in the early- and even mid-twentieth century Irishness was frequently associated with being working class. This meant that Irish girls were thought to need the same type of moral guidance and instruction that native working-class girls were offered by groups such as the LVA. Secondly, the class identity that was ascribed to the Irish was supplemented by a female moral identity that prioritised

⁵ The social history of the Irish in Liverpool has not been extensively researched by historians, although John Belchem's work *Irish Catholic and Scouse: The History of the Liverpool Irish, 1800-1939* (Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2007), has begun to address this, whilst Frank Neal's work *Sectarian Violence: The Liverpool Experience, 1819-1914: An Aspect of Anglo-Irish History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987) covers the social and political aspects of the rivalry between Protestants and Catholics within the city. For more on the history of the Irish in Liverpool prior to the twentieth century see Ryan Dye, 'Catholic Protectionism or Irish Nationalism? Religion and Politics in Liverpool, 1829-1845,' *The Journal of British Studies*, 40, 3 (2001): 357-390; Colin G. Pooley, 'The Residential Segregation of Migrant Communities in Mid-Victorian Liverpool,' *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, New Series, 2, 3 (1977): 364-382.
⁶ See Maria Luddy, *Prostitution and Irish Society 1800-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); James M. Smith, *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and the Nation's Architecture of Containment* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007); Bronwen Walter, *Outsiders Inside: Whiteness, Place and Irish Women* (London: Routledge, 2001).

purity and innocence. Significantly, the LVA did not create this image of the Irish girl in order to justify their working practices. The links between Irishness and moral purity had an extensive prior history beyond the actions of the LVA. The first part of this chapter notes that, even in Ireland itself, an idealised femininity that emphasised chastity and moral virtue was so prevalent as to become part of Irish female national identity. In Liverpool, the LVA can be seen to have replicated rather than manufactured moral discourses of femininity and Irishness. The disproportionate attention that the LVA paid to Irish women should not be interpreted simply as racism or well-intentioned, though largely misguided, stereotyping. Instead, I suggest that local purity discourses about Irishness and class were influenced by, on the one hand, the LVA's familiarity with Irish purists and, on the other, the nationalistic, pure image that some Irish girls projected of themselves. As a result of the strength of this Irish feminine identity, the Irish girl became a particularly compelling character for those campaigning to prevent moral decline in Liverpool.

Female Purity and Irish National Identity

Irish women represent the “largest migrant group to come to Britain in the past 150 years,” with more women than men leaving Ireland “in most decades since 1871 when reliable statistics were first recorded.”⁷ For many women, emigration offered

⁷ Mary J. Hickman and Bronwen Walter, ‘Deconstructing Whiteness: Irish Women in Britain,’ *Feminist Review*, 50 (1995): 6 and Walter *Outsiders Inside*, 15. Despite this large scale movement of people, Walter suggests that the migration of Irish women has received little academic attention. See Walter, *Outsiders Inside*, 2.

an opportunity to earn money that could then be sent back home to their families.⁸ For others, the economic factors behind emigration were more about individual subsistence. Brown has suggested that the “economic and social realities of Irish farming life in the post-Famine period” were central to the exodus from Ireland thereafter.⁹ To some extent, the decision to leave Ireland may therefore have depended upon which part of the country an individual came from. Economic difficulties were experienced in some parts of Ireland more than others. Walter argues that the partitioning of Ireland in 1922 had differing and gendered effects on employment in the north and south of the country, noting that the north-east’s industrial economy, particularly around Belfast, meant that there was more employment for women in this area. As such, women living there had less economic need to emigrate than women in the Republic of Ireland.¹⁰ Indeed, women migrating from Dublin and the rest of the South featured far more in the LVA’s dealings with Irish immigrants, although in many cases the organisation did not distinguish between women from Northern Ireland and the republic. Significantly, this also meant that the organisation did not distinguish between Protestant and Catholic Irish girls, with the LVA associating itself broadly with various Christian leaders in Liverpool and even individuals representing non-Christian faiths, such as Judaism. To this end, the LVA seemingly avoided sectarian politics. For many years the LVA’s roster of vice presidents simultaneously included the Roman Catholic

⁸ Sharon Lambert “From ‘Irish Women’s Emigration to England 1922-1960: The Lengthening of Family Ties,’” in Alan Hayes and Diane Urquhart (eds.), *The Irish Women’s History Reader* (London: Routledge, 2001), 183.

⁹ Terrence Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History* (London: Harper Perennial, 2004), 11.

¹⁰ Walter, *Outsiders Inside*, 17. This argument is supported by Pooley’s research on the Irish in London. He suggests that of the 39,229 Irish women in London in 1931, just 12.4% were from Northern Ireland. See Pooley, ‘Getting to know the city,’ 216.

Archbishop of Liverpool, the Anglican Lord Bishop of Liverpool, senior Jewish Minister Rev. S. Frampton and the President of the Free Church Council.¹¹

In terms of conditions in Northern Ireland and the Republic, Walter has suggested that many women left Ireland because of increasing restrictions made on their lifestyles during the 1920s and 1930s. She has argued that women emigrated in an attempt to escape a marriage bar which kept married women from “most forms of paid work,” as well as the “punitive sanctions on unmarried motherhood, the banning of contraception, and low pay and status for single women.”¹² Moral discourses about sex, the dangers of popular culture and the importance of respectable womanhood impacted forcefully on the lives of many Irish women during the early and middle years of the twentieth century.¹³ In her research on the emigration of Irish women to England between 1922 and 1960, Lambert proposes that sexual activities were considered so taboo and sinful within Irish society that pregnancy outside of marriage often precipitated the migration of Irish girls to England. Girls in this situation who stayed at home risked bringing shame upon their families.¹⁴ So, although many of the Irish women that the LVA encountered may well have had rural backgrounds they may not necessarily have been as socially or sexually naive as the LVA imagined.

Purity movements such as the LVA were not specific to Liverpool, or indeed, to England. In Ireland there was significant interest in the actions and moral

¹¹ See, for example, LVA Annual Reports for the years 1923-1924, 1925-26, 1926-1927, 1927-1928, Unpublished, LRO M326 VIG/3 Box 2.

¹² Walter, *Outsiders Inside*, 21.

¹³ See Jim Smyth, ‘Dancing, Depravity and All That Jazz: The Public Dance Halls Act of 1935,’ *History of Ireland*, 1, 2 (1993): 51-54.

¹⁴ Lambert, ‘Irish Women’s Emigration to England,’ 183.

state of young women. It is likely that before Irish girls had even arrived in Liverpool and met with an LVA worker, they would already have felt the influence of campaigns to maintain their moral purity.¹⁵ Yet despite the existence of similar fears about white slavery in Ireland and in Liverpool, there were important differences between the vigilance committees in these areas. In Ireland, the formation of vigilance associations was closely tied to the development of women's rights. Alice Abadam, organiser of the Catholic Women's Suffrage Society, spoke out on the issue, claiming that efforts to stop the progress of moral evil were hindered by the "political helplessness of women."¹⁶ In Liverpool, by contrast, there was no such concern with "women's right to the parliamentary franchise" on the part of the LVA.¹⁷ This lack of political campaigning appears to have been a characteristic of Liverpool's local purists, rather than a feature of the English purity movement overall. Mort has suggested that there was an overlap in the membership of some suffrage and purity organisations. For example, Millicent Fawcett was the President of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) as well as being the head of the National Vigilance Association's (NVA) "preventative and rescue sub-committee."¹⁸ Similarly, Lucy Bland has argued that women's efforts "to influence the management of public spaces" were in part motivated by a "desire to facilitate women's entry into a world hostile to their presence."¹⁹

¹⁵ See, for example, Luddy's discussion of purity campaigns in Dublin in her work *Prostitution and Irish Society*, 162-163.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 163 and 165.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 167.

¹⁸ Frank Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities: Medico-Moral Politics in England since 1830*, Second Edition (London: Routledge, 2000), 107.

¹⁹ Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast: Feminism, Sex and Morality* (London: Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 2001), 113.

This is not to say that the LVA disagreed with their parent organisation on political matters. In fact it is likely that the LVA identified with and accepted many of the NVA's political and ideological views, with the local organisation taking a social conservative stance on many moral issues. For example, throughout both the inter- and post-Second-World-War periods the LVA cited the "prevention of the spread of undesirable publications" in their "Objects."²⁰ Overall, however, the records of the LVA suggest that their main focus lay in making the streets morally safe for women and encouraging women to uphold the moral standards that they, as an organisation, promoted. In actual fact, political campaigning and white slavery were uneasy bedfellows in Liverpool. Chapter Three noted that despite the similarities in their attitudes towards morality and prostitution, The Women Police Patrols (WPP) in Liverpool had a more overt political agenda than the LVA. For the WPP advancing the professionalisation of their service and gaining official recognition for the skills performed by their patrollers was of paramount importance. It is perhaps for this reason that the WPP's Annual Reports did not display the same level of concern with white slavery or Irish immigration as the LVA's records.²¹

²⁰ See LVA Annual Reports, Objects, Number 5. Even after the Second World War the organisation continued to support the politics of the NVA. Shortly after the war LVA declared that it had taken "an active part in the protests and agitation which led to the Home Secretary recommending the adoption of a Bye-law prohibiting the sale of contraceptives from slot-machines." LVA Annual Report 1949-1950, Unpublished, LRO M326 VIG/3 Box 2, p. 4. Also, in the early 1950s the LVA became interested in raising the age of consent. As such, Mrs. Sugden, the Secretary of the Association, wrote to various embassies and authorities in 1952 to request information about ages of consent across Europe; see LVA Correspondence, LRO 326VIG 7-2. However, the information that Sugden gathered does not appear to have been utilised in any kind of organised strategy of campaigning, with the organisation's street patrol work still their main focus.

²¹ LVA Annual Reports for the Period 1928-1942, Unpublished, LRO M326 VIG/3 Box 2.

In early-twentieth-century Ireland, as in Liverpool, there was a comparable level of concern about young women being forced into prostitution.²² In fact, where Irish purists and the LVA were similar was not so much in their levels of political activism on feminist issues but in their moral discourses, fears and ethical outlook. Luddy's work on prostitution in Ireland reveals that fears about white slavery and immorality were channelled regularly into purity work. She argues that such anxieties were tied to a number of social and moral issues; in particular, Irish purists fretted about rural girls' ventures into the city, about young girls' interactions with new leisure markets such as the cinema, and about the need for middle-class women to act as protectors and moral guides to working-class women.²³ In Dublin, purity campaigners focused on suppressing "Immoral English newspapers" and, spurred on by rising fears about white slavery, vigilance committees were formed with the express purpose of confronting immorality.²⁴ With the outbreak of the First World War the idea that young women required moral guidance and protection was heavily foregrounded, as it was in mainland Britain. Patrols were set up by the National Union of Women Workers of Great Britain and Ireland to monitor women's behaviour on Dublin's streets.²⁵ In many ways, the moral codes and fears of Irish purists about the corrupting effects of urban life upon respectable femininity were similar to those of the LVA in Liverpool. However, in Ireland, close discursive associations between femininity and moral purity were not only the preserve of purists or the religious. Both Luddy and Smith have noted that moral virtue was

²² Luddy, *Prostitution and Irish Society*, 63.

²³ *Ibid.*, 67.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 162-163.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 172-174.

closely bound up with Ireland's national identity.²⁶ In Ireland qualities such as purity, Catholicism and "rural ideals" were part of the country's "prevailing language of national identity formation."²⁷

Assessing dominant cultural representations of gender within Ireland, Walter has noted the appropriateness of Peter Stallybrass and Allon White's oft quoted phrase "what is socially peripheral is often symbolically central."²⁸ She has argued that the prominent position that Irish culture has historically afforded feminine symbolism belies the social marginalisation of Irish women throughout the Republic's recent history.²⁹ For Walter, the Catholic Church's veneration of the Virgin Mary as a model of ideal womanhood after the famine meant that "restrictive and limited roles for women became Catholic religious ideals." Gender-defined qualities such as devotion to the family, care-giving and asexuality became "powerful" components of "Irish women's identities, enforced by education and social sanctions."³⁰ Walter's argument is significant here because it suggests that the LVA's perception of Irish women as sexually and socially naive was a cultural identity that was as prevalent in Ireland as much as it was ascribed to Irish female immigrants once they reached England.

During the twentieth century there was a concerted effort in Ireland to construct an idealised image of Irish women as morally pure. Following independence, discourses of sexual morality became an important part of the

²⁶ Luddy, *Prostitution and Irish Society*, 1-2 and Smith, *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries*.

²⁷ Smith, *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries*, 6.

²⁸ Original quote from Peter Stallybrass and Allon White *Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (London: Routledge, 1986), see Walter, *Outsiders Inside*, 18.

²⁹ Walter, *Outsiders Inside*, 18.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

country's "nativist national imaginary."³¹ Writing about dominant approaches to immorality in Ireland at this time, James M. Smith has identified what he has termed Ireland's "architecture of containment."³² On the one hand, this refers to the various forms of institutionalisation that were used to house women who transgressed, from mother and baby homes to Magdalen asylums. On the other hand, Smith has proposed that this "architecture of containment" was expressed through legislation and public discourse.³³ In particular, he has suggested that the 1930 Carrigan Committee (The Committee on the Criminal Law Amendment Acts (1880-85) and Juvenile Prostitution) and the subsequent Criminal Law Amendment Act 1935 were fundamental to Ireland's efforts to disassociate Irishness and immorality:

Both the [Carrigan Committee's] report and the ensuing legislation demonstrate a significant discursive distortion, one that would enable Ireland's church-state partnership effectively to criminalize sexual relations outside of marriage and thereby inscribe moral purity into the project of national identity formation.³⁴

Smith describes the Carrigan Committee's final report as "highly contentious."³⁵ Its recommendations included prohibiting the sale of contraceptives,

³¹ Smith, *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries*, 3.

³² *Ibid.*, 2. See also James M. Smith, 'The Politics of Sexual Knowledge: The Origins of Ireland's Containment Culture and the Carrigan Report,' *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 13, 2 (2004): 208-233.

³³ Smith, *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries*, 2.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

the implementation of fines and custodial sentences for procurement, solicitation, and public indecency, as well as the return of flogging for convicts who had committed sexual crimes against young people.³⁶ Outlining what he has considered to be the Carrigan Report's legacy, Smith has argued that the Irish state "effectively criminalized sexual immorality, in both legislative response and societal discourse," and in so doing it criminalised all forms of sexual transgression from single motherhood to rape and incest.³⁷ Furthermore, Smith has suggested that institutionalisation became one of the central ways in which sexual immorality was dealt with in Ireland. Although institutionalisation was not always intended to focus on punishment or social exclusion, Smith argues that "prevailing modes of confinement" in the form of the Borstal or prison simply "contributed to the containment of embodied sexuality crucial to the project of national identity formation."³⁸ That is to say that the incarceration of sexually transgressive women allowed Irish society to maintain its idealised sense of Irish women as chaste and morally pure. Many women leaving Ireland may, therefore, have done so in a bid to escape this form of containment.³⁹

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 17. Mark Finnane has suggested that the Carrigan Committee was "especially influenced by the police" and that its work represented an "extended inquiry into the moral order" of Ireland, indicating the degree to which officials were influenced by Catholic values. Mark Finnane, 'The Carrigan Committee of 1930-31 and the 'Moral Condition of the Saorstát', *Irish Historical Studies*, 32, 128 (2001): 519-536.

³⁸ Smith has noted that female representatives from the Irish Women Worker's Union told the Carrigan Committee that a voluntary stay in a refuge or religious home could rehabilitate unmarried mothers and allow them to rejoin society free from moral stigma. Smith, *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries*, 18-19.

³⁹ See Paul Michael Garrett, 'The Abnormal Flight: The Migration and Repatriation of Irish Unmarried Mothers,' *Social History*, 25, 3 (2000): 330-343.

