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Prostitution and the Contagious Diseases Acts in Nineteenth-Century England

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Submitted in Partial Completion of the
Requirements for Departmental Honors in History

Bridgewater State University

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Abstract

During England's Victorian period, the Contagious Diseases Acts were established, which regulated women's bodies and represented the intersectionality of gender, class, and power. Before the CD Acts, England began to grow rapidly during the Industrial Revolution, which was in part made possible by the work of underpaid and undervalued working-class women. One option for women to earn an income was prostitution. Men who worked as sailors and soldiers were common customers in prostitution, which contributed to the rapid spread of venereal disease throughout the British Empire. In the spirit of protecting men, the first CD Acts were passed in the 1860s. The CD Acts allowed any woman who was suspected of being a prostitute to be legislated, policed, and held hostage by men in the medical field. As a result of the targeting of women's bodies, men and women unified to protect the rights of prostitutes against the unjust policies. By analyzing newspapers, speeches, and essays revealing the sexist and classist ideologies supporting the CD Acts' legislation, this project will explore how men legally exercised control of women, and how those actions were justified by society's perception of medicine, policing, and the social status of its practitioners, thereby allowing men to maintain their elite status through regulation. It will also address how women and allies worked together against the CD Acts in an effort to advance women's rights. It is important to recognize the levels of bodily autonomy women have had, and why the regulation of working-class women has continued to protect men in positions of authority. This research is significant to understanding the use of women's bodies in legislation and how the CD Acts and their repeal would later work in establishing feminist movements that crossed political, class, and power boundaries.

Introduction

Stereotypes of women during Great Britain's Victorian era often forget women who were prostitutes. A woman was meant to be a wife and mother, and anything outside of that role was not worthy of recognition. As Great Britain began to industrialize, women started working new jobs. Some women had a new sense of freedom as they could provide for their families in new ways. Having more freedom in the workforce meant that women had to work both in the home and at their jobs to make ends meet. To supplement income, some women began to work in prostitution; most women who entered prostitution did so as a result of their circumstances. In some ways, prostitution allowed women to have some freedom over their bodies, which they were not receiving at other available working-class jobs. The prostitution industry growing throughout the British Empire meant that men were paying frequently for those services. The biggest investors were British sailors and soldiers. A result of prostitution was the spread of venereal diseases. As venereal diseases spread, men became increasingly sick, and so did prostitutes.

In order to protect men in the armed forces, Parliament passed the Contagious Diseases Acts of 1864, 1866, and 1869. The CD Acts used secret male police to find women who were suspected of being prostitutes and send them to lock hospitals which were thought to slow or stop the spread of venereal diseases. The CD Acts were vague, and any woman could be subjected to unfair arrest and examination at the police's discretion. This situation was a problem because many women realized that men had easy access to regulate their bodies while using the law to justify it. Lock hospitals were places where women would be sentenced until they were "clean" and could no longer spread disease. This cleanliness was not just in relation to venereal diseases, but also in connection to a prostitute's morality and womanliness. Doctors and

advocates of the Contagious Diseases Acts thought that women were more moral after leaving the lock hospitals, but they did not truly know if women went back to prostitution or not. It is possible that prostitutes were scared to be subjected to unauthorized examinations and being locked away for months, so they did not want to be caught again. People believed what medical doctors said not because of accurate research but because of their class authority and professed morality.

This essay employs both primary and secondary sources to gather information as evidence. The primary sources that it uses mostly include newspapers, articles, excerpts from books, and court cases. By analyzing newspapers, speeches, and essays revealing the sexist and classist ideologies supporting the CD Acts and those of its dissenters, this project will explore how men legally exercised control over women, and how those actions were justified by society's perception of medicine, policing, and the social status of its practitioners, thereby maintaining their elite status through regulation. It will also address how women and allies worked together against the CD Acts in an effort to advance women's rights. Newspapers such as *The Shield* are analyzed to describe how women reported on their experiences and organized their work towards equality. Contemporary articles and books demonstrate why many people may have been in favor of the Contagious Diseases Acts; others mention why they were not so popular. Court cases from the *Old Bailey Proceedings* are used to draw out how the law treated people in regard to prostitution and brothels. These sources reveal the country's differing feelings about and treatment of women, prostitution, and the men in power.