Irish Virtue as Urban Vulnerability

On arriving in England, Irish women would have found themselves subject to economic and social codes that were set according to their gender. At the same time, they would also have had to deal with the effects of being perceived to be outsiders. As noted earlier in this chapter, some women leaving Ireland would have done so in the hope of improving their economic situation. However, emigration was not a simple solution to the economic problems experienced by Irish women, and it did not assure any advancement in their social mobility. Though the ability of the Irish to enter Britain was never placed under restriction, moralising discourses about the Irish, about the type of work they would take up outside their home country, about their intelligence and about their economic prospects, meant that even in the twentieth century the Irish often suffered from low social status.⁴⁰

Irish prospects for social mobility in countries like England were even worse than those experienced by indigenous working-class girls. Walter has argued that from the mid-nineteenth century onwards Irish women in both Britain and America tended to be employed as “menial” workers in service positions, “a role which indigenous women left behind as soon as higher status employment became available.”⁴¹ Where male workers were concerned, Walter has emphasised that the British tendency to stereotype the Irish as “dirty” had much to do with the image of the male Irish labourer as someone who worked outdoors.⁴² Moreover, Walter argues that the Irish in Britain have been defined typically by perceptions of Irish

⁴⁰ Wendy Webster, ‘Race’, Ethnicity and National Identity,’ in Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska (ed.), *Women in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2001), 293.

⁴¹ Walter, *Outsiders Inside*, 1.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 23 and 88.

men, with Irish women being “[d]iscursively” invisible. In this sense, the status of the Irish woman was inferred from that of her male counterpart. In being “associated with ‘dirt’,” the Irish woman’s femininity was called into question and she was “despised for lacking domestic skills.”⁴³ In his work on the Irish in Liverpool, Belchem has suggested that perceptions of Irish women as unable to “manage” the family money “continued through to the Edwardian period,”⁴⁴ while both Walter and Penny Summerfield have suggested that this view of Irish women as dirty endured well into the twentieth century.⁴⁵ Irishness and slum-living were not just closely associated but, for some commentators, causally intertwined. In 1934 the novelist and journalist J. B. Priestley wrote of the Irish in Liverpool: “they have settled in the nearest quarter and turned it into a slum, or, finding a slum, have promptly settled down to out-slum it.”⁴⁶ Even by the 1950s, in cities like Liverpool and London, the Irish working class were still closely associated with dirt and overcrowding.⁴⁷

Just as middle-class discourses of class and respectability defined native working-class females according to whether they were ‘redeemable’ or ‘irredeemable,’ Irish women found their identities categorised in similarly polemic terms.⁴⁸ Alongside the notion of Irish women as dirty and uncivilised sat an

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁴⁴ Belchem, *Irish, Catholic and Scouse*, 32.

⁴⁵ Walter cites Penny Summerfield’s 1984 research showing that welfare managers during the Second World War still thought of Irish workers in terms of the stereotypes of drunkenness and dirt. Walter, *Outsiders Inside*, 88-89.

⁴⁶ Priestley, quoted in Belchem, *Irish, Catholic and Scouse*, 304.

⁴⁷ Walter, *Outsiders Inside*, 209. For more on the earlier stigmatisation of Irish migrants, particularly in Liverpool, see John Belchem, ‘Comment: Whiteness and the Liverpool Irish,’ *Journal of British Studies*, 44, 1 (2005): 146-152.

⁴⁸ Beverley Skeggs, *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable* (London: Sage, 1997), 47.

alternative discourse of Irish women as morally reclaimable. The LVA's preventative approach to vice and immorality meant that they viewed the morality of many of the Irish women that they encountered with optimism. Where the LVA spent time helping or investigating female Irish immigrants, it was generally because they saw them as women who were or, at the very least, *could be* respectable. In this way, the LVA's approach to both indigenous working-class and immigrant Irish women was part of a tradition whereby middle-class women would attempt to educate both groups so that they would be "moral regenerators of the nation."⁴⁹

Indeed, the discourses that have surrounded Irish ex-patriots have often been closely associated with those of class, insofar as Irishness was frequently assumed to be an indicator of an individual's low class background. This meant that any ethnic prejudices or assumptions made about the Irish were heavily interwoven with existing discourses of class prejudice. For example, where the issue of prostitution and vice was concerned, the low social status of Irish women and indigenous working-class women meant that they attracted similar attention from the LVA. Women from both groups were thought to have come from humble backgrounds, where women's labour was necessary to the economic upkeep of the home. Both groups of women were a source of anxiety because of an assumption that where money was scarce and moral fortitude inadequate, vice would flourish. I do not want to suggest that there were no differences in the treatment or perceptions of Irish and indigenous working-class women. Local working-class women may have been considered to have similar economic and moral backgrounds to female Irish

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

immigrants, but there was an extra level of concern that surrounded Irish women and their potential to turn to vice. Specifically, anxieties about the ability of Irish women to negotiate urban life were fuelled by a sense of the city as alien to these women. Unlike English working-class women, Irish girls were much more readily associated with a sense of naivety that was borne from purity and chastity. Irish girls' assumed rural backgrounds and poor knowledge of city life meant that they were defined regularly as prime examples of female moral naivety. In this way, the LVA replicated purity discourses already in circulation in Ireland, promulgating associations between female Irish national identity and moral virtue.

Purists in Liverpool and in Ireland were aware of each other's activities and the roles they performed in their respective local settings. Indeed, these organisations sometimes worked together in campaigns to protect Irish female morality.⁵⁰ The LVA made a point of explicitly stating its links with Ireland in its 1938-39 Annual Report. The report suggested that the LVA maintained "close co-operation and mutual help" with "all the Vigilance Associations in Britain and Ireland." Moreover, the LVA went on to point out that it sent weekly lists and details of immigrant Irish girls to the NVA, so that the information could be forwarded to "Organisations in their particular districts."⁵¹ These connections between Liverpoolian and Irish purists continued into the post-Second World War

⁵⁰ Garrett has suggested the Child Protection and Rescue Society of Ireland (CPRSI) worked with English vigilance associations to repatriate unmarried Irish mothers. He argues that despite the "impetus for repatriation" coming from English societies, Irish agencies co-operated in this process. One possible reason for organisations like the CPRSI working with English purity workers in this way was a concern in Ireland about Catholic children being brought up outside the faith if they remained in England. Garrett, 'The Abnormal Flight,' 331.

⁵¹ LVA Annual Report 1938-39, Unpublished, LRO M326 VIG/3 Box 2, p. 5. The LVA also made a similar point of highlighting its connections with other agencies, including those in Dublin, Belfast and Cork. LVA Annual Report Report 1939-1940, Unpublished, LRO M326 VIG/3 Box 2, p. 5.

period, with the LVA noting in 1950 that there were “several bodies doing work among girls in Dublin” who “frequently” used the LVA’s “services.”⁵² In 1955 the LVA noted that it shared with the “British Vigilance Association” the expense of printing leaflets containing Vigilance Association addresses and that they then sent these leaflets to “Irish agencies and welfare bodies.”⁵³ Consequently, there were clear links between Irish and Liverpoolian purists during the mid-twentieth century, with communications between the two groups being seen as a useful strategy in the effort to keep Irish girls morally and socially safe.

Having promoted their services to purity organisations in Ireland, the LVA hoped that these connections would help disseminate their message that Irish girls should not travel to Liverpool without a reputable job lined up. Nevertheless female travel from Ireland continued to be a concern for the LVA. Throughout the early- and mid-twentieth century, the LVA expressed its concern about the number of Irish young women travelling to Liverpool in search of work or a new life in England. Though some Irish female immigrants intended to stay in Liverpool, others were more ambitious in their travel plans, with their docking in Liverpool being only one stage in their overall journey to a life outside Ireland. For the LVA, the transience of women from this social group was a cause of particular concern. Abroad in a new city and away from their families, the LVA became anxious that such girls were ideal prey for those who sought to traffic them into white slavery, or induce them into immoral lifestyles.

⁵² LVA Annual Report 1949-1950, p. 5.

⁵³ LVA Annual Report 1955, Unpublished, LRO M326 VIG/3 Box 2.

From time to time the criticism is made that these girls should not be encouraged to come to England, we do know that a great deal has been done in Ireland to prevent them running risks, but there are so many of them who are genuinely anxious to “better themselves.” But their ignorance of distance is appalling, and often when asked where they are going to, the reply is Yorkshire or Lancashire, and they do not realise the difference of name between a County or town.⁵⁴

The LVA was confident in stating that “a great deal” was being done to discourage girls from leaving Ireland because of the association’s links with Irish purity organisations. For the LVA as well as their Irish counterparts, such surveillance was necessary because of the “risks” that travelling posed to these supposedly innocent girls. The quote highlights the centrality of notions of ignorance and naivety to the LVA’s perception of the risks that Irish girls took by travelling for work. The organisation believed that the naivety of these girls was borne out of more than simply being a newcomer to an area; to a large extent, Irish women were thought to be ignorant to the very concept of urban space and distance. Unable to appreciate even the size of the locations to which they travelled, the quote suggests that it was the transience of Irish women that was particularly alarming. The LVA did not take for granted that Irish girls were able to fully comprehend what was meant by ‘a city’ in terms of the sheer scale and design of this type of settlement. Fears of this kind infantilised Irish women’s knowledge about travel and underestimated their ability to adapt to new locations. Colin Pooley’s research on the diaries of a young woman

⁵⁴ LVA Annual Report 1932-1933, Unpublished, LRO M326 VIG/3 Box 2, p. 5.

who moved from Londonderry, Northern Ireland, to London in the late-1930s has shown how young women could readily learn to navigate new cities. The woman in Pooley's study acquired spatial knowledge of her new urban setting through movement and activity, attending a local Church and visiting places such as Kew Gardens.⁵⁵ She appears to have been inquisitive and cautiously confident in her approach to her new home, with Pooley noting:

She walked frequently, used public transport for longer distance travel in the city, rarely felt scared or alienated – though commented on the peculiarities of new locations – and did not mind travelling around London alone, although many of her trips were in the company of friends.⁵⁶

She did not embark upon this move lightly; her father and a friend accompanied her when she first arrived in the country and together they sought out family friends.⁵⁷ Pooley's case shows how Irish women were adaptable in their approach to learning about and travelling around new places in English cities.

Lambert has proposed that the family was an important factor in Irish female emigration, insofar as family “networks” provided “the most important means of arranging and maintaining emigration.”⁵⁸ Often, the success of these family connections for protecting and establishing Irish girls in their new homes in England did not require any intervention on the part of local purity groups, although

⁵⁵ Pooley, 'Getting to know the city,' 218.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 218.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 219-220.

⁵⁸ Lambert, 'Irish Women's Emigration to England,' 184.

this did not prevent purists from taking an interest in emigration organised in this way. The LVA fretted about the success of these family networks. They were particularly keen to help Irish girls who had arrived in Liverpool seeking the homes of distant family members or prospective employers with insufficient information about how to locate these people. In one such case, an Irish girl was stopped by the LVA on her way to see her brother-in-law in Birmingham. According to the patrol worker, the girl had no address and was “quite certain she would be able to find him in the street.” For the LVA, the case proved “the absolute ignorance of the size of our cities.”⁵⁹ The assumed inability of Irish girls to safely negotiate urban spaces, or accurately plan out and conduct long distance journeys, meant that they featured prominently as potential white slaves in local purity discourses of urban vulnerability.

Moreover, the anxiety provoked by the belief that Irish girls had poor urban awareness was compounded by the belief that they were likely to be too shy or timid to seek out reputable help, if and when they got lost. One Irish girl, who was approached by an LVA worker patrolling Liverpool’s Exchange Station, was said to be “particularly nervous.” She had applied for a position in service in a north Lancashire town following an advert placed in an Irish Newspaper. Unsure of which train she needed to take, the girl was “too frightened” to seek assistance. The LVA explained that: “It was the first time that she had been away from her country home in Ireland, and she felt very strange.”⁶⁰ It is significant that the LVA noted that this girl’s home was in the countryside. In presenting Irish girls as lacking sufficient

⁵⁹ LVA Annual Report 1936-1937, Unpublished, LRO M326 VIG/3 Box 2, p. 8.

⁶⁰ LVA Annual Report 1923-1924, p. 12.

knowledge of urban space, it was assumed that many young women arriving in Liverpool came from rural backgrounds.⁶¹ Although this spoke to the notion that these girls were particularly innocent and uncorrupted by city living, it also implied that Irish girls were worryingly out of touch with the modern world. After putting the girl in this case onto the correct train, the LVA noted that: “It seems incredible in these days to realise that a girl of her age should be so helpless and nervous on a journey.”⁶² In this instance, the naivety and innocence displayed by the girl was so extreme as to thoroughly alarm the LVA. Though the organisation worked to defend moral purity amongst women, workers recognised that it was not beneficial or practical for girls to be completely ignorant or unaware of how to negotiate urban space.

Featuring regularly in LVA’s accounts of their patrol work, the purity and naivety of Irish girls was often contrasted with the influence of fallen women or the moral dangers of urban life. Purists feared that the more naive of Irish girls lacked the social wherewithal necessary to maintain their perceived moral purity in the face of corruption. In their more pessimistic assessments of Irish female vulnerability, the very innocence that the LVA appreciated in Irish women paradoxically became a cause for apprehension. The LVA implied that such qualities could be readily exploited by dangerous and immoral characters. In one “typical case [that] occurred early one morning” between 1932 and 1933, an LVA worker was “attracted by two young Irish girls who had disembarked from the Irish boat in the company of a

⁶¹ This assumption was probably reasonable in most cases. Brown has suggested that “The twenty-six counties of independent Ireland were indeed strikingly rural in the 1920s. In 1926, as the census recorded, 61 percent of the population lived outside towns or villages.” Brown, *Ireland*, 9.

⁶² LVA Annual Report 1923-1924, p. 12.

well-dressed, middle aged woman, about whom she did not feel quite happy.”⁶³

Upon approach, the woman told the worker that she was looking after the girls and she “strongly advised them to have nothing to do with our [the LVA] Worker.”⁶⁴

Consequently, the LVA representative sought the help of a nearby “official.”⁶⁵ The LVA’s vague description of this person simply as an “official” suggests that this was not a police officer but more likely a member of the ferry company’s staff. Yet by describing this person as an “official” in their recounting of the case, the LVA intended to show their supporters that they could draw the respect and attention of those in positions of authority. Though the LVA workers did not have their own powers, they wanted their supporters and the women they encountered to realise that the LVA knew how to draw on the power of others. In this particular case, the official’s intervention was shown to have frightened off the suspicious woman when she refused to answer the official’s questions about who she was or what relation she was to the girls. At this point the woman made off and climbed into a taxi.⁶⁶

Abandoned by their travelling companion, the girls confessed that they had met the woman when one of them had become ill during the journey, and she had offered to take care of them. The woman had lied to the girls, telling them that they could share a taxi with her once in Liverpool, as their destinations were not so far apart. In actual fact, the girls were intending to take up positions as nurse probationers in a hospital in the north, leading the LVA to suggest: “One can only

⁶³ LVA Annual Report 1932-1933, p. 9.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

guess what might have happened if the Worker had not intervened in time.”⁶⁷ Such was the level of concern about Irish girls travelling to England that, upon hearing of the case, the matron at the hospital to which the girls were travelling asked the LVA to meet other Irish girls travelling to her hospital.⁶⁸

As this case demonstrates, the surveillance of Irish girls came to be seen by the LVA and by some employers as both necessary and acceptable, with the LVA being more than willing to liaise with employers and carers to arrange to escort young Irish girls to or from the boats.⁶⁹ As part of their efforts to monitor the movements of young women, the LVA would also liaise with the National Vigilance Association, sending them “weekly lists of the Irish girls who come to this country, with information of their names and future addresses, which they [the NVA] forward to organisations in their particular districts, who help the girls after their arrival.”⁷⁰ This meant that the monitoring of girls could be networked in such a way that their movements could be tracked across the country.