As for secondary sources, this study uses information from historians who study the Victorian era. Several historians have used prostitution, women and gender, and sexuality as lenses to look into Britain society during the Victorian era. The history of women and

prostitution in Victorian Britain is an area of study that is still growing. Women's studies as a site of learning have been used to understand the experiences of different women and how they intersect with different identities. The experiences women have been through when organizing against the regulation of bodily autonomy created movements that changed the trajectory of the understanding of rights for future women.

Scholars have extensively researched the nineteenth-century feminine experience in the political sphere, and its relation to prostitution. Among them is Kathryn Gleadle whose research covers children and childhood politics, women and political engagement, and global feminism throughout the nineteenth century. Gleadle's published work from 1995 titled *The Early Feminists* argues that the women's rights movement started during the 1830s and 1840s through organization for reform. Historian Martha Vicinus has studied Victorian women, women's studies, and sexuality. Vicinus' 1972 book *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age* is a collection of essays that describes the role of women, their status, and their stereotypes during the Victorian period. This work is significant for understanding the feminine stereotypes that women were subjected to and later fought against.

Judith Walkowitz's main area of study is Great Britain, focusing on nineteenth-century political culture and different contests over sexuality. Walkowitz book, *Prostitution and Victorian Society* (1980), establishes the relationship between feminists and prostitutes while also recognizing the clashes that women in middle and upper classes had with men of authority. For example, Walkowitz's article, "We Are Not Beasts of the Field': Prostitution and the Poor in Plymouth and Southampton under the Contagious Diseases Acts," covers the atmosphere of different neighborhoods under the Contagious Diseases Acts. Historians and writers have

pursued once-obscure areas of study and transformed them into vibrant fields in which many are interested today.

Victorian Working Women

The British Industrial Revolution began in the late 1700s with many unique innovations and technological advancements for the time. The advancements made during the Industrial Revolution made it easier for the general population to have access to jobs and goods. These included jobs in agriculture, factories, and domestic service. Dr. James Mitchell, a member of the Central Board of Commissioners, surveyed and collected data from different factories. In 1833, 56.8% of the factory workforce were women. In flax industries, women took up 67.4% of the workforce, and in silk, 78.1%.¹ Women began to have more opportunities because of the Industrial Revolution, so they were able to provide for themselves and their families. Men and women both worked in factories, but women began to outnumber men.

The increase in women paid work came about in certain jobs because businesses were able to take advantage of them. Women were new to the workforce, so they had not had the opportunity to establish a presence of authority that would allow them to prevent abuse. Businesses saw that women were inexperienced in the regular workplace and took the opportunity to mistreat them. Historian Katrina Honeyman describes how women were able to be taken advantage of by stating, “Women embodied the very attributes that the new capitalist employers desired. Women were more willing than men to work hard, to endure dreadful working conditions and to be paid a pittance...Women were expendable and flexible.”² Businesses were able to expand capital through the mistreatment and underpayment of women. Women became reliant on low-paying positions, which left them vulnerable to being taken advantage of.

¹ Report from Dr. James Mitchell to the Central Board of Commissioners, respecting the Returns made from the Factories, and the Results obtained from them.” *British Parliamentary Papers*, 1834 (167) XIX.

² Honeyman, Katrina. *Women, Gender and Industrialization in England, 1700-1870* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 50.

The work that women had to do was not valued highly, despite their high productivity and wide range of responsibilities. Women could not earn enough to sustain their families because they were being pulled in many directions to complete tasks throughout their daily lives. Honeyman describes the role working-class women had regardless of their profession:

High productivity was impossible by those multi-occupied, so in an environment where rising productivity was perceived as desirable if not necessary, women found themselves marginalized. For much of the eighteenth-century women were expected to contribute to their family's and the nation's wealth, but they were not regarded as eligible for skilled or full-time work.

Although women did not have access to the same financial opportunities as men, but they were still expected to contribute to their family economies and for the nation in regard to productivity. Women had to supplement their incomes with different jobs.

One advantage of working was being paid, but a disadvantage was the exploitation that came with it. Long hours and hard work left women without much to do once they finished work. Women were not able to see their full potential because they were not treated as equals, even in the slightest. They began to believe that their work was worth only the minimal pay they were receiving. As Martha Vicinus explains, "The rapid spread of factory employment for working-class women has its disadvantages. Employment at low pay convinced many women that they were inferior and confirmed others in their sense of apathy and hopelessness."³ The confirmation that their work was not worth being paid fairly led women to undervalue their labor.

Women were working under the condition that men controlled their finances. Their employers underpaid and undervalued their labor. Husbands were in control of their wives' property. The government legislated that men controlled the funds in a marriage. Financial

³ Vicinus, Martha. *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age* (London: Routledge 1972). 111.

opportunity due to the Industrial Revolution and the need for cheap labor did not mean that women were free, as their finances were controlled, and their work continued after their brutal shifts once they got home. Middle- and upper-class women were upset with the way their finances were being regulated and started to resist through different means of protest. One 1858 issue of the *English Woman's Journal*, shows that there was large support for women and their rights to property:

In the summer and autumn of 1855 petitions were circulated throughout England representing the injustice of the law respecting the property and earnings of married women, and imploring the Parliament to take the matter into immediate consideration. These petitions, organised and started by a couple of philanthropic ladies, resulted in March, 1856, in the presentation to both Houses of a petition signed by 3000 women; in addition to this Woman's Petition, petitions from all parts of the country poured in, bearing the signatures of upwards of 26,000 men and women. Thus, there was no mistaking the profound and universal interest felt in the question, and the absolute necessity for immediate alleviation.⁴

This report on the laws of women's property in marriages displays the desire for women to have ownership of their earned money. This also shows the alliance between women and men, as some men supported women having control over their finances. This was accomplished through a petition which was submitted to Parliament. Women were not expected to resist, as they still had 'feminine' responsibilities throughout their lives – resistance not being one of them.

An ideal woman was the perfect "wife." A woman who did not have the desire to be a wife would not be considered worthy. Her goals had to align with what was set out for them by stereotypes enforced by men and women. Vicinus describes a woman's expected responsibilities across class lines: "The perfect wife was an active participant in the family, fulfilling a number of vital tasks, the first of which was childbearing. She was expected in the lower classes to

⁴ [article title?] *The Englishwoman's Review of Social and Industrial Questions* (London: Englishwoman's Review, 1886), 58.

contribute to the family income. In the middle classes she provided direct economic support through the care of her children, the purchasing and preparation of food and the making of clothes.”⁵ Women had to live up to a standard and did not include a sense of freedom because their abilities were constantly being surveilled by the people around them.

Women had to explain why they were worthy in ways that men could accept. They could not just exist as they were; they had to be connected to their constructed role. In 1868, activist Josephine Butler highlighted women’s role as mothers: “We are all mothers or foster-mothers. The few exceptions to this rule, -the cases in which the maternal feelings are weak or wanting,-- are to be found among mothers of families as well as among childless women.”⁶ Although women were trying to make progress through different sectors of society, they still confined themselves to stereotypes. The self-infliction of feminine motherly stereotypes kept women in a place where they had to be a specific person.

⁵ Vicinus, Martha. *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age* (London: Routledge 1972) IX.

⁶ Butler, Josephine Elizabeth, *The Education and Employment of Women* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1868), 20.

Prostitution

Some women began to choose prostitution as a job because of their circumstances.

Women were not often forced into prostitution but got there through gradual choices when they were young. As a woman faced financial difficulties, she was able to use prostitution as a quick way to earn money, and lift herself out of the situation she was in. Prostitutes were legally allowed to do their job as long as they did not bother the public. Prostitutes stayed within designated areas, so they were not a nuisance to the people around them.⁸ This meant that women were able to be prostitutes freely and men were able to pay them freely. Clearly, prostitution was a casual occurrence, a transaction between a customer and a prostitute. Sometimes prostitution was a way for women to survive without having a boss above their head exploiting them.

Women sold sex to men who were willing to pay them. This was a job that some women took on entirely or to supplement their income. Although many women turned to prostitution, not every woman did as an act of desperation. Even with working new jobs and demanding greater rights, being exploited made it necessary to work more than one job for many people.