The LVA deliberately sought out Irish girls as an ethnic group requiring particular moral and social guidance and this strategy indicates that the sort of moral policing practiced in Liverpool differed from that conducted in other regions. In their work on the “child-saving movement” in Scotland between the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries, Linda Mahood and Barbara Littlewood have proposed that “there is little evidence of the systemic targeting or stigmatization of minority

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ For example, in an earlier case from the year 1923-1924, a woman from Kent wrote to the LVA asking if they could locate a hospital place in Kildare for an Irish girl who was convalescing in Kent. The LVA obliged and met the girl in Liverpool to see her on her way. See LVA Annual Report 1923-1924, p. 14.

⁷⁰ LVA Annual Report 1938-1939, p. 5.

ethnic groups in relation to their family life or morality, in spite of the periodic arrival of the Irish (and Roman Catholic).”⁷¹ The Liverpool case shows that, in this city at least, the symbolic role of the Irish girl in discourses of vulnerability, transience and vice was such that they were singled out for extra surveillance. That is not to say that the LVA paid no attention to other immigrant groups as well, but the Association did not pay such enduring and detailed attention to others as they did to Irish women.

Where wider debates about ethnicity did enter the LVA’s case work, it was usually as a result of the organisation’s anxiety about the immorality of ethnic minority men. It is not surprising that the LVA were suspicious of such men, since it was not unusual during the early- and mid-twentieth century for non-white men to be thought to have a corrupting influence on young white girls. Chris Waters has proposed that during the interwar period British national identity became more feminised as domesticity was emphasised over the public sphere. He has suggested that this had important implications for cultural understandings of interracial sexual relationships because:

if the nation was increasingly ‘feminine,’ then fears of unlicensed Black male sexuality could generate anxieties not only about the safety of women, hearth, and home but about the very safety of the nation itself. Such

⁷¹ Linda Mahood and Barbara Littlewood, ‘The “Vicious” Girl and the “Street-Corner” Boy: Sexuality and the Gendered Delinquent in the Scottish Child-Saving Movement, 1850-1940,’ *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 4, 4, (1994): 551-552.

concerns had surfaced in the 1920s and 1930s when opposition to interracial marriages in British seaports became widespread.⁷²

Certainly, Liverpool was one port which experienced significant racial tensions during the interwar period.⁷³ In 1919 groups of white people attacked ethnic communities (particularly black seamen) in a series of race riots and, though they did not reference this specific unrest, the LVA's suspicious approach to non-white men was evident in their reporting of interracial relationships.⁷⁴ Stories such as that of a girl who was apparently given V.D by a "coloured man" and that of a girl who took up the "undesirable company of coloured acquaintances," were indicative of the LVA's readiness to find a correlation between ethnicity and immorality.⁷⁵ Waters' findings that, in the 1950s, women who formed relationships with black men were often regarded as transgressive and deviant can also be applied to the LVA's perception of some of the women who they dealt with during the interwar years.⁷⁶ In the case of the girl who had taken up with "coloured acquaintances," the LVA described her as "hardened and difficult to influence from her loose mode of living," whilst her step-father told the organisation "that it was absolutely

⁷² Chris Waters, "'Dark Strangers' in Our Midst: Discourses of Race and Nation in Britain, 1947-1963,' *The Journal of British Studies*, 36, 2 (1997): 212.

⁷³ See Laura Tabili, 'The Construction of Racial Difference in Twentieth Century Britain: The Special Restriction (Coloured Alien Seamen) Order, 1925,' *The Journal of British Studies*, 33, 1 (1994): 72; Lucy Bland, 'White Women and Men of Colour: Miscegenation Fears in Britain after the Great War,' *Gender and History*, 17, 1, (2005): 34.

⁷⁴ Charlotte Wildman has suggested that concerns about unemployment and miscegenation fuelled these riots in various places around the country. Moreover, she notes that Liverpool witnessed "the worst of the violence and with murderous results" when black sailor Charles Wooton drowned at the docks having jumped or been pushed into the water while a crowd looked on. Charlotte Wildman, 'Urban Transformation in Liverpool and Manchester, 1918-1939,' *The Historical Journal*, 55, 1 (2012): 122.

⁷⁵ LVA Annual Report 1923-1924, p. 14 and LVA Annual Report 1928-1929, Unpublished, LRO M326 VIG/3 Box 2, p. 7.

⁷⁶ Chris Waters, "'Dark Strangers' in Our Midst,' 228-229.

impossible to induce her to live at home.”⁷⁷ However, because of their concentration on prevention rather than rescue, the LVA appears to have had far less interaction with men suspected of being immoral than with girls who were supposedly in need of protection.⁷⁸ For the LVA, Irish girls, with their assumed working-class and protected rural backgrounds, represented a quintessential form of vulnerable femininity.

Overall, the LVA had a contradictory understanding of female purity and moral innocence. The Association’s perception of Irish girls shows that during the interwar period the organisation was struggling to find a balance between promoting feminine virtue and inadvertently cultivating the type of innocence that could be exploited by white slavers. Although the perceived naivety of Irish girls worried the LVA, the organisation felt that it was important to protect their moral outlook. The organisation did not attempt to ‘open the eyes’ of these girls by revealing the precise dangers of the streets, or what might happen to a so-called white slave. Underlying all the association’s concerns about Irish girls being naive and innocent was a respect for the purity that they were thought to embody. In 1928 the LVA reported that two young girls had travelled from Ireland to Liverpool by boat, where they

⁷⁷ LVA Annual Report 1928-1929, p. 7.

⁷⁸ The records do contain occasional suggestions that the LVA might investigate the backgrounds of men suspected of trafficking. However, they tended not to ‘rescue’ girls from these men so much as they simply prevented girls from meeting such characters. In a case from 1932-33, the LVA branch contacted their Newcastle equivalents, the Newcastle Vigilance Association, after intercepting two Northern Irish girls who had entered Liverpool en-route to a meeting with the fiancé of one of the girls in Northumberland. Having spoken to the man, “the voice and broken English evidently that of a foreigner,” and disbelieving his claims to have sent money for the girls’ further transport, the LVA “refused to let the girls travel through the night.” Meanwhile, the Vigilance Workers in Newcastle investigated the case and advised the LVA that it would be “unwise to allow the girls to proceed.” Further investigation revealed that the men were “Egyptians, living in very undesirable surroundings, and that one of the men was married, but separated from his wife.” LVA Annual Report 1932-33, p. 8.

were approached by an “elderly” woman.⁷⁹ As the girls explained, the woman tried “to persuade them to go with her to her lodging house, where she had a lot of men lodgers, and they would be sure of a good time.”⁸⁰ Intent upon travelling to a local convent, one of the girls “wisely” informed the woman of their plans and they declined to go with her.⁸¹ Although the woman persisted with her interest in the girls and offered to accompany them on their way, she eventually left the two alone, when an LVA worker, “not liking her attitude,” approached the three of them.⁸² These ‘convent girls’ were representative of an idealised Irish femininity. For the association, their religious affiliations conveyed a sense of moral uprightness and their wariness of the suspicious woman suggested that they had an adequate awareness of the dangers of urban life. These girls embodied all that local purists’ saw as positive about Irish femininity. Virtuous, devout and repelled by immorality, they represented a vision of Irish femininity that the LVA sought to uphold. The LVA’s aim was not to eliminate naivety in young women by expanding the possibilities for secure female travel and employment, rather their efforts were focused on managing and protecting the innocence of those women who could not or would not be dissuaded from travelling.

Conclusion

The status of Irish women in Liverpool was shaped by dominant definitions of class, gender and ethnic national identity. On the one hand, the Irish were popularly

⁷⁹ LVA Annual Report 1927-28, p. 6.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*

regarded as being of low social status and as members of a social residuum, with Irish women perceived to be unfeminine and unable or unwilling to perform their domestic duties adequately. On the other hand, Irish women were represented very differently by local purists. For the LVA, Irish women were seen to be pious and innocent to the point of naivety. If local working-class girls were thought to be morally undereducated and at risk of corruption, then so too were Irish girls. But the Irish were also considered to require extra attention, due to their supposed lack of exposure to city life and urban culture. Though the LVA may have on occasion encountered Irish girls who were already 'fallen' or behaving immorally, the LVA did not focus on them. Instead, they selected girls who they believed to be essentially respectable and in need of protection.

This chapter has shown how the LVA's interest in Irish women in Liverpool was heavily influenced by Irish ideas about female morality. Irish female national identity emphasised innocence and purity and, through their communications with Irish purists, the LVA was aware of this understanding about the morality of Irish women. The LVA expected them to be innocent, to have little knowledge of immorality and to be unprepared to detect the motives of those who would seek to corrupt them. This is significant because it meant that whilst the LVA did indeed target this group for moral surveillance, they were encouraged to do this by discourses that were already prevalent in Ireland. As such, we cannot conclude that the LVA's focus on these women was motivated merely by ethnic prejudice against these women as outsiders.

It is too simplistic to view the LVA's perception of Irish women as the product of straightforward racism, or as founded on an image of femininity that the organisation cultivated to suit its own preventative agenda. Rather it was the case that LVA accepted the idealised homespun image of Irish women because it was easily accommodated into their overall views about women's moral vulnerability in urban settings. The discourses of white slavery that appeared in Liverpool during the early- and mid-twentieth century played on well-established fears about port-life, sexual immorality and Irish immigration. For the LVA, Irish girls were the embodiment of virtuous yet vulnerable femininity, and so were presented as ideal candidates for the organisation's moral guidance and support. Certainly, the LVA can be seen to have engaged in an early form of ethnic profiling, with Irish ethnicity emerging as one of the key factors that the association considered when deciding whether to intervene in the lives of women arriving in the city. But, ultimately, the LVA was intent upon upholding a dominant moral code that regulated *all* women regardless of ethnicity. Protecting the Irish was, in the LVA's mind, one distinctive way of achieving that goal.

Chapter Five

The “Port of Hope”¹: Finding Respectable Employment

A moral disaster prevented may not be so sensational as a rescue achieved, but how far-reaching are its beneficial results! In many of the cases with which we have to deal there would, humanly speaking have been ‘one more unfortunate,’ but we were permitted to stand in the breach and the danger was happily averted.²

From its inception, the LVA took it upon itself to maintain the morality of young women in the port city of Liverpool and, in doing so, the organisation recognised and responded to the economic necessity of women’s employment outside the home. The workers of the LVA knew that it was impractical to expect the young women who entered the city not to be in need of jobs, either for their own security or for that of their families. However, depending on the type of work sought out, the LVA saw female employment as either a means of social improvement or a potential source of danger. The above quote refers to the organisation’s work investigating and putting women in touch with potential employers. It makes clear the high moral stakes that the LVA believed surrounded this particular task.

For the LVA, the main “danger” posed by women’s work outside the home was the potential for “moral disaster,” not material or environmental considerations such as low pay or poor working conditions. Though the Association was set up

¹ John C.H. How, Rector of Liverpool, LVA Annual Report 1932-1933, Unpublished, LRO M326 VIG/3 Box 2, p. 3.

² LVA Annual Report 1916, Unpublished, LRO M326 VIG/3 Box 2, p. 8.

with the remit of tackling white slavery, the quote shows how the LVA attempted to situate the everyday nature of their work within wider concerns about the threat of prostitution. The organisation implied that whilst rescue work may have produced more “sensational” stories, the process of investigating the prospective jobs of the women they met acted as a form of preventative work. The LVA argued that, as a direct result of their interventions into discussions between women and potential employers, they “averted” the potential for these women to fall into disreputable work and, consequently, immoral lifestyles. Indeed, the suggestion that the LVA’s work prevented a woman from becoming “one more unfortunate” made clear that the Association was not focused upon rescue work. Once a woman was defined as immoral, the LVA believed there was little they could do to help her. It was for this reason that, from their inception and throughout the interwar years, the Association considered the task of vetting employment opportunities a legitimate and significant preventative strategy for maintaining female morality.

This chapter argues that the vigilance effort in Liverpool took a cautious and pragmatic approach to female employment during the interwar years. Caught between wariness about the economic ambitions of poor, urban women and a desire to enable them to lead honest and independent lives, the LVA charged itself with finding what it deemed respectable work for women. Guiding and shaping the often vague and haphazard employment intentions of those who arrived in the city, the LVA regarded certain types of work as having a use in keeping women off the streets and away from the threat of prostitution, as well giving them the opportunity to support themselves and their families. I will show that the LVA readily promoted

'feminine' jobs, especially domestic service. Drawing on the work of Selina Todd, Colin Pooley and Beverley Skeggs, I argue that the LVA's preoccupation with domestic labour as an acceptable form of respectable work was not simply about defining women's capabilities and areas of *natural* competence, it was also about the class of the women that the LVA typically encountered.³ The types of jobs that the LVA promoted to young women reflected the social status of the girls in question.

Examining in detail the cases of various runaways recorded by the LVA's Annual Reports, I illustrate that stability and respectability of employment were paramount and that ambition leading to risk-taking in search of social or economic promotion was strongly discouraged. Local case studies provide clear examples of the LVA's pragmatic approach to female employment insofar as the LVA sought to influence girls' ideas about how they could earn money or find work. For the LVA, ambition was a trait that required strong moral guidance in order to ensure that it did not corrupt young working-class females by taking them off on dangerous adventures towards disreputable employment goals.

I will show how the LVA considered their employment guidance and expertise all the more important during the interwar years, due to Liverpool's precarious economic situation and insecurities in the local job market. For many working-class women, finding work was essential to their survival. But an economic downturn in Liverpool meant that working-class women in particular had

³ Selina Todd 'Poverty and Aspiration: Young Women's Entry to Employment in Inter-war England,' *Twentieth Century British History*, 15, 2 (2004): 119-142; Colin Pooley, 'Living in Liverpool,' in John Belchem (ed.), *Liverpool 800: Culture, Character, History* (Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2006), 171-255; Beverley Skeggs, *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable* (London: Sage, 1997).

limited choices available to them. Consequently, the LVA's moral work had no option but to take account of structural economic conditions in the city. It is therefore important to first consider how Liverpool's economic prospects affected the LVA's employment policy during the interwar years.

Work, Poverty and Female Morality

As an international port, Liverpool had once been home to great wealth in the form of its merchant and business classes. However, the concentration of prosperity in the hands of the few also meant that Liverpool suffered significant problems with poverty. Pat Ayres has noted that, despite Liverpool's association with shipping bringing various associated industries into the city, Liverpool was, at the start of the twentieth century, "one of the poorest, most squalid and disease ridden places in Britain."⁴ Although the city had been able to boast approximately 45 per cent of the UK's total export trade by value in 1857, the structure of the local economy would, in later years, present economic and social problems for the city.⁵ Charlotte Wildman's research has carefully balanced the negative aspects of Liverpool's economic development during the interwar years against the local Corporation's efforts to redevelop large parts of the city, but she notes that the local economy was unstable and it lacked diversity.⁶ With much of Liverpool's workforce dependent upon trade and commerce, local employment was especially vulnerable to

⁴ Pat Ayers, *The Liverpool Docklands: Life and Work in Athol Street* (Wirral: Liver Press, 1999), 6. See also Madeline McKenna, who has suggested that in 1919 Liverpool was home to some of the "worst slums in the country," in her work 'Municipal Suburbia in Liverpool, 1919-1939,' *The Town Planning Review*, 60, 3 (1989): 288.

⁵ Francis E. Hyde, 'The Growth of Liverpool's Trade, 1700-1950,' in Wilfred Smith (ed.), *Merseyside: A Scientific Survey* (Liverpool: University of Liverpool Press, 1953): 159-160.