Prostitutes gathered where men could be found because that would provide them with more financial opportunity. Walkowitz describes the names of places where prostitutes were known to reside in Victorian Britain: “Most Victorian cities had at least one notorious district where public women lived and plied their trade among a heterogenous population of the laboring poor. Some districts were traditional centers of prostitution, like the narrow streets around the Water Lanes of York; others were of more recent origin. Whether old or new, they early acquired derogatory popular names, such as “Grapescent Lane,” York the “Dust Hole,” Greenwich, and “Damnation Alley,” Plymouth.”⁷ These places were nicknamed because of the women who were

⁷ Walkowitz, Judith R., *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1982) 14.

prostitutes, not because of the men who paid them. Prostitutes went to the places where men who would pay them were to be found.

The neighborhoods targeted during the Contagious Diseases Acts were where prostitutes resided for work, but each place had a unique dynamic. The social range of neighborhoods where prostitutes could be found varied. There were streets that were valuable in some ways because they were a part of the pub and entertainment scene, frequented by many people. The respectability of those businesses meant that there could be a few brothels in the area. These neighborhoods would also contain buildings that housed traditional nuclear families. Some streets included high populations of men, fed by the large immigration to cities during the time. There were not specific characteristics that made up these places other than the fact that there could be prostitutes found working there.⁸

Prostitutes frequented these places because that is where they knew they could alleviate some financial instability. Some women were not frequent prostitutes and participated for a short period of time. Others had been in the profession for many years, as Walkowitz reveals, “Rather, most women’s entry into prostitution appears to have been circumstantial rather than premeditated – less frequently as a result of deliberate migration to specific centers of ‘gay life’ than a response to local conditions of the urban job market. Placed in a vulnerable economic and social position, some women may have found the shorter hours and better pay of prostitution a temporary solution to their immediate difficulties.”⁹ Prostitutes were doing what they could to

⁸ Walkowitz, Judith R., and Daniel J. Walkowitz. “‘We Are Not Beasts of the Field’: Prostitution and the Poor in Plymouth and Southampton under the Contagious Diseases Acts.” *Feminist Studies* 1, no. 3/4 (1973): 73-106.

⁹ Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, 14.

survive. In comparison to other working-class positions in society, prostitution was an alternative that could be somewhat manipulated.¹⁰

Prostitutes could work in brothels under the conditions set by an owner. There were people who complained about brothels and the noises that they made in their neighborhoods. Women could manipulate prostitution even more through the business of brothels. People did not like having brothels in their neighborhoods and we can see evidence of this in British court records. The well-being of prostitutes was not a worry for the people involved in the *Old Bailey* court system. The Old Bailey court system contains almost 200,000 published trials, which describes the treatment of non-elites through the eyes of the law. The treatment of prostitutes or patrons was not a problem to men or the court, it was the business and the atmosphere it created in a particular neighborhood. In 1855, Caroline Howard and Mary Jones were brought to court for running a brothel that received numerous complaints:

707. CAROLINE HOWARD and MARY JONES, unlawfully keeping a common bawdy house.

MR. RYLAND *conducted the Prosecution.*

PATRICK BURKE. I occupy No. 6, Hare-court, and have done so for five years, during all which time No. 2 has been a brothel—I knew Mrs. Robinson, who was convicted here in March; and at the latter part of the time that she was there, I have seen the prisoners there—I have seen men, and women who I knew to be prostitutes, go in together at different times of the night and day—I was never in the house—I have seen Jones there for three years off and on—I have heard most ridiculous conversation there, and most undoubted bad language—the neighbours have complained—I have been aroused in the night many times by the rows—the house is a nuisance to the neighbourhood, and I have complained of it as such—the younger prisoner has been there since May, and I have seen her take money from prostitutes of Aldersgate-street—I have only seen Jones acting as servant.