⁶ Charlotte Wildman, 'Urban Transformation in Liverpool and Manchester, 1918-1939,' *The Historical Journal*, 55, 1 (2012): 123.

fluctuations in these industries. In 1953 W. Robertson, an economist at the University of Liverpool, suggested that Liverpool's failure to develop local industries or attract new ones meant that the city had to contend with a "large pool of surplus labour even in the most prosperous of the inter-war years."⁷

In 1932, the national rate of unemployment was 22 per cent, but in Liverpool the rate stood at 28 per cent; this was to set an ongoing trend in the relationship between the Liverpool and the national unemployment rates thereafter.⁸

Although the city attempted to overcome its economic decline by promoting its world status as a port city and by advertising its attractiveness for investors, these efforts were largely unsuccessful.⁹ Writing in 1960, H. R. Poole of the Liverpool Council of Social Service offered a bleak recollection of the city's experiences after the First World War. He suggested that Liverpool's "high hopes" of "post-war reconstruction" had been "hampered and distracted by rising unemployment and urgent economic difficulties."¹⁰ In language that invoked memories of the World Wars before and after this period in Liverpool's history, Poole claimed that the city's aspirations were "finally...blasted and torn when the full weight of the depression hit Merseyside."¹¹ He proposed – with regional affection – that whilst Liverpool's situation was a "mirror of national events," Liverpool's story cast the difficulties of the time "in sharp relief," because the city's "new hopes and ideas

⁷ W. Robertson, 'The Merseyside Development Area,' in Wilfred Smith (ed.), *Merseyside: A Scientific Survey*, (Liverpool: University of Liverpool Press, 1953), 181.

⁸ Stuart Wilks-Heeg, 'From World City to Pariah City? Liverpool and the Global Economy, 1850-2000,' in Ronaldo Munck (ed.), *Reinventing the City: Liverpool in Comparative Perspective*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2003), 47.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 47-48

¹⁰ H. R. Poole *The Liverpool Council of Social Service: 1909-1959* (Liverpool: The Liverpool Council of Social Service, 1960), 35.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

were so bold and were fought for so hard, and the economic difficulties were so intense.”¹² Certainly, large sections of the city were seriously affected by the interwar economic downturn. Dock workers were most obviously hit by the depression, which caused economic damage across other employment sectors in the city. Associated businesses in areas such as storage and messenger work were hit, as were small businesses, such as cafes and pubs near the docks.¹³

Differing expectations about the stability or appropriateness of women’s work meant that definitions of female unemployment were problematic during the interwar period. Officially, married women were undoubtedly disadvantaged by the state’s introduction of the Anomalies Act in July 1931. The Act stated that unemployed married women would not be eligible for benefit in line with other workers and, in Liverpool alone, 3,000 women had been disallowed benefit by November of that year.¹⁴ This Act shows that it was not just the LVA who had an uneasy relationship with female employment, but also the state. The notion of an unemployed woman was problematic because such a definition challenged the assumption that women had a guaranteed role working at home for the benefit of their families.

However, during times of economic difficulty women found that they had to take on the role of bringing money into the home. Todd has argued that the high levels of male unemployment in the early 1920s and again in the early 1930s meant that many young women took jobs in domestic service to alleviate economic

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Sam Davies, Pete Gill, Linda Grant, Martin Nightingale, Ron Noon and Andy Shallice, *Genuinely Seeking Work: Mass Unemployment on Merseyside in the 1930s* (Birkenhead: Liver Press, 1992), 19.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 78.

difficulties caused by their fathers being out of work.¹⁵ With high unemployment in interwar Liverpool, work within domestic service became a necessity for many women.¹⁶ Even during the economic difficulties of the 1930s such work was relatively plentiful, with many young women taking up low-paid positions in lower middle-class and skilled working-class homes with children.¹⁷ As a result, the number of women officially working in Liverpool's personal service sector rose from 31,000 in 1921 to 38,000 in 1931.¹⁸ According to Colin Pooley, the narrow gap between the social status of service workers and their employers in Liverpool showed how cheap domestic service was in the city when compared with London.¹⁹ Drawing on Caradog Jones' 1930s survey of Merseyside, Pooley has noted that live-in domestic servants earned, on average, 10 to 12 shillings per week plus board, working 10-12 hour days with only half a day off.²⁰ Todd has argued that this increase in domestic service can be read as evidence of "downward occupational mobility" for working-class women, who were squeezed out of other, more well-paid sectors such as clerical and retail work.²¹ Indeed, the opportunities available to women at the time were markedly shaped by their social class.²² Despite the gap between domestic servants and their employers being narrower than in other parts of the country, Todd has shown that a woman's path into domestic service on

¹⁵ Selina Todd, 'Domestic Service and Class Relations in Britain 1900-1950,' *Past and Present*, 203 (2009): 186.

¹⁶ Sam Davies et al., *Group Genuinely Seeking Work*, 24.

¹⁷ Colin Pooley, 'Living in Liverpool,' 205. Adrian Bingham has suggested that nationally there was actually a shortage of domestic servants during the 1920s. See his work *Gender, Modernity and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 68.

¹⁸ Sam Davies et al., *Genuinely Seeking Work*, 25.

¹⁹ Colin Pooley, 'Living in Liverpool,' 205-206.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 205.

²¹ Selina Todd, 'Poverty and Aspiration,' 131 and 122.

²² *Ibid.*, 120.

Merseyside still reflected her social background, with daughters of the “artisan class” working in private homes, whilst those of a slightly lower social status worked in institutions.²³

Though the LVA did not especially concern itself with the workings of Liverpool’s economy, the organisation was concerned about the impact of local economic fluctuations on the lives of young women. Aware that unemployment was a problem in the city, the organisation was anxious about how young girls could prosper with no legitimate means of employment. At a national level, the relationship between unemployment levels and the state of female morality also concerned the LVA’s parent organisation, the NVA.²⁴ As the LVA put it in the early 1930s, the NVA had already “played a leading part in obtaining laws which have put an end to the open activities of traffickers in women,” and it now “sought to prevent the supply of potential victims.”²⁵ The NVA aimed to do this by assisting “girls in difficulty or distress at the railway Stations.”²⁶ During the interwar years many young working-class women from rural areas migrated into towns in order to find work, and it was these migrant women that the purity associations aimed to intercept with their transport station patrols.²⁷ From the point of view of both the NVA and the LVA, their patrol work protecting women from traffickers had, in the words of the LVA, “gradually, and inevitably, become immediately linked with the unemployment problem.”²⁸

²³ *Ibid.*, 127.

²⁴ LVA Annual Report 1932-1933, p. 5.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ For more on rural working-class women’s work and migration see Selina Todd, ‘Young Women, Work and Family in Inter-War Rural England,’ *The Agricultural History Review*, 52, 1 (2004): 84.

²⁸ LVA Annual Report 1932-1933, p. 4.

The LVA argued that it supported the work of its parent organisation through its links with NVA workers in the capital and through their shared understanding of the relationship between the country's economic problems and the moral dangers that these circumstances posed for vulnerable young girls. For example, in 1933 it was feared that girls were travelling to London for domestic work despite not being "the class of trained servant" required, and despite the fact that they would "not be coming [for such work] were it not for industrial distress."²⁹ For these purity campaigners, there was a clear link between the trafficking in women and economic decline, since unemployment seemed to cause so many women to make sudden and unplanned journeys to new parts of the country in search of work. The LVA said it had interviewed runaways and found that many of them came from large families where the father was unemployed. They suggested that these girls had "heard there is plenty of well-paid work in Liverpool, Manchester or London..."³⁰

The Association was extremely concerned that the message about Liverpool being a city of unemployment, rather than economic opportunity, was not getting through to some of the women who were travelling there. In 1933 the then chairman of the LVA, the Rector of Liverpool, noted that during that year the LVA had dealt with a greater number of women and girls than was average. He explained that this:

...may in large part be accounted for by the fact of unemployment. Girls travel about from place to place in search of work, and Liverpool attracts

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

them as a Port of Hope, though so often of hope unrealised. Under such circumstances the timely help of our Society may, and often does, step in and avert disaster.³¹

With this statement the Rector made it clear that the LVA's task, where employment was concerned, was to manage the unrealistic expectations of hopeful young girls in order to ensure their overall well-being. The potential "disaster" that he referred to was moral, rather than economic. The LVA was not politically interested nor was it a lobbyist group *per se*. Moreover, members do not appear to have taken a principled or idealistic interest in the material impacts of poverty upon young women's lives, except where material deprivation could be considered a factor in the causes of prostitution. As the LVA saw it, their remit in hard times was to make sure that a downward local economy did not see more girls selling themselves on the streets out of desperation and a lack of alternative prospects.

In order to achieve their aims of managing unrealistic expectations and economic need, the LVA devised appropriate strategies of surveillance. Throughout this thesis I have argued that the landing stage at the docks and Lime Street train station were focal points for the LVA's practice of informally policing the city's streets. From these entry points the organisation could intercept newcomers to Liverpool and investigate their plans before they wandered off alone into the city. Yet the LVA's interest in female employment illustrates how their surveillance practices were far more extensive than simply talking to girls as they stepped from boats or trains. Maintaining contact with other vigilance associations (such as the

³¹ John C.H. How, Rector of Liverpool, LVA Annual Report 1932-1933, p. 3.

NVA), as well as with employment organisations, the LVA was in a position to enquire about the situations of girls due to arrive in Liverpool. The Association's workers would also make follow up enquiries about girls previously helped and sent on their way to destinations outside the city. In 1930 the LVA noted its "sincere appreciation" of the "various kindred Associations" who co-operated with them in meeting girls and assessing their circumstances.³² Members of the LVA suggested that they had received help from various regions, including London, Paris, Glasgow, Belfast, Cork, Dublin, Newcastle-on-Tyne, Manchester, New York, Australia and Buenos Aires.³³ In terms of their local connections, the LVA made special mention of the Liverpool House of Help, who temporarily housed women brought there by the LVA, and Nugent House (part of a local philanthropic movement set up by Father James Nugent in the Victorian era in order to help the poor), which also housed women, as well as helping to find employment for them.³⁴

With these extensive links, it was not surprising that the LVA had some success in facilitating female employment and establishing their expertise in this field. The Association successfully convinced the public that it was an authority on women's work. As such, the LVA did not always have to push its services or help onto women or employment agencies. In 1924 the LVA proudly declared that it was regularly sought out by people and organisations hoping to benefit from its experience, noting that they received "a number of appeals by correspondents for...information regarding travel, reliable agencies for seeking employment, for

³² LVA Annual Report 1929-1930, p. 7.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.* See also Liverpool House of Help Annual Reports 1943-1967, Unpublished, LRO 362HOU 3.

addresses of reliable lodgings, and the bona fides of situations in this country and abroad.”³⁵

Additionally, the Association’s work was recognised by the local Labour Exchange. In one case from the LVA’s 1917-18 Annual Report, a nineteen-year-old girl was referred to the organisation by the Manageress of the Labour Exchange, after the girl had tried and failed to find work in a munitions factory.³⁶ On her first visit to the Labour Exchange the girl had met a “respectable” woman who had given her lodgings.³⁷ Once the LVA were involved in the girl’s case, they were pleased to find that the woman looking after her was “fully alive to the dangers to which [the girl] was exposed in a large city like Liverpool.”³⁸ Satisfied that the girl had found an appropriate moral guide to teach her how to navigate the city’ urban dangers, the Association proceeded to try to find work for her, while she continued to make her own enquiries at the Labour Exchange. The girl subsequently found work as a kitchen maid, although when this employment came to an end the LVA placed her in a home and she was eventually “claim[ed]” and “given over” to her brother.³⁹ That the girl was so closely monitored until her brother arrived to take her home indicated the extent of the LVA’s anxieties about women being allowed to travel on their own without a chaperone to protect them. Moreover, the fact that the girl briefly took up work as a kitchen maid shows that the Association considered this type of work respectable enough for young female travellers. By doing this type of work, the LVA reasoned that the girl was being kept off the streets. Her job,

³⁵ LVA Annual Report 1929-1930, p. 13.

³⁶ LVA Annual Report 1917-1918, Unpublished, LRO M326 VIG/3 Box 2, p. 12.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

working in kitchens, was similar to the sort of work that the LVA regularly encouraged young women to take up. Keeping in contact with organisations such as the Liverpool Domestic Servant's Registry, as well as with "ladies who are interested in our work," the LVA considered itself to be well-positioned to find suitable employment for young women, which was most often defined as domestic positions.⁴⁰

Domesticity remained a key feature of the LVA's notion of female respectability during the interwar years and even after the Second World War. As late as 1961, the Secretary of the LVA, Mrs Bond, said of the organisation's work helping women into employment: "we are able to put [girls] in touch with local employers needing domestic or factory workers."⁴¹ In this respect, little had changed about the LVA's estimation of the employment opportunities available to women before and after the Second World War. For purity campaigners like the LVA, domestic service had long been a compelling option when trying to find work for women of low status. It was anticipated that these women would be most likely to rely upon having an income and so, to avoid them turning to immoral means of earning, this type of work was frequently suggested. Skeggs has argued that domestic service has historically been considered a didactic path, developing the respectability of working-class women.⁴² Not only did this type of work keep women away from the dangers of public sphere, it exposed them to the supposedly good examples set by higher status families and taught them qualities such as

⁴⁰ LVA Annual Report 1923-1924, p. 15.

⁴¹ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 12th December 1961. That Mrs. Bond chose to highlight these areas reflects that the organisation was still focused on helping working-class women and that it still defined respectable work for these women in terms of traditional non-skilled or low-skilled employment.

⁴² Skeggs, *Formations of Class and Gender*, 47.

cleanliness. Owing to the fact that most of the women who the organisation helped came from working-class backgrounds, the LVA reconciled their vision of respectable domesticity with the need for these women to work by continually trying to place them in positions as servants or maids. Women's work was important to the LVA, not least because it prevented idleness in young single girls and it meant that women were less likely to sell themselves out of economic necessity.

When the LVA met one "stupid and stubborn" Irish runaway they were unimpressed that the girl "had been unemployed for some time and apparently was not at all anxious to find work."⁴³ The LVA tried to find a domestic position for the girl but their attempt was unsuccessful. They blamed this failure on the girl's "lack of references and of suitable clothing," and so put her on a steamer back to Dublin.⁴⁴ The case typified the LVA's desire to use work to prevent idle women from roaming the streets. Work was intended to be the means by which such women could be steered towards more respectable lifestyles. When it became apparent that no-one would employ the Irish girl, the LVA believed that the only other option for protecting her was to send her back to her family, who were found to be "nice people of good position."⁴⁵ Once again, the solution to this girl's "wandering habits" was to see her contained within the domestic sphere, if not through work then through parental influence.⁴⁶

⁴³ LVA Annual Report 1930-1931, p. 7.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

Whilst the LVA might have been disappointed by this particular girl's lack of ambition, the organisation met many girls whose over-ambitious characters were considered to be equally troubling. With the relationship between work and female morality very much interlinked, the organisation was cautious when faced with girls who showed ambition and drive. The LVA did not necessarily regard these traits as inherently dangerous, rather they were wary about the potential for such characteristics to lead girls into making poor decisions. The young women who the LVA encountered were often treated with suspicion when it came to their ability to identify and pursue their own independent goals. As the following case studies will show, this mistrust was not always misplaced where young girls' ambitions involved such plans as becoming a celebrity or an actress. But I argue that regardless of whether the intentions of the girl were realistic or respectable, the same limited range of employment opportunities were presented to these girls by the LVA time and time again.

Runaways: Case Studies

During the course of their patrol work, the Association regularly encountered girls who had come to Liverpool in search of work or a better lifestyle for themselves. The type of work these girls sought and their methods of finding employment were often at odds with LVA expectations. The LVA's case studies, as detailed in their Annual Reports, indicate that many girls travelled to Liverpool because they believed the city would provide them with jobs (or at least transport to other localities with jobs). If the interwar downturn in traditional sectors, such as factory

work, had sent these girls off in search of new prospects, it was not always the case that these travellers were looking to remain within these fields of employment. The following case studies show that some girls had ambitions of following more unconventional and glamorous career paths, much to the concern of the LVA. Though the organisation did ultimately help these girls by reuniting them with their families, the Association's accounts of the attitudes and aspirations of these girls tells the historian a good deal about the organisation's sense of its own importance. Moreover, these case studies show that even girls who were trying to challenge traditional feminine lifestyles were directed towards jobs in domestic service and factories in order to curtail their unruly behaviour.