WILLIAM ARTHUR EDE (*City policeman*, 125). I have known the house, No. 2, Hare-court, since 1848, as a common brothel—Mrs. Robinson, who was convicted here last March, was the lessee, and is now—the prisoners acted as servants—it was still a brothel

¹⁰ Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, 31.

up to last Saturday, when I took the prisoners into custody—I have seen prostitutes go in and out repeatedly both with and without men—I have seen both the prisoners take money—there have been complaints continually about the *rows* there, and the house has been indicted six or seven times—I went into the house in March last, and saw what was very improper; a person named Curtis was keeping the house then, and Howard was there.¹¹

The men who are complaining about the brothel seem to have been bothered by the noise and business that kept the brothels open. Attitudes about brothels and the prostitutes inside working were negative. The case uses language like “nuisance,” “ridiculous” and “prisoners.” Calling prostitutes in a brothel “prisoners” suggests that they did not consent to working there. There is no sense of concern for the women inside, rather the concern is about how the neighborhood is affected through noise and ridiculousness. The house was continuously reported, as there were multiple reports about it before the operators of the brothel were brought to court.

In a different case, one man was arrested and sentenced because he had an underage girl working in his brothel. Although women were not the main concern of the courts, when they were underage, they were considered still to be their parents’ property. Under the sexual offense of keeping a brothel, Alexander Mutller was prosecuted for unlawfully taking an underage girl as an “inmate.” Mutller was fined five pounds and had to serve two years of hard labor for his crimes. Because Dyer was suspected of being forced to be a prostitute when she was underage, the man who held her in a brothel was tried:

180. ALEXANDER MUTLLER (26), Unlawfully taking Lily Dyer, aged 17 years and 8 months, from the possession of her father with intent, etc., and that she should become the inmate of a brothel.

MR. ARTHUR GILL *Prosecuted.*

GUILTY.—*The prisoner had been fined £5 for keeping a brothel, twice convicted of assaults on the police, and once of a brutal assault on a woman; he was also known to the police as a prostitutes' butty.— Two Years' Hard Labour.*

¹¹ *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, November 2022), July 1855, trial of CAROLINE HOWARD MARY JONES (t18550702-707).

*The police-officers were commended by the COURT.*¹²

Alexander Mutller was arrested and tried for taking and underage girl from the “possession” of her father. The only reason that this was a problem was because she was underage. Had she been an adult, she would not have been treated with this much care by the court system. Dyer was underage, and the word used to describe her in the case was not “prostitute” but “inmate.” The case never revealed if Dyer consented to working in the brothel. Her father was not only responsible for her well-being, but to be the main regulator of her actions. Perhaps Lily Dyer would have been considered a fallen woman after the day she turned 18, no longer under the close control of her father – at which time she would have been subjected to the control of male legislators.

A prostitute was subject to moral judgement and often labelled as a “fallen woman.” Fallen women were those who had fallen away from God’s arms. In many instances, fallen women were pitied. In 1902, medical doctor James Foster Scott wrote a book called *The Sexual Instinct its Use and Dangers As Effecting Heredity and Morals*, which in part describes prostitution and fallen women:

Society calls those women who have fallen into the sin of unchastity as sacrifices for the fornicators by the vilest terms, such as "abandoned women," "strumpets," "harlots, whores," "prostitutes," "courtezans"; they are cut off from all association with their fellow-beings, and are deserted almost entirely, even by the churches. The poor fallen woman, hounded from garret to cellar, and driven hither and thither, is treated by the police as a sort of wild animal, or criminal; she is segregated with others of her class; she is an outcast.¹³

Society, while not tolerating her, and while giving her the most opprobrious epithets, yet argues that some women must sacrifice themselves for the good of mankind! Why, then, if it is necessary that these women should exist, should we cast disgrace upon them? Rather should we revere and extol them for the sacrifice of themselves for the public good. If they are necessary, then they have, for man's benefit, thrown away every

¹² *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, November 2022), February 1900, trial of ALEXANDER MUTLLER (26) (t19000212-180)

¹³ Scott, James Foster, *The Sexual Instinct: Its Use and Dangers as Affecting Heredity and Morals* (New York: E.B. Treat and Company 1902), 102.

prospect of the joys of earth or heaven, of home, of family, of motherhood and wifehood, of love, of respect, and of hope; having sold their peace of mind, and happiness and honor, they have, in addition, sold their own bodies.¹⁴