In their 1926-27 Annual Report the LVA recounted the story of Hilda, a sixteen-year-old girl who had been found at the landing stage supposedly waiting for a boat to take her to "seek her fortune in Hollywood [sic]," where she planned to meet with her uncle Tom Mix (a "well-known" actor).⁴⁷ No doubt sceptical about the girl's story, the LVA worker dealing with this traveller was immediately concerned about how Hilda had funded her trip thus far. After persuading her to stay in a hostel "pending...investigations" into her background, the Association found that Hilda had stolen £30 from her father and absconded from the family home.⁴⁸ It is significant that the LVA's report noted that this "sudden lapse" in Hilda's otherwise "obedient and good" character could be "put down to the excitement of the cinemas."⁴⁹ The LVA endorsed the assumption that modern consumer culture had a negative influence on the young. Aspects of popular culture

⁴⁷ LVA Annual Report 1926-1927, pp. 8-9.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 9.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

such as the cinema were seen as a destabilising force on young girls' morality, on account of the problematic aspirations they were believed to inspire. Given that the LVA saw themselves as moral managers of young women's goals and ambitions, it is not surprising that the LVA accepted the cinema as the likely cause of Hilda's misbehaviour.

By highlighting Hilda's belief that she could travel to make money in Hollywood, the LVA emphasised her naivety and innocence. The Association was unconcerned about the fact that Hilda wanted to better herself, they simply wanted to show that this girl could not be trusted to make appropriate decisions about *how* to organise her own life. Hilda was said to have admitted on her reunion with her father "Oh daddy, I wanted to earn a lot of money to help mother and you."⁵⁰ The LVA could rationalise that whilst Hilda's intentions might have been positive, her decisions were poor. For the LVA she was a prime example of the sort of naivety that they tried to combat. Prior to her adventure to Liverpool, Hilda had worked in a mill in Lancashire, where she was described as "excellent at her work."⁵¹ Her employer told the LVA that she earned 30s per week but that her earnings were expected to rise to 45s as a result of her strong work ethic.⁵² By turning her back on this legitimate, stable and, in the LVA's mind, reliable form of work in preference for a life in Hollywood, Hilda's case cemented the notion that the LVA was needed to guide young girls seeking appropriate forms of economic improvement.

Hilda's story was not the only example of a young girl falling on hard times after chasing a path to stardom. Later, in 1931, the LVA recalled an encounter with

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

two young women, aged eighteen and nineteen who came from an unspecified town apparently in the north-west of England.⁵³ They had arrived in Liverpool at 9pm when a taxi driver took them to Lime Street station where he knew he would find the help of an LVA worker. It transpired that the girls worked in a factory but that they had “ambitions beyond” this.⁵⁴ They had run off in search of careers on the stage and had previously travelled to Manchester and Blackpool where they sought “dancing engagements” and theatrical work, but with no success.⁵⁵ In desperation, the girls then came to Liverpool, by now thin and starving. The LVA placed them in a hostel and contacted their “anxious” parents before sending them home.⁵⁶ Unlike Hilda’s case, however, the LVA did not altogether reject the aspirations of these girls. The organisation noted that these young women did have a talent for performance and, as such, the Association had been able to:

rouse the kindly interest of the Mayor of the town who got them introduced into an Amateur Theatrical Society, where they could attain a certain amount of their ambition, and could spend some of their spare time in a congenial atmosphere.⁵⁷

Though the ambitions of these girls were not completely dismissed by the LVA, the organisation was clear that their performing talents needed to be

⁵³ This assumption was based on the fact that the young women were said to have travelled from Manchester, to Blackpool and then Liverpool via a mixture hitch-hiking and walking. LVA Annual Report 1930-31, p. 9.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

channelled into a hobby rather than a career. It is not clear from the LVA's records whether the girls went back to their factory jobs but it seems likely, as the organisation made no mention of the girls taking any new form of employment. In allowing the girls a "certain amount of their ambition," the LVA characteristically hoped to quell their interest in acting and return them to a more traditional form of employment. Such arguments were widely used throughout the interwar period. For example, in 1932 the LVA reported meeting an 18 year old "aerobatic dancer" who had been touring Ireland for three months.⁵⁸ The tour was not financially successful and the company disbanded leaving the girl with on 2s 10½d and no means of getting to her home in the Midlands. The LVA paid her fare and later received a letter from the girl saying that she would now "accept any employment other than in a theatrical troupe, unless it was under much more reliable management".⁵⁹ Two aspects were significant about the LVA's reporting of this case. First, they made a point of noting that the girl had approached their worker after noticing her badge, rather than the worker having to approach the girl. Second, the girl's experiences had changed her attitude to the stage. For the LVA, this was a girl who was ready to learn the lessons that they were trying to teach. She was not only receptive to their guidance, she actively sought it out, and she had learned to be far more cautious in her work and lifestyle choices.

The organisation's decision to include cases of this sort in their annual reports was intended to reaffirm for their supporters the importance of their preventive and rescue work, as well as emphasising the vulnerability of the girls

⁵⁸ LVA Annual Report 1931-1932, p. 7.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

who came to the city. Cases such as Hilda's endorsed the LVA's belief that young women's economic ambitions could, if unchecked, pull them into disreputable trades and misadventures. Not all women possessed such powerful aspirations and impractical plans as Hilda's, though girls with more modest goals received similar practical guidance from the LVA. The literal and metaphorical journey towards finding legitimate and achievable forms of employment could, in the Association's estimations, be morally treacherous for young girls with big ideas and no family close at hand to advise them. The LVA believed that if this journey were not carefully managed and planned then even girls with the most honourable of intentions could find themselves heading towards disreputable lifestyles as a result of poor decisions, economic desperation or simply eagerness to 'get ahead'.

Conclusion

Paid employment was accepted by the LVA as an economic necessity for working-class women, but the organisation was always concerned to ensure that any work that they took up did not compromise appropriate forms of female morality. As part of a wider national network of social purity organisations, the LVA displayed considerable anxiety about young working-class women's ability to adhere to traditional codes of respectable femininity. These women formed a social group that was, by virtue of their age, naive to the moral dangers present on Liverpool's streets and easily influenced by the superficial glamour of popular culture. Simultaneously, by virtue of their low social status such women were also regarded as particularly

vulnerable to being corrupted by their employment ambitions, as a result of their economic situation.

Such ideas about working-class women's moral vulnerability were not specific to the LVA during the interwar years. Representatives from other local organisations such as the Women Police expressed similar concerns. For example, Mabel Cowlin explained to the Macmillan Committee that it was an "unintelligent class" of woman who turned to prostitution because it provided "an economically easy way of satisfying many desires which would never be satisfied in her life otherwise."⁶⁰ It was this sense of material desire and economic ambition that the LVA took steps to manage and curtail. Clearly, the LVA believed that paid employment could be used to satisfy the material and economic needs of young girls, thereby preventing them from ever needing to consider prostitution. Yet if the ambitions and desires that a young girl possessed were too expansive, then the LVA felt that there was a danger that she would easily be diverted from the path to reputable employment and into more immoral means of earning a living.

In the case of Hilda, here was a girl who, for the LVA, had overstepped her social status. She was a good mill worker and this, they felt, was where she should concentrate on earning her money, if she wanted to achieve her aim of supporting herself and her family. In the case of the theatre performers, their interests were shown to have pulled them away from secure family environments and into the company of strangers. They had used inappropriate tactics to reach their goals by hitching lifts from place to place, with no overall plan and with few respectable

⁶⁰ Mabel Cowlin, Departmental Committee on Street Offences, 20th April 1928, p. 24, TNA HO326/7.

contacts. The LVA considered these girls to be open to corruption, not least because their unchaperoned movement through public space might enable them to make the acquaintance of unscrupulous characters who would manipulate them.

For the LVA, female employment was both a protection from the threat of vice and at the same time a potential path towards vice, if a woman's employment ambitions proved to be overly ambitious, or if they took her away from her family and too far into the public sphere. By guiding women into quintessentially feminine forms of employment, such as domestic service or mill work, the LVA believed that they could stop young girls from turning to prostitution, without exposing them to glamorous lifestyles that might prove to be their moral downfall. In their efforts to help young working-class women find reputable employment, the LVA was always concerned to enable young women to negotiate a path through the traditionally male public sphere, whilst preserving their sense of femininity and respectability.

Moreover, it will be shown in the next chapter that not only did this division of public and private continue to shape the LVA's thinking about the type of work, lifestyles and activities that were appropriate for working-class women after the Second World War, but these were issues that continued to have national significance. During the 1950s, the Wolfenden Committee examined the issue of street solicitation. It is worth comparing the similarities of this committee and the Macmillan Committee, who, as noted in Chapter One, were charged with examining the same issue during the 1920s. I will argue that prostitution remained a key concern in official understandings of women's relationship to public space. The upshot was that, during the post-Second-World-War period, young women

continued to be constrained within public space by moral codes about female respectability and the potential for moral corruption.

Chapter Six

Old Discourses and New Protagonists: Prostitution and Female Sexuality in the Postwar Period

This chapter argues that street prostitution remained a source of moral anxiety throughout the postwar period. The prostitute continued to be identified as moral other, while official and unofficial attempts to control solicitation continued to reflect wider fears about female morality. In this way, I challenge a dominant historical thesis about the postwar period as characterised by increasing sexual permissiveness and social freedom.¹ Both nationally and locally, the idea that female respectability on the streets was in need of constant protection and supervision still influenced ideas and practice relating to women's use of urban space. Just as in the earlier part of the twentieth century, the LVA still sought to manage young women's movements through the streets of Liverpool; they continued with their preventative patrols, with putting female travellers in touch with respectable lodging houses and with finding suitable employment for women in areas such as domestic service. The organisation also maintained its links with individuals of high moral and social standing in the local community, with the Lady Mayoress taking up a Vice Presidency on the board of the Association alongside the Catholic Lord Bishop and the Anglican Archbishop of Liverpool.²

¹ Arthur Marwick, for example, presents a permissive interpretation of the 1960s and argues that the roots of this more promiscuous culture can even be found as early as 1958. See Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy and the United States, c. 1958-c.1974*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 18 and 688-689.

² LVA Annual Reports 1916-1976, Unpublished, LRO M326 VIG/3 Box 2.

Nationally, anxieties about urban morality also remained high on the state's agenda. Just as in 1927, when fears about female sexuality had influenced the creation of the Macmillan Committee, in 1954 the Home Office set up the Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution (the Wolfenden Committee). Though prostitution and homosexuality were placed together on the Committee's agenda as a result of their perceived transgressiveness, they were not treated in the same way by the Committee.³ The debate about the criminalisation of homosexuality was, for Wolfenden, an overwhelmingly philosophical issue, whereas prostitution was debated as practical matter of how to control this form of inevitable trade on the streets.⁴ As with Macmillan, the Wolfenden Committee set about investigating the usefulness of the solicitation laws and their relationship to the moral condition of the nation's streets, especially London. The Committee's work was intended to bring some clarity and resolution to the problematic solicitation laws. Questions about how to define prostitution, whether there was a difference between amateur and professional prostitution, whether prostitutes encouraged 'normal' women to engage in immoral behaviours, and precisely what was illegal about the prostitute's trade had all dogged the solicitation laws since at

³ For this reason, this chapter deals only with the Wolfenden Committee's interest in prostitution. For more on Wolfenden and official and unofficial responses to the regulation of homosexuality in the twentieth century see Roger Davidson and Gayle Davis, 'A Field for Private Members': The Wolfenden Committee and Scottish Homosexual Law Reform, 1950-67,' *Twentieth Century British History*, 15, 2 (2004): 174-201; Matt Houlbrook, 'Soldier Heroes and Rent Boys: Homosex, Masculinities, and Britishness in the Brigade of Guards, circa 1900-1960,' *Journal of British Studies*, 42, 3 (2003): 386-388; Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Frank Mort, *Capital Affairs: London and the Making of the Permissive Society* (London: Yale University Press, 2010); Jeffrey Weeks, 'Wolfenden and Beyond: the remaking of homosexual history,' in *History and Policy*, www.historyandpolicy.org/papers/policy-paper-51.html (February 2007) [Accessed February 2012].

⁴ Mort, *Capital Affairs*, 167.

least the first calls for the establishment of the 1927 Committee. These questions had not gone away and had, in fact, begun to increase in urgency by the early 1950s.

The Wolfenden Committee was put together amid sensational press reports and ‘expert’ concerns about the extent of prostitution upon London’s streets.⁵ In 1953 the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II had placed the capital under a microscope of publicity, with this attention having fed directly into the formation and metropolitan-focus of the inquiry.⁶ Helen Self has suggested that the weight of this press reporting was so great that it directly influenced the Committee’s conclusions.⁷ When the Wolfenden Committee published their report in 1957, it recommended that penalties for solicitation were to be increased, and it proposed to remove the need for proof that a citizen had been annoyed by the solicitation in order to secure a conviction – proposals that were enacted in the 1959 Street Offences Act. The Committee’s final report set out a legal framework for controlling prostitution based upon its status as a visible form of sexual immorality. Jeffrey Weeks has argued that the Committee drew upon the distinction between the public and private spheres in their efforts to separate the moral from the legal.⁸ This meant that the Wolfenden Committee believed that the law should only prosecute prostitution where it was conducted within the public sphere. Acts between individuals within the private sphere were, for Wolfenden, moral rather than legal

⁵ Helen J. Self, *Prostitution, Women and Misuse of the Law: The Fallen Daughters of Eve* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), 9; Mort, *Capital Affairs*, 14-15.

⁶ Frank Mort, ‘The Sexual Geography of the City,’ in Gary Bridge and Sophie Watson (eds.), *A Companion to the City* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 307; Tim Newburn, *Permission and Regulation: Law and Morals in Post-War Britain* (London: Routledge, 1992), 50-1.

⁷ Self, *Prostitution*, 9.

⁸ Jeffrey Weeks, *Sexuality and its Discontents: Meanings, Myths and Modern Sexualities* (London: Routledge, 1985), 215.

matters. This effectively pushed prostitution off the streets and into indoor call-girl work, a state of affairs that Wolfenden accepted as preferable and inevitable.⁹

But the notion that legal and moral considerations could be fully disassociated from one another was problematic; the act of defining an act as criminal or not, depending upon where it takes place, has always been largely a moral decision. Moreover, it is a decision that tells the historian much about the cultural and moral significance of the differing spheres being considered. The Wolfenden Committee's assumption that attempts to solicit in public needed to be punished more severely than those committed in private highlights the extent to which urban spaces were still associated with immorality and disreputability, especially where women were concerned. I argue in this chapter that the increased control over the public sphere recommended by the Wolfenden Committee had clear implications for women's use of public space well into the postwar period.

Though the politics of social and sexual regulation had begun to change after the Second World War, this chapter shows that these changes were often subtle and they did not represent a total break with earlier forms of regulation. In this respect, my interpretation of the continued symbolic significance of the prostitute as a sexual 'other' during the postwar years supports the work of Weeks and Frank Mort, both of whom have urged caution in assessing the supposedly large-scale nature of moral change during this period. For Weeks, it may be legitimate to consider the 1950s as witnessing a climate of "liberalisation," but this "scarcely constituted a

⁹ Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society: The regulation of sexuality since 1800*, Second Edition (London: Longman, 1989), 244; Self, *Prostitution*, 141.

revolution.”¹⁰ More recently, Mort has argued that postwar shifts in sexual and social practices represented “an extremely uneven acceleration of shifts that had a much longer period of incubation.”¹¹ He has suggested that the legal status of prostitution had changed so little since the late-nineteenth century that Victorian sexual politics had a direct influence upon the Wolfenden Committee, one of the twentieth century’s most comprehensive inquiries into prostitution and homosexuality.¹²

Here, I explore the discussions that took place between the Wolfenden Committee and one of their witnesses, Mr. C. C. Martin, Chief Constable of Liverpool. I have selected Martin’s testimony for analysis because of the rich detail he provided concerning official responses to prostitution in Liverpool during the postwar years. His account, as well as the Wolfenden Committee’s response to it, shows how moral purity discourses and policies pursued by groups such as the LVA remained strong during the postwar period. However, the exchanges between Martin and members of the Committee will also show that there was a move towards seeing prostitution as a problem that needed to be dealt with by professionals (such as Women Police) rather than voluntary groups or campaign organisations such as the LVA and the NVA.

In order to consider the continued prevalence of moral purity discourses, I want to explore some of the key themes that emerge from Martin’s conversations with the Committee in order to fully trace the links between their perceptions of prostitution and earlier purity discourses explored throughout this thesis. In the first

¹⁰ Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society*, 254.

¹¹ Mort, *Capital Affairs*, 4.

¹² *Ibid.*

instance, I analyse the official discussion in terms of the importance awarded to locality in perceptions of the prostitute, and her status as a criminal or outcast. It will become clear that whilst London was considered by both the Committee and Liverpool's Chief Constable to have by far the greater problem with prostitution, their discussions were informed by mutual perceptions of Liverpool as a gateway to immorality. What makes this representation of Liverpool so significant is that it correlates with the transient, immoral identity attached to the city by local purists earlier in the century. Both Martin and members of the Committee drew on this local purity language and situated it within the context of a debate about criminality and the law.

The second theme that I examine in Martin's testimony – morality and working-class women – shows the ongoing prevalence in official discourse of older purity ideas about the need for sexually transgressive women to be controlled because of the threat that they were believed to pose to social order. Drawing upon late-nineteenth-century notions that working-class women could not manage their own respectability, and about the corrupting nature of urban space, the Wolfenden Committee's recommendations continued elements of a longer purity tradition. The third theme found in their discussions with Martin – managing moral vulnerability – shows that preventative patrol work, such as that performed by the LVA since 1908, was still considered a relevant strategy for maintaining the decorum of urban working-class women. However, neither the Committee nor Martin focused upon the work of the LVA. Instead, Martin preferred to discuss the usefulness of this preventative work via the example of the, now professionalised, women police in

the city. The women police were no longer an outside organisation, insofar as they had become part of the city's police force in 1948, although their role was understood very differently to that of the male force. As such, Martin's notion that they performed a form of street level social work was indicative of the extent to which the need to protect female morality in public spaces had become part of official understandings of social order. Finally, I argue that the distinction between the public and private in understanding the law's application to prostitution makes clear that Wolfenden continued to be concerned with morality. What the Committee recommended was a system whereby prostitute women were identified as different to all other women citizens on account of their presence in public space and their contravention of traditional ideas about acceptable female sexual conduct.

Prostitution in London and Liverpool

When the Wolfenden Committee met in 1954, it set about the task of hearing evidence from carefully selected witnesses, each with their own claim to talk with authority on the subject of prostitution. The process of questioning these individuals and searching for evidence on a topic as sensitive and at times sensational as prostitution was not always comfortable for members of the Wolfenden team. Discussions were sometimes tense, and Committee members could be reluctant to engage; prostitution was not an easy topic to discuss, even for those who were supposed to have a legitimate expert interest and suitable moral credentials.

Recognising these problems, the chairman of the Committee, John Wolfenden, ensured that these discussions were closed to the public, for the inquiry

met *in camera*. Mort has noted that when the Committee expected to hear evidence from prostitutes, Wolfenden anticipated the “potential entertainment value” of listening to his male colleagues’ conversations with these women.¹³ However, if Wolfenden had thought he would see his Committee squirm in relation to tales of debauchery and corruption spilling out from the docks and onto Liverpool’s streets, then his expectations were largely unfulfilled by the evidence provided by the Chief Constable of Liverpool. Instead, what the committee heard was an account of two Liverpools: one overworld Liverpool, where the streets were free from immoral problems such as prostitution, and one underworld Liverpool, where unsavoury criminal characters met behind the closed doors of notorious drinking establishments and private addresses.

It was on Thursday 31st March 1955 that the committee gathered in the meeting room 101 of the Home Office in Whitehall to hear the evidence from Martin.¹⁴ The members were more relaxed when hearing evidence from regional witnesses such as Martin, as they would have expected the shocking evidence to come from those speaking about the state of prostitution on the streets of London. In fact, Mort has gone as far as to argue that the Committee was so London-centric in its creation, conduct and recommendations that its work represents “a dramatic example of localized policy making,” with observations about the situation in the capital influencing national “proposals for important changes to the criminal law

¹³ *Ibid.*, 185-186. The meeting between the Committee and the prostitute women did not, in the end, take place.

¹⁴ C. C. Martin, Transcript of Evidence, Departmental Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution, 31st March 1955, TNA HO345/13.

and a wide-ranging debate about normal and deviant sexual conduct.”¹⁵

Nevertheless, the ideas about prostitution offered by Martin indicate that moral ideas about the corrupting nature of prostitution and the need to control this trade were in evidence elsewhere in the country. Though Wolfenden and Martin considered London the nadir of vice, such was the level of anxiety about prostitution that their discussions and, ultimately, the Committee’s proposals had far reaching ramifications in the provinces as well.

This sense of the Committee’s focus and expectations was clearly present in the way that John Wolfenden addressed Martin at their meeting. The chairman asked if “generally speaking in the provinces prostitution, in the sense of street walking and soliciting, and so on, is not a serious problem?”¹⁶ By presuming to ask Martin about the situation in the “provinces,” Wolfenden implied that the rest of the country outside London could be considered and addressed as a whole. Martin, too, shared this perception. He told Wolfenden: “I would go further than that, I would say it is almost non-existent in many places in the provinces” and that “it is not a problem outside London.”¹⁷ That this impression was not challenged by the Committee, save for a brief question about whether it applied to all major cities in England and Wales, indicated the extent to which Martin’s regional assessment of prostitution spoke to the Committee’s London-centric examination of the problem.

Moreover, the notion that Liverpool acted as a gateway to an immoral life for women in London, because of the city’s transport connections, was already firmly established by the work of the LVA. Earlier chapters of the thesis have

¹⁵ Mort, *Capital Affairs*, 142.

¹⁶ Wolfenden to Martin, Departmental Committee, p. 6.

¹⁷ Martin, Departmental Committee, p. 6.

shown that many of the girls who the LVA intercepted intended to travel through Liverpool, as part of a longer journey, rather than remain in the city. Often London was the intended destination and this was no different in the postwar years. In 1958 the LVA noted:

London is still the pinnacle of quite a few girls' ambitions as they have a pre-conceived idea that the life there is a dazzling and exciting affair.

Whenever girls arrive without a job to go to and with very little money we try to persuade them to stay in Liverpool as we always have a list of employers needing resident domestic helpers.¹⁸

Both Martin and the Committee appear to have internalised and replicated the LVA's vision of Liverpool as a much quieter cousin to the more spectacularly immoral London. However, their motivations for drawing on this perception of Liverpool were different to those of the LVA. As the quote above shows, the LVA's perception of Liverpool's relationship with London allowed them to convince girls to stay in Liverpool and therefore under their watchful eye. For Martin, his understanding meant that he could claim success in his field. Addressing the Committee as the man responsible for policing in the city, it is unsurprising that Martin was keen to present Liverpool's streets as firmly under his control. From the moment Martin began to address the Wolfenden Committee, he emphasised that prostitution in the sense of "street walking" was "not a problem" in Liverpool, with

¹⁸ LVA Annual Report 1958, Unpublished, M326 VIG/3 Box 2.

only five convictions for this offence in the previous year (i.e. 1954).¹⁹ Martin even suggested that the city's docks were free from this type of prostitution "nowadays," noting that the prostitutes who did frequent this area could be characterised more as "amateurs...ready to get hold of a sailor and take him home."²⁰

None of this meant that the LVA or indeed Martin and the Wolfenden Committee considered Liverpool to be a quiet backwater. Just as the LVA associated transience with the potential for immoral transgression, so too did Martin and the Wolfenden Committee. Liverpool's status as a port town gave rise to discussions about the criminal culture of the city and the place of the prostitute in this world. Martin told the inquiry about more covert, that is to say indoor, forms of sexual trading in Liverpool and about the criminal men who surrounded women who sold themselves in this way. He explained that the city was home to "a good deal of brothel keeping," as well as a "quite good deal of living on the earnings of prostitution" and much of it by "coloured men."²¹ Despite his assurances to the Committee about the limited nature of street prostitution, Martin did not shy away from presenting his official audience with a picture of Liverpool as home to an underworld of "shebeens" and brothels, with seafarers inexorably "attracted to these places" in search of a good time.²² These hidden prostitutes were pushed together with other criminal underworld characters in Martin's evidence. He suggested that prostitutes worked "in league" with men, often pimps, to commit robberies and he

¹⁹ Martin, Departmental Committee, p. 1.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2. (Martin defined a shebeen as "a place where intoxicating liquor is sold without a license.")

observed that prostitutes had been known to associate with murderers.²³ Although he did not claim to have encountered any prostitutes who had themselves committed crimes as serious as murder, Martin's evidence again replicated the long-standing idea that the prostitute was located within the world of serious urban criminality.

This image of Liverpool as an underworld playground actually says as much about the cultural identity of the prostitute as it does the reputation of Liverpool itself. The prostitute was not simply identified as a social nuisance or petty criminal, rather she was imagined as a signifier of more widespread social disorder and unrest. As such, there were echoes of the late-nineteenth-century purity movement in this aspect of Martin's testimony. As Lucy Bland has noted, the prostitute came to symbolise urban danger and disorder, a perception that propelled prostitution towards the top of the Victorian purity movement's agenda.²⁴ By identifying the prostitute as part of an illegitimate social residuum, Martin defined the prostitute as a societal problem, just as the earlier social purity movement had done. This ongoing perception of street women was significant because it allowed the Wolfenden Committee to justify their overall conclusion that the law did indeed have a part to play in controlling sexual relations. At the same time, the underworld depiction of the prostitute employed by Martin meant that his discussion with the Committee soon turned to the issues of class and the urban environment. Prostitution was explored as symptomatic of the poorest areas in Liverpool, and thus, for Martin, with some of the poorest people in the city.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

²⁴ Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast: Feminism, Sex and Morality* (London: Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 2001), 98.

Morality and Working-Class Women

The notion that prostitution in Liverpool was part of a criminal underworld fed directly into pre-existing anxieties about the immoral dangers to be found in urban spaces. For figures like the Chief Constable of Liverpool, the Wolfenden Committee and, before them, purists in the LVA, Liverpool's immoral underworld represented a threat to the social order of the city. This underworld informed their ideas about the moral danger posed by the prostitute and specifically her potential to corrupt the morals not only of other women but also other *places*. This meant that although the notion of an underworld was a discursive device, its narrative focus centred on place as much as it did character. The notion of a Liverpoolian underworld was applied to the real, material geography of the city, with particular emphasis on areas frequented by the working class. Consequently, in their understandings class and gender were both played out on the streets of Liverpool, with the effect that some areas were associated with criminality and transgression much more than others.

When one member of the Wolfenden Committee, Mrs Cohen, Vice president of the Scottish Association of Girls' Clubs, asked Martin if Liverpool's prostitutes could be characterised as "high grade" or "low grade," she and the Chief Constable entered into a discussion about the relationship between a prostitute's home-town and her character.²⁵ Implicit in this exchange was the assumption that class and character were interchangeable attributes, with an individual's geographical origins acting as a measure of both. Martin explained: "They are tough, the hardcore of

²⁵ Mrs. Cohen to Martin, Departmental Committee, p. 10.

prostitutes are tough types. They are Liverpoolians mainly.”²⁶ He suggested that they were girls from “squalid districts.”²⁷ Yet it was not only Liverpool’s “squalid districts” that were believed to have created these women. Martin noted that some of the “tough types” “migrated to Liverpool” from elsewhere.²⁸ Other “squalid districts” in other parts of the north-west region were similarly assumed to foster similar links between environmental poverty and immorality. For example, Mrs. Cohen readily assumed that the sorts of prostitutes associated with wider crime in Liverpool came in from areas in Lancashire, associated with lower-class employment.²⁹ The idea that prostitutes were working-class girls from especially rough neighbourhoods was an argument that was easy to accept and propagate for the Chief Constable and members of the Committee alike. Since the nineteenth century, the middle and upper classes had used moral notions about the behaviour of the working class in order to avoid addressing issues of material inequality.³⁰ Working-class girls, whether they were native to the city of Liverpool or newcomers, were therefore generally perceived by the Committee to lack the appropriate moral fibre required to avoid the temptation of the streets.³¹

As this thesis has already shown, this impression of working-class women had been central to the formation of the LVA nearly fifty years earlier. At the local level, the organisation’s reluctance to let young working-class women manage their

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Cohen to Martin, Departmental Committee, p. 10.

³⁰ Beverley Skeggs, *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable* (London: Sage, 1997), 43, 46.

³¹ For more on Victorian middle-class anxieties about working-class women’s sexuality and the threat that it was perceived to pose to social order see Judith Walkowitz, ‘The Politics of Prostitution,’ in Stevi Jackson and Sue Scott (eds.), *Feminism and Sexuality: A Reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 289; Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, 97-8.

own behaviour was evident in their interactions with them. In 1938, for example, the LVA reported sending a sixteen-year-old girl home to her grandmother after finding her travelling in the company of a man “evidently double her age.”³² The Association highlighted this case under the headline “SAVED FROM TEMPTATION,” indicating they thought the girl had been compromised through her own poor judgement.³³ Moreover, this lack of confidence in young, working-class women’s ability to manage their own morality survived well into the 1960s. In 1968 the Lord Bishop of Liverpool warned at the LVA’s annual meeting that “permissive morality does not create personal happiness for those who indulge and young people are now expected to take important decisions although lacking knowledge and experience.”³⁴ Respectability was still considered to be the preserve of the well to do and a virtue that the working class could only achieve by accepting guidance. The enduring nature of this idea speaks to the extent to which debates about prostitution law remained entangled with broader ideological assumptions about the need to socially control the sexuality of all women, and working-class women in particular. That is not to say that all working-class class women were viewed as potential prostitutes, but they were all considered morally vulnerable. Such vulnerability meant that they might be dragged into vice by existing prostitutes or their male associates, though the bigger concern was the potential for a casually promiscuous, working-class girl to spiral into one form of prostitution or another.

³² LVA Annual Report 1938-1939, Unpublished, M326 VIG/3 Box 2, p. 9.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ LVA Annual Report 1968, Unpublished, M326 VIG/3 Box 2.

Managing Moral Vulnerability

In his discussion of the class of women who worked as prostitutes, Martin complained about the lack of control that local officials had over many of the women who they encountered:

...there are so many young girls who either come from the city or have come into the city and are being led into this life of prostitution and who might be dealt with by women police, but they have no authority to do anything about it if they are 17 or more.³⁵

Martin believed that the women police could be used effectively to achieve moral order in certain neighbourhoods. He informed the Committee there was already a “good deal” of women police patrolling “those streets in Liverpool...where there is likely to be street walking.”³⁶ According to the Chief Constable this measure had kept prostitutes “off the street,” although it did tend to encourage brothels.³⁷ Nevertheless, for Martin, the use of women police to manage moral order on the streets of Liverpool was to be encouraged. When questioned about this strategy by Committee member and Conservative M.P. Sir Hugh Linstead, the Chief Constable explained that Liverpool had used women police patrols on a voluntary basis until 1948, when they became part of the police force.³⁸ The increasing number of

³⁵ Martin, Departmental Committee, p. 28.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.* For more on women’s integration into the local police see Gaynor Diane Williams, ‘Women in Public Life in Liverpool Between the Wars,’ Unpublished Thesis: University of Liverpool (2000), p. 119.

women police in the local force from this point onwards was explained by Martin's assertion: "We find them invaluable; I do not know what we would do without them."³⁹ The Chief Constable went on to describe the "tremendous amount of good work" done by these officers with regards to prostitution and "social work in relation with girls and youngsters."⁴⁰ This statement indicated that women police were regarded by Martin as useful for dealing with vulnerable communities rather than criminals.