The Contagious Diseases Acts

In Victorian England, commentators worried that infection rates for venereal diseases were on the rise.¹⁵ Men were working as sailors and soldiers and their places of duty changed frequently. Increased geographic mobility meant they were able to participate in prostitution as customers in many different places. Eventually, this increased infection of venereal diseases to both men and women, specifically prostitutes. The spread of disease among women was not a concern because they were becoming sick, but because the health of men was threatened. That said, some citizens of London and outsiders from other countries did have a sense of sympathy for what these workers had to go through. A French social reformer, Flora Tristan, arrived in London for her fourth time in the year 1840. Tristan wanted to get to the bottom of what was going on and is soon shocked by what she noticed: "It is truly a spectacle, one that better reveals the moral state of England than anything else one could say..."¹⁶ Tristan understood that prostitution was a rising problem in London, and she frequently discussed social problems concerning women. Often, what failed to be mentioned in contemporary texts about prostitution during the nineteenth century was who exactly was involved outside of the prostitutes. Tristan describes what she saw in a gin-palace:

Around midnight the habitués begin to arrive. Several of these cabarets are the meeting places where high society or the aristocratic elite gather...In the finishes there are all sorts of amusements. One of the most relished to get a prostitute so soused that she falls down

¹⁴ Scott, *The Sexual Instinct: Its Use and Dangers as Affecting Heredity and Morals*, 102.

¹⁵ Szreter, Simon. "The Prevalence of Syphilis in England and Wales on the Eve of the Great War: Re-visiting the Estimates of the Royal Commission on Venereal Diseases 1913-1916." *Social History of Medicine* 27, no. 3 (2014): 508-529.

¹⁶ Pauk, Barbara. "Contesting National and Gender Boundaries: Flora Tristan's 'Promenades Dans Londres.'" *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 37, no. 1/2 (2008): 123-35.

dead drunk; then they force her to drink a mixture of vinegar, mustard, and pepper; this beverage almost always gives her horrible convulsions, and the twitching and contortion of the poor unfortunate woman provoke laughter and entertain *honorable society* ever so much...this life, which begins over again every night, is the only way these public women have to make money...¹⁷

Women were ridiculed by some among the highest members of society. Tristan continues to describe the horrible things prostitutes are put through in order to make enough money to survive. Men at the highest ranks were participating in things that began to become criminalized once they could no longer control it. Not all women were prostitutes, but any woman could be subject to an invasive search of her body.

The Contagious Diseases Acts were a means to control women in their work as prostitutes within the British Isles, but this legislation spread throughout the British empire to other nations. A description of the Contagious Diseases Acts from the nineteenth century gives an idea of what different people thought at the time: "If a woman, willingly, or by compulsion is examined, and declared to be diseased, she can be detained in a Government hospital for nine months, if necessary. When cured, she is liberated, and the object of the Acts is accomplished. Immoral men are thus sought to be protected. There is nothing to protect women. They may be infected by men; and are so infected."¹⁸ Most of the people financing prostitution were men, yet they were the ones protected, not regulated. The law also punished women who were not prostitutes, but just suspected by men of being prostitutes. Although the Contagious Diseases Act had negative effects on people in nineteenth-century England, men were admitted to hospitals for venereal disease across the globe, which weakened Britain's real and figurative strength as an imperial power.

¹⁷ Pauk, "Contesting National and Gender Boundaries: Flora Tristan's 'Promenades Dans Londres.'" 123–35.

¹⁸ The "Contagious diseases acts", what are they? Issued by the Scottish National Association for the Abolition of the State Regulation of Vice and for the Promotion of Social Purity.

The Contagious Diseases Acts were passed for the first time at two in the morning. The bill (some historians claim) was never publicly discussed, and passed without debate. They were passed to prevent disease in men and women, yet only women were specifically regulated under the law. The Acts were originally enforced in 15 English and three Irish towns. There were attempts to spread the Acts throughout larger areas, which the efforts were occasionally successful.¹⁹

Men of all different backgrounds were participating in the business of prostitution while it was perceived that the overall strength of men was being terrorized by venereal diseases. Weak men meant that there was a weak imperial presence among the British. Most importantly, the men who were supposed to be the strongest representation of British society were becoming the sickest. Soldiers and sailors were spreading sexually transmitted disease throughout Britain. As disease spread, The Contagious Diseases Acts were passed in 1864 with subsequent revisions throughout the later 1860s. Charles Bell Taylor, an ally medical doctor against the CD acts wrote why they were discriminatory against women. Any woman who police thought a prostitute could be was subjected to a state sanctioned assault:

The sworn evidence which some pretend is a protection to the liberty of the subject is worse than useless, at best it amounts to this: – a woman protests her innocence, and declines to go with or accept the disguised policeman's invitation to register herself as a common prostitute. He therefore, doubtless with considerable chagrin, informs his superintendent that he thinks a certain woman is no better than she should be; and the superintendent goes before a magistrate, and swears "That he has good cause to believe such a person is a prostitute," where upon the magistrate issues a warrant for her apprehension."²⁰

¹⁹ The Contagious Diseases Acts", What are They? Issued by the Scottish National Association for the Abolition of the States Regulation of Vice and for the Promotion of Social Purity (1800-1899) <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/mmfh3wg5/items>.

²⁰ Bell, Charles Taylor, "Observations on the Contagious Diseases Act (women, not animals): showing how the new law debases women, debauches men, destroys the liberty of the subject, and tends to increase disease, being a reply to Mr. W. Paul Swain's paper on the working of the Act at Devonport," 1869, 4.

Police did not have to have a valid reason for arresting and imprisoning women because the Acts themselves were broad in terminology. Police could come up with what they wanted and choose who to take and subject to medical examination or imprisonment if the woman refused.

In 1829, Metropolitan Police began their work in the streets despite the fact that many working people (men and women) saw the police “watch men” as a threat to their freedom. Local divisions began to be established and the scope of the policeman’s job began to expand.²¹ It was the Metropolitan Police’s job to control prostitutes in the street. There were no rules to follow when determining whether a woman on the street was a prostitute. This meant that any woman regardless of her status could be chosen by a police officer to be detained and examined – if she refused, she could be imprisoned. Detectives who imprisoned women for their suspected activity in prostitution were “secret police.” They often wore plain clothes, and spied to find the next women to detain.²² Policing women who worked as prostitutes was not aimed to protect them, but rather designed so that police could maintain power in them.

During the era of the Contagious Diseases Acts, women were confined to lock hospitals until they were deemed clean enough to return to society. The gap between the people legislating and caring for prostitutes under the guise of medical care and prostitutes themselves was large. Published in 1869 in *The British Medical Journal* were the “Repression of the Contagious Diseases Acts,” which in part explains the thinking of some of the men involved in supporting the Acts:

Advantage will be taken of a proposed dinner, in aid of the funds of the London Lock Hospital, which will be held at the Willis’s Rooms on Tuesday, May 11th – H.R.H the Duke of Cambridge in the chair – to bring together some of the influential friends of this measure.

²¹ Emsley, Clive, *The English Police: Political and Social History* (London: Routledge, 1996). Honeyman, Katrina. *Women, Gender and Industrialization in England, 1700-1870* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000)

²² The Contagious Diseases Acts”, What are They? Issued by the Scottish National Association for the Abolition of the States Regulation of Vice and for the Promotion of Social Purity (1800-1899) <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/mmfh3wg5/items>.

It was at a Lock Hospital dinner in 1864, under the same presidency, that the measures now in force for the diminution of venereal disease in the army and navy, were first foreshadowed...It is anticipated that on the present occasion an equally influential; attendance will be obtained, and that it will be made subservient, not only to the interests of this most valuable charity, but to the elucidation of facts which will aid further legislation for the prevention of the formidable class of disease amongst the civil population.²³

None of the people discussing the Acts or the future of their measures would be representative of the population they were legislating. It is claimed that the purpose for their meeting over dinner is for the charity the Acts bring to the country, but more people were hurt in the process than ever helped.

The practice of medicine during the Victorian era was growing rapidly, even in a global sense. Medical doctors were becoming more professionalized and respected, and the stakes were becoming higher as training became more specific and specialized. As Charles Rosenberg argues in his review of Eyler and Pelling's book on medical history: "A kind of orthodoxy has already come into being: the real and contemporaneously perceived deterioration of health in the nineteenth-century England was a consequence of urbanization and industrialization...The motivations were varied but in some ways consistent: Christian humanitarianism [*and*] a desire to rationalize the new social and economic order."²⁴ Physicians were developing a control over the British population even as they pursued a desire to help people. "Statistics was primarily a weapon, only secondarily a body of techniques and data...statistics served as a kind of metaphorical scheme, scientific in form yet ultimately structured about instructive moral contrasts."²⁵ People could not question whether or not medical professionals were using correct

²³ "The Repression Of Contagious Diseases." *The British Medical Journal* 1, no. 429 (1869): 268.