Women members of the police force in Liverpool endorsed and continued the moral work and street patrolling done by the voluntary women police earlier in the century. Martin's testimony suggested that whilst the women police achieved their goal of professionalisation, this did not change the focus of their work or the preventative nature of their street patrols. What now differentiated them from purity campaigners in the LVA was that they were recognised by officials such as Martin and the Wolfenden Committee. Their ability to maintain the respectability of young working-class women, and in turn the city streets, was now fully sanctioned. One key way in which they were required to do this was to prevent vulnerable women from being tempted into casual forms of prostitution.

Early twentieth-century purists and officials such as police chiefs and politicians were aware that it was not always easy to identify who was a prostitute, or precisely what constituted an act of prostitution. Moral panic about young girls experiencing 'khaki fever' during the Great War and the rise of a consumerist youth culture during the interwar years all raised questions about the validity of the

³⁹ Martin, Departmental Committee, p. 22.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

distinction between promiscuity and prostitution.⁴¹ These anxieties were still in evidence during the postwar period. The Chief Constable told the Committee that Liverpool did have “amateur” prostitutes, “the good-time girls who come in because of the American troops.”⁴² For Martin they were “not of the same type as the day to day prostitute,” but in their pursuit of these foreign men they led what he termed “a prostitute’s life.”⁴³

Liverpool’s status as a port heightened the sense of danger that surrounded the local amateurs. In Committee, Mrs. Cohen asked whether such women would gather at the dock when a Navy ship was in the port. The Chief Constable responded by saying that a “tremendous number of local girls” would “crowd round the dock gates, or as near as they [could] to the dock gates” when a domestic or foreign naval detachment arrived.⁴⁴ He claimed that when the port was particularly busy with “a sort of invasion of sailors in the town,” then there were consequently “more women of this type knocking about.”⁴⁵ The girls were not always from Liverpool either. In one instance Martin appeared to joke that they came from Manchester, a nod to the rivalry between the two provincial cities, before suggesting some other possibilities. He noted that “quite a few girls” had arrived “from places as far off as Leeds and Newcastle,” whereupon they had “begun a life of prostitution” in Liverpool.⁴⁶ Despite claiming that prostitution was not a problem in

⁴¹ Philippa Levine, “‘Walking the Streets in a Way no Decent Woman Should’: Women Police in World War I,” *Journal of Modern History*, 66 (1994): 43; Adrian Bingham, “‘An Era of Domesticity’? Histories of Women and Gender in Interwar Britain,” *Cultural and Social History*, 1, 2 (2004): 227-228.

⁴² Martin, Departmental Committee, p. 10.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

Liverpool, then, the Chief Constable's evidence implied that the transient nature of port life could have a negative influence upon the sexual morality of young women. Moreover, that the Committee thought to question him about the relationship between Liverpool's seafarers and amateurs also indicated that this association was so commonplace that it was made by the local police as well as by purity campaigners. Traditional purity fears that young girls might be corrupted by vice through amateur prostitution were accepted by the Wolfenden Committee. John Wolfenden believed that it was relevant to punish solicitation in public rather than in private precisely because of the corrupting potential of visible forms of vice. Whilst Wolfenden argued that sexual controls on the private sphere should be lessened, the idea that controls over the public sphere needed to be tightened came from traditional ideas that prostitution on the streets had the potential to corrupt other women too.

Public versus Private

When talking to Liverpool's Chief Constable, Wolfenden noted that other witnesses had suggested to the Committee that the toleration of brothels might "remove a large amount of the public offence to the indecency which goes on in London."⁴⁷ It was an observation born out of Wolfenden's personal belief that the influence of the professional prostitute upon promiscuous girls and amateurs was so great that it would be less if she worked behind closed doors, instead of on the streets in full view. The theory was that if the prostitute worked away from the public then she was less likely to set a bad example to other women or to stir up temptation in men

⁴⁷ Wolfenden to Martin, Departmental Committee, p. 7.

by being so obviously available.⁴⁸ When Martin responded by cautioning that brothel-keeping could “still be offensive,” as it “spreads very rapidly, especially in the coloured quarter,” other members of the Committee seemed keen to support Wolfenden’s perception of the problem.⁴⁹ In particular, Mr Wells, a barrister and Labour M.P., reluctant to surrender the Committee’s public/private scale of offensiveness asked Martin “Would you agree...about the offensiveness, that street walking must be offensive but a brothel may be?”⁵⁰ Martin agreed, with the proviso that this depended upon the brothel not being set up in a place where it might ruin the good reputation of an area.⁵¹

For both Martin and the Committee, then, the real social problems that emerged from their study of prostitution were those that impinged upon public life, such as moral decline amongst local populations and the damage prostitution could do to the reputation of an area. By arguing for greater punishments for solicitation, the Committee made it clear that controls over the private sphere were to be relaxed, whilst tighter regulation was to be placed around displays of immorality in public spaces. This meant that whilst visible forms of prostitution declined the trade adapted and expanded into call-girl networks and other covert forms of working.⁵² Thus the Wolfenden Committee upheld the long-standing tendency towards coding female sexuality within the public sphere as deviant.⁵³

⁴⁸ Self, *Prostitution, Women and Misuse of the Law*, 141.

⁴⁹ Martin, Departmental Committee, p. 7.

⁵⁰ Wells to Martin, Departmental Committee, p. 8.

⁵¹ Martin, Departmental Committee, p. 8.

⁵² Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society*, 244.

⁵³ See Carol Smart, *Law, Crime and Sexuality: Essays in Feminism* (London: Sage, 1995), 67.

The recommendations of the Wolfenden Committee exhibited the same understanding about the moral dangers of public space as the LVA had held for the previous half century. Believing that the most useful way of approaching the problem was to attempt to draw a line between prostitution as a moral offence and a criminal offence, the Committee essentially deployed the Victorian ideology of 'separate spheres' in order to define the law's interest in prostitution.⁵⁴ With the Wolfenden Committee claiming to be disinterested in the private conduct of citizens, the price of a relaxation of controls over the private sphere was greater control over the public domain.⁵⁵ Wolfenden defined the nature of the prostitute's offence in terms of her contravention of public order and her trade exposing other citizens to immorality.⁵⁶ What the Wolfenden Committee proposed to control was, in effect, the prostitute's use of public space and, in so doing, they defined her as different to other citizens and other women. She required special attention and particular laws to monitor her behaviour. In this respect Wolfenden took up a purity idea that went further back than the creation of the LVA, to the ideas of late-nineteenth-century, social purity feminists.

For these earlier purists, the prostitute – and the immoral code that her activities were supposedly symptomatic of – required the intervention of the legal system. Questions about the liberty of women and the extent to which the state could intervene into their sexual practices were deflected by the idea that prostitutes

⁵⁴ For more on Victorian gender codes and the separation of public and private see Catherine Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History* (Cambridge: Polity, 1992), Chapter Three and 153-4.

⁵⁵ Weeks, *Sexuality and its Discontents*, 215. See also Rosie Campbell and Maggie O'Neill, *Sex Work Now* (Cullompton: Willan, 2006), xix.

⁵⁶ Teela Sanders, *Sex Work: Risky Business* (Cullompton: Willan, 2005), 94.

were not ordinary women and so did not require or deserve the same consideration. Although purity feminists argued that they wanted to dispose of the opposition between respectable and disreputable women, believing that the distinction took attention away from male sexuality as the subject of critique, their proclaimed opposition to this moral duality was not easily reconciled with the wider political language of the movement.⁵⁷ Social purity's emphasis on chastity and women's moral superiority over men reflected a very middle-class understanding of female respectability, and it was this version of femininity that they supported. Moreover, by putting forward an argument for women's legitimacy in the public sphere based on their social and *sexual* decency, the purity movement impacted negatively upon the liberties of those women who contravened this ideology. The politics of prostitution was constructed by some purists as distinct from women's politics more broadly, leaving the purity movement unable to rationalise the liberties of prostitute women with those of women in general. That the Wolfenden Committee had not moved on from these nineteenth-century purity ideas was evident in their distinction between the public and private sphere. Indeed, the Committee even went as far as to recommend that the legal category of the common prostitute remain in place, further cementing the idea that she was different from other citizens in her relationship to public space.

The only issue with indoor prostitution that appears to have given John Wolfenden any pause for thought was not one of liberty or prejudice but of policing. He sought reassurance from Martin about whether:

⁵⁷ Frank Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities: Medico-Moral Politics in England since 1830*, Second Edition (London: Routledge, 2000), 110-111.

any serious attempt to drive [prostitutes] off the streets would perhaps...make the work of the police more difficult...that it would not be as easy for the police to know what was going on and know who was about...if the prostitutes were hidden away either in brothels or in one-girl flats on a call girl system.⁵⁸

Reassuringly for Wolfenden, Martin did not agree with this proposition, arguing that the prostitutes in Liverpool “voluntarily” talked to the police, with one officer he knew claiming a call girl system would never exist in Liverpool, as the street girl would inform the police about it.⁵⁹ As a result, the Committee was satisfied that the prostitute’s offensiveness could be qualified according to whether she plied her trade in public or private. By drawing a distinction between public and private and by focusing their proposals for legislative control on the former sphere, the Committee essentially aimed to police the visibility of prostitution. Their recommendations coded the streets as spaces where displays of sexual transgression by women were given special, criminal status.

What is most significant about the overlap between the ideas of national officials on the Wolfenden Committee and local officials such as Martin with those of earlier purists is the fact that they themselves do not appear to have noticed the similarities. Mort has recently argued that the Wolfenden Committee “privileged the

⁵⁸ Wolfenden to Martin, Departmental Committee, p. 10.

⁵⁹ Martin, Departmental Committee, p. 11.

expert witness over the moral campaigner.”⁶⁰ He has argued that the postwar period saw a “generation of state-orientated professionals” move decisively away from “the ‘amateurish’ and ‘unscientific’ character of the purity associations.”⁶¹ Amongst some members of the Wolfenden Committee there was a tendency to write-off purists as part of a “lunatic fringe” of campaigners.⁶² The supposed expertise of purity groups was called into question by officials who now wanted to bring their own professional politics and career experience to the debate about how to handle prostitution.

I argue that the proposals of the Wolfenden Committee on prostitution, which were enacted in the 1959 Street Offences Act, effectively took over the discourses, ideas and in some cases strategies of earlier purists. Certainly, the LVA continued in their efforts to keep Liverpool’s streets free from immorality during the postwar years. Their practice of patrolling the docks and stations in an effort to intercept vulnerable female newcomers to Liverpool remained a central part of their work. Not only did they continue to articulate the same fears about the moral vulnerability of the young, the poor, the Irish and the migrant, but the LVA still believed that their surveillance activities and employment connections were important tools in the maintenance of proper forms of female morality. However, the organisation did begin to decline during these years. By the mid-1960s, the LVA had to contend with the fact that social and cultural conditions in Liverpool had begun to change. Unlike during the interwar period, the city was able to capitalise on increased postwar employment and affluence during the 1950s and 1960s to

⁶⁰ Mort, *Capital Affairs*, 149.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*, 147.

become a “widely acknowledged centre of popular culture.”⁶³ This change in perceptions of Liverpool brought with it a new challenge for the LVA. They found girls travelling to Liverpool in search of the glamour of Merseybeat and The Beatles and, had the organisation had any sustained power or influence, it would have been expected that their work load would in fact have grown at this time.⁶⁴ Instead, the opposite was true. This chapter has shown that one of the main reasons for this was because significant elements of the purity discourses endorsed by the LVA had been incorporated into official strategies of regulation at the levels of the national and local state.

Conclusion

The Wolfenden Committee was the second comprehensive government investigation into the law on prostitution in only three decades. The Committee set out to offer a new, secular approach to the problem of addressing prostitution, and this necessitated moving away from purity campaigns which were, in their view, too wedded to moral discourses over and above a more objective debate about the role of law in society.⁶⁵ However, what the Wolfenden Committee set out to achieve and what they actually enacted as policy were quite different. It has been argued throughout this chapter that the debates that the Wolfenden Committee and officials

⁶³ Paul Du Noyer, *Liverpool Wondrous Place: Music from the Cavern to the Coral* (London: Virgin Books, 2004), 14; Jon Murden, ‘“City of Change and Challenge”: Liverpool since 1945,’ in John Belchem (ed.), *Liverpool 800: Culture, Character and History* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006), 417.

⁶⁴ LVA Annual Report 1963, Unpublished, LRO M326 VIG/3 Box 2; LVA Annual Report 1964, LRO Unpublished, M326 VIG/3 Box 2. Philip Norman has argued that during the 1960s Liverpool became especially fashionable, with girls in the city developing their own sense of style. See Philip Norman, *Shout: The True Story of the Beatles* (London: Pan Books, 2003), 183.

⁶⁵ Weeks, *Sexuality and its Discontents*, 29.

like Chief Constable Martin engaged in, as well as their understanding of female sexuality, had much in common with the purity tradition. That the Committee was ultimately unable to maintain its supposed liberal objectivity is clear from the claim made in their final report that prostitution was “an evil of which any society which claims to be civilised should seek to rid itself.”⁶⁶ Morality, and specifically the discourses of moral purity, permeated the Wolfenden Committee’s thinking.

Although the Committee was reluctant to associate itself with the purity movement, it was nevertheless influenced by the language and ideology of campaigners. I would even argue that the recommendations of the Committee and their implementation in the Street Offences Act 1959 left the purity movement with little room for argument where prostitution and the law were concerned. In the postwar years government officials, as represented nationally by the Wolfenden Committee and locally by Martin, had taken up the purity mantle. Crucially, however, they did this in ways that were more nuanced than the earlier purity campaigners. The Committee attempted to draw a distinction between public and private because they upheld the legitimacy of the law as a force for dealing with the prostitute. That is to say, the Committee created a pragmatic solution to the issue of solicitation whereby the law could intervene in the public but not the private lives of citizens. The upshot of this was that while prostitutes were pushed indoors and the old purity groups such as the LVA were rendered old-fashioned, the notion that female disreputability was synonymous with urban space was still upheld, and the

⁶⁶ Report of the Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution, Cmnd, 247 (London: HMSO, 1957) para. 226.

prostitute continued to be used as a warning about the dangers of female immorality.

Conclusion

This thesis has shown how the relationship between young women and urban space in early- to mid-twentieth-century Liverpool was heavily shaped by moral debates about respectable femininity and the threat of prostitution. Nationally significant anxieties about the need to protect women from the corrupting influence of prostitutes and the moral dangers of urban lifestyles for young working-class women informed both official and non-official methods of social regulation. The perceived fragility of the distinction between the respectable female and the prostitute produced a highly gendered understanding of urban space in this port city. However, these policies of control were not new to the twentieth century.

The thesis has argued that there were considerable continuities between traditional, Victorian purity responses to prostitution and those influencing the interwar and even postwar years. Existing ideas about the prostitute as other – as a moral danger – as the antithesis of the respectable, domesticated woman of the private sphere persisted. The Victorian notion that working-class women in particular required moral guidance within the public sphere continued to inform official understandings of prostitution, urban space and female sexual morality well into the twentieth century. But changes in women's lifestyles meant that these ideas were perceived to be under threat. By the interwar years debates about the efficacy of the solicitation laws revolved around the disjuncture between dominant moral codes of traditional femininity and changing social conditions, especially women's increased use of public space in Liverpool and other big cities.

The laws governing the prostitute and the debates that engaged high profile politicians and law enforcers during the course of the Macmillan Committee revealed that urban space was still believed to be inimical to traditional notions of respectable femininity. I have argued that interwar debates about the workings of the solicitation laws centred on the continuing need to maintain clear distinctions between ordinary women and prostitutes, as well as on concerns that young women's use of public space would threaten their moral decorum if the visibility of prostitution was not kept in check. I have shown that amongst the police and politicians in particular there was significant concern about the fact that the police were finding it increasingly difficult to differentiate between ordinary women and street women, based on signifiers such as dress, deportment and women's proximity to certain areas in a city. Although a drop in the number of arrests for solicitation in Liverpool during the 1920s suggests that the police were not significantly influenced by the local vigilance association's anxieties about white slavery, the evidence presented here indicates that local officials nevertheless viewed prostitution in very similar moral and ethical terms to local purist campaigns.

The Macmillan Committee debates clearly illustrate that, despite their efforts to treat prostitution as a legal rather than a moral issue, politicians and law makers understood and consequently legislated against the prostitute as a social and cultural other. I have argued that the Macmillan Committee's extended discussions about the usefulness of the legal category of the common prostitute profiled a dual set of moral arguments. On the one hand, it was suggested that the term legitimated the prostitute's trade by giving such women an official identity and, on the other hand,

it was argued that this legal category protected ordinary women by ensuring that the police targeted only common prostitutes wandering in public and not all women.

These moral concerns were also in evidence at street level, where social purists instituted their own strategies of moral surveillance, such as local patrolling and entering into correspondence with young girls' guardians and employers. By examining the work of the Liverpool Vigilance Association, I have shown how official debates existed in a reciprocal relationship with the concerns of the purity movement, with local campaigners demonstrating more nuanced versions of the broader national obsessions with prostitution and female sexual morality. In Liverpool, the LVA perpetuated the notion that young women could be morally corrupted by travelling through the city unchaperoned. Replicating moral guidance strategies instituted by the Victorian purity movement, the LVA advocated using preventative work in an effort to maintain the morality of women on Liverpool's streets. The LVA identified themselves as moral 'experts' and set about intercepting women travelling into the city, especially via key entry points such as the port and the main train station. I have argued that the LVA's efforts to investigate women's employment intentions and their efforts to maintain contact with purity organisations around the country meant that they in fact attempted to exert their authority over a wide range of women. Indeed, in their day-to-day work, the LVA actually had very little to do with the city's prostitutes, despite having been set up to combat white slavery. My examination of the Association's port and station case studies highlights that the LVA was not a rescue organisation. Once a woman was perceived to have embarked on an immoral lifestyle the LVA's main concern was to

keep other girls safe from her corrupting influence rather than to help her.

Consequently, this thesis has demonstrated that the preventative strategies employed by local purists meant that they could claim to have a legitimate interest in the lives of women with no obvious connections to prostitution.

The LVA concentrated its interests on particular groups of women who were perceived to be most at risk of moral corruption. Reflecting earlier purity anxieties about the ability of working-class women to manage their own morality, the Association revealed particular concern about these women. The LVA's interest in providing local employment was always motivated by the belief that women who needed to work outside the home required extra moral guidance. The organisation believed that working-class women needed to be placed in respectable jobs such as domestic service in order to prevent them from turning to vice out of economic necessity. At the same time, there was also a fear that these women were simply too naive to avoid being exploited by the unscrupulous characters who frequented the city's urban spaces. Concentrating on young working-class women in particular, local purists did not trust these young women to travel for work or to identify suitable jobs without their guidance. Their strategy indicates that well into the twentieth century, the gendering of public space and the regulation of women's movements though the city were heavily informed by discourses of class and female vulnerability. Moreover, the examination of the LVA's approach to employment that is offered in the thesis highlights the extent to which mid-twentieth-century social purists continued to rely upon domestic service as a means for keeping women of low status 'respectable.' For women who needed to work outside the

home, it was argued that domestic service offered the opportunity to earn money whilst remaining within the relative moral safety of this extended definition of the private sphere.

Indeed, the LVA was especially concerned about women's engagement with the public sphere. The LVA's targeting of young, Irish immigrant women illustrates the extent to which discourses of vulnerability and the corrupting nature of urban space were central to the LVA's self-appointed moral authority. Drawing on the resources of Victorian purists about the dangers of the city and Irish purity ideas about the innocence of Irish women, the LVA constructed a sense of the Irish girl as a naive, rural innocent who lacked the appropriate social and cultural experience required to survive in Liverpool's urban spaces. At the same time, local purists' treatment of Irish women clearly demonstrates how wider fears about female morality were locally nuanced. Certainly, the notion that Irish girls required moral surveillance, either because of their low social status or their assumed innocence, was not particular to Liverpool. But the analysis that I offer here indicates that the disproportionate amount of attention that the LVA devoted to Irish women was a distinctive feature of the local purity movement. Liverpool's role as a port meant that transience was a key feature in the LVA's understanding of urban moral danger. The Irish girl was therefore a compelling character for local purists because she was thought to typify the moral dangers of life on Liverpool's streets.

In the final part of the thesis, I have shown that late-nineteenth-century ideas about the need to protect women from corruption and the dangers of urban space were still being incorporated into official and unofficial responses to prostitution

after 1945. The LVA remained active after the Second World War and, once again, concerns about how to regulate the prostitute resulted in the establishment of a government committee. The proceedings of the Wolfenden Committee highlighted the extent to which earlier purity ideas about the moral dangers of prostitution had been incorporated into official thinking. The Wolfenden Committee represented yet another attempt to find a way to regulate the prostitute without entering into moral debates about this form of commercialised sex. Once again, it was an attempt that failed, and moral perceptions of the prostitute as other remained paramount in this committee's approach to the problem of street solicitation. I have shown that by arguing for the regulation of the prostitute based on distinctions between public and private, the Wolfenden Committee and the subsequent Street Offences Act 1959, which implemented the Committee's recommendations, incorporated policies derived from the purity movement. This has been significant because the Wolfenden Committee has been conventionally understood to mark a clean break with Victorian policies of sexual regulation.¹

This thesis argues that historians cannot interpret the decline of the purity movement in the postwar period simply as evidence that their ideas were now outdated and outmoded. To be sure, the purity movement did lose momentum during these years, insofar as the organisation itself began to partly fragment. The organisation's treasurer, Mr. R. W. Jones, admitted, whilst canvassing for funding, that the LVA was "urgently in need of new capital."² He explained that the

¹ See John Wolfenden, *Turning Points: The Memoirs of Lord Wolfenden* (London: The Bodley Head, 1976); Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800*, Second Edition (London: Longman, 1989), 239, 242-244.

² Letter by R.W. Jones to Undisclosed Recipient, N.D. (c. mid-1950s), LRO 326 VIG/7-2.

Association did not “undertake any advertising or appeals and for that reason our work is not well known.”³ With the profile of the organisation relatively low, it appears that the LVA struggled to adapt to local cultural changes with regards to youth culture, the interest that the Merseybeat phenomenon brought to the city and the decline in Liverpool’s role as a port. From the late 1960s onwards the records of the LVA become less substantial. By the mid-1970s the organisation no longer existed, having been incorporated into the Liverpool Personal Service Society. The PSS had been in existence since 1919 and one of its founders was the MP and social campaigner Eleanor Rathbone.⁴ The survival of organisations such as the PSS over the LVA was indicative of the fact that more professionalised, social-work inspired ideas about the need to alleviate poverty had replaced the activities of social purists. Where local efforts to tackle prostitution were concerned, there is evidence that by the late 1960s and early 70s, the Liverpool Corporation was working with neighbourhood action groups and housing associations in a bid to regenerate some of the poorer areas of the city; it was thought that such measures would reduce social problems such as prostitution and kerb-crawling.⁵ The work of the LVA was consequently replaced by the local consultations, reports and investigations of civic leaders, town planners and residents.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ For more on the work of Eleanor Rathbone see Susan Pedersen, *Eleanor Rathbone and the Politics of Conscience* (Yale University Press, 2004), 181.

⁵ See the archives of the Shelter Neighbourhood Action Project (SNAP), established in 1970s, LUAD/396/52. SNAP was an Association representing residents, the Liverpool Corporation, Housing Associations and Shelter. It was set up in order to allow residents of the Liverpool 8 area to work with the Local Authority on improving environmental conditions there. The relationship between these types of local government projects and the management of prostitution from the 1970s onwards requires further study.

At the national level, the Wolfenden Committee and the Street Offences Act 1959 took over purity movement's policy of keeping England's streets morally respectable by implementing preventative policies of social control. I have demonstrated that the legal philosophy underpinning the 1959 Act was significantly influenced by the ideas of the purity campaigners dating back to the Victorian era. By targeting the common prostitute in law, the postwar state reiterated the message that the prostitute was not like other women. By making female sexuality visible, the prostitute's sexual transgressiveness was policed as criminal. Wolfenden's belief that being a 'public' woman in this way required regulation was informed by persisting understandings about respectable femininity being confined to the private sphere.

This has important implications for contemporary policies relating to prostitution. Sophie Day has noted that the "Wolfenden architecture still characterises prostitution control in the UK."⁶ Specifically, she has argued that the Street Offences Act 1959 "provides a clear example of the contradictions and peculiarities of the language of public and private that is applied to sex workers today."⁷ By being forced to work in private, prostitutes find that their employment cannot be conducted as a public matter; instead their work must replicate sexual relations within the private sphere.⁸ Criminologist Teela Sanders has emphasised that contemporary policies have created the "anti-sexual" city, with appropriate

⁶ Sophie Day, *On the Game: Women and Sex Work* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 93.

⁷ *Ibid.* 7

⁸ *Ibid.* 7-8.

moral conduct being enforced on the streets.⁹ Sanders has suggested that New Labour's 2004 'Paying the Price' consultation was the "first attempt since the 1950s" to examine the regulation of prostitution.¹⁰ Yet their report did not significantly change understandings about the need to regulate sex workers. As with debates in the early- and mid-twentieth century, the focus of this consultation was once again on street-based prostitution, ignoring other forms of sex work.¹¹ The Home Office's 2006 'Coordinated Prostitution Strategy,' which followed the consultation, rejected ideas about decriminalisation, toleration or licensing, supporting instead the use of measures such as Anti Social Behaviour Orders to punish solicitation.¹²

Recent official approaches to prostitution have, therefore, continued to define the prostitute as a criminal who represents a threat to social order and the well-being of local communities. My historical examination of the relationship between official and unofficial forms of regulation offered in this thesis demonstrates that contemporary understandings of the problem have a very extensive genealogy indeed. I have highlighted the extent to which cultural anxieties and dominant moral codes about female respectability have shaped policy and practice throughout the twentieth century. Prostitution regulation has not just been about the removal of prostitutes from public view; it has also been about protecting the civility of the streets from the moral threat of disreputable female conduct. Whilst purity organisations no longer appear to have a place in today's moral

⁹ Teela Sanders, 'Controlling the "Anti-Sexual" City: Sexual Citizenship and the Disciplining of Female Street Workers,' *Criminology and Criminal Justice*, 9, 4 (2009): 507-525.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 511.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.* 512.

economy, their ideas about prostitution and women's use of public space continue to resonate in contemporary policy. Victorianism has a legacy which is by no means concluded.

Appendices

Appendix 1
Nationalities of the ‘Young Women’ that the LVA helped between 1916 and 1927 (Source: LVA Annual Reports, LRO M326 VIG/3 Box 2)

| | 1916 | 1917-18 | 1919-20 | 1922-23 | 1923-24 | 1925-26 | 1926-27 |
|----------------------|------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| African | | | | | | | 1 |
| American | 4 | 10 | 4 | 5 | 7 | 13 | 22 |
| Argentine | | | | | | | |
| Armenian | 4 | | 4 | | 1 | | |
| Australian | | 1 | 1 | | | 1 | |
| Austrian | | | | | | | |
| Belgian | 7 | 8 | 11 | | | | |
| Brazilian | | 1 | | | | | |
| British West African | | | | | | | |
| Canadian | 1 | 4 | 21 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 5 |
| Danish | | 7 | 1 | | | | |
| Dutch | | 1 | 1 | | | 1 | |
| English | 55 | 102 | 132 | 114 | 202 | 154 | 177 |
| Estonian | | | | | | | |
| Eurasian | | | | | | 1 | |
| Finnish | | | | | | | |
| Flemish | | | | | | | |
| French | 6 | 2 | 11 | 1 | 2 | 2 | |
| German | 1 | 1 | | | 3 | 3 | |
| German-Pole | | | | | | | 1 |
| Greek | | | | | | | 1 |
| Hungarian | | | | | | | |

| | 1916 | 1917-18 | 1919-20 | 1922-23 | 1923-24 | 1925-26 | 1926-27 |
|--------------|------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Icelander | | | | | | 2 | |
| Indian | | 1 | | | | | |
| Irish | 855 | 953 | 368 | 326 | 435 | 513 | 517 |
| Italian | | | | | 1 | 3 | |
| Jamaican | | | | 4 | | | |
| Japanese | | | | 1 | | | |
| Manx | 301 | 4 | 2 | | | 1 | 1 |
| Norwegian | | 2 | | 2 | | 3 | |
| Peruvian | | | | | | | 1 |
| Polish | | | | 1 | 1 | | |
| Portuguese | | | 1 | 3 | | | |
| Russian | 13 | 6 | 1 | | | | 3 |
| Russian-Pole | 1 | | | | | | |
| Scandinavian | | | | | 1 | | |
| Scottish | 26 | 24 | 17 | 39 | 20 | 21 | 22 |
| Spanish | 1 | 1 | | | 2 | 1 | |
| Swedish | | 1 | | | | | 3 |
| Swiss | | | | 1 | 2 | | |
| Welsh | 4 | 13 | 6 | 6 | 27 | 12 | 11 |
| West Indian | 1 | 1 | | | | | |

Appendix 2
Nationalities of the ‘Young Women’ that the LVA helped between 1927 and 1937 (Source: LVA Annual Reports, LRO M326 VIG/3 Box 2)

| | 1927-28 | 1928-29 | 1929-30 | 1930-31 | 1932-33 | 1933-34 | 1934-35 | 1935-36 | 1936-37 |
|----------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| African | | | | | | | | | |
| American | 19 | 20 | 9 | 3 | | 1 | 4 | 4 | |
| Argentine | | | | | | 2 | | | |
| Armenian | | | | | | | | | |
| Australian | | | | | | | | | |
| Austrian | | | | | | 2 | | | |
| Belgian | | | | | | | | | |
| Brazilian | | | | | | | | | |
| British West African | | | | | | | 1 | | |
| Canadian | 16 | 6 | 3 | 2 | 7 | 12 | 5 | 5 | 4 |
| Danish | | | | | | | 3 | 1 | |
| Dutch | | | | | | | | | |
| English | 135 | 126 | 82 | 67 | 70 | 83 | 59 | 28 | 38 |
| Estonian | | | | | | | 1 | | |
| Eurasian | | | | | | | 1 | | 1 |
| Finnish | | | | | | | 3 | 1 | |
| Flemish | | | | | 1 | | | | |
| French | 1 | 1 | | | 1 | 2 | 1 | | |
| German | 2 | | | 1 | | 1 | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| German-Pole | | | | | | | | | |
| Greek | 1 | | | 1 | | 1 | | | |
| Hungarian | | | | | | | | | 1 |

| | 1927-28 | 1928-29 | 1929-30 | 1930-31 | 1932-33 | 1933-34 | 1934-35 | 1935-36 | 1936-37 |
|--------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Icelander | | | | | | | | | |
| Indian | 1 | | | | | | | 1 | |
| Irish | 501 | 428 | 501 | 447 | 469 | 584 | 721 | 940 | 1117 |
| Italian | | | 1 | | | | | | |
| Jamaican | | | | | | | | | |
| Japanese | | | | | | | | | |
| Manx | | 2 | 1 | | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | |
| Norwegian | | | | | | | | 1 | |
| Peruvian | | | | | | | | | |
| Polish | 2 | | | | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Portuguese | | | | | | | | | |
| Russian | | 1 | | | | | 1 | | |
| Russian-Pole | | | | | | | | | |
| Scandinavian | | | 1 | | | | | | |
| Scottish | 23 | 15 | 8 | 10 | 11 | 10 | 4 | 5 | 2 |
| Spanish | 5 | | | | | | 1 | | |
| Swedish | | | 1 | | | | | | |
| Swiss | | | 1 | | 2 | | | | 1 |
| Welsh | 6 | 5 | | 1 | 5 | 10 | 5 | 1 | 2 |
| West Indian | | | | | | | | | |

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