²⁴ Rosenberg, Charles E. Review of *Medicine and Community in Victorian Britain*, by John M. Eyler and Margaret Pelling. *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 11, no. 4 (1981): 677–84.

²⁵ Rosenberg, Charles E. Review of *Medicine and Community in Victorian Britain*, 679.

information or statistics. This gave doctors the ability to persuade anyone with the information they presented while incorporated their personal bias and morals – a way to control the narrative of events such as the Contagious Diseases Acts.

The Great Social Evil of prostitution became a medical evil. Many people outside of the medical profession knew that the Contagious Diseases Acts were not a way to eradicate prostitution, but a way to lessen its appearance in society. Medical doctor William Acton thought that it was necessary to decrease the number of prostitutes so that the spread of disease would be less prominent. In a paper read to the Association of the Medical Officers of Health, Acton asserted: “It is useless to shut our eyes to facts. Prostitution is no passing evil, but one that has existed from the first ages of the world’s history down to the present time, and differs but little, and in minor particulars, in this nineteenth century, from what it was in the earliest times...nor is it reasonable to suppose that in the years to come the world will prove more virtuous than it has shown itself in ages past.”²⁶ Acton, like many people, knew that prostitution would not go away on its own, but he believed it could be controlled.

A lock hospital was a place where people were locked up to heal; it was possible to join voluntarily but most people were subject to incarceration without a choice. The main reason for locking people up in hospitals to heal was for venereal diseases. As a result of this, women who were suspected of being prostitutes were targeted. Frederick Walter Lowndes wrote the text *Lock Hospitals and Lock Wards in General Hospitals* in 1882, many years after the Contagious Diseases Acts were initially enacted. Here, Lowndes describes the significance of lock hospitals:

²⁶ Acton, The Contagious Diseases Act: shall the Contagious Diseases Act be applied to the civil population? : being a paper read before the Association of the Medical Officers of Health, on Saturday, December 18th, 1869.

These hospitals being built and maintained for persons suffering from venereal diseases, it follows as a natural consequence that the female patients will be mostly common prostitutes, and the male patients men who have been guilty of some recent act of immorality. In other words, lock hospitals are principally for the reception and treatment of persons suffering from diseases, the direct result of their own vicious indulgence. This is why they enjoy so little of the liberality so lavishly bestowed upon other hospitals and infirmaries, both general and special.²⁷

People like Lowndes believed that lock hospitals were significant for healing people from things such as venereal diseases. He believed that because people were infected with venereal diseases, they must have been participating in activities that were “immoral.” The lock hospital’s first purpose was to cleanse what immorality was in the eyes of the elite male; second was the condition of venereal diseases. People who supported the Acts and the funding of lock hospitals understood that innocent women were locked up. This was not an important factor in a medical doctor’s opinion, and the knowledge that some innocents would be locked up did stop them from operating these hospitals as oppressive unfair places of control. The lock hospitals themselves were not controlled, and their actions were not defined under the law. Medical doctors could do as they pleased with the funding from these places of medical confinement without any repercussions.

The claim that men did not need regulation was backed by the idea that there were no male prostitutes; no men who could be regulated. Lowndes later published an article in 1883 titled, *A Defence of the Contagious Diseases Acts and of Government Lock Hospitals* which defends the idea that women should bear the brunt of the regulation.

This last has brought many a poor creature to our hospital who otherwise might never have heard of it. I have never suggested that prostitutes, either in places under the Acts or elsewhere, have ceased to be women. What I contended was, that Dr. Patterson was not

²⁷ Lowndes, Frederick Walter. *Lock Hospitals and Lock Wards in General Hospitals* London: J. & A. Churchill 1882.

justified in accusing the Acts of unfairly affecting one sex and not another. They are not directed against one sex, but against a special class of that sex who make a living by prostitution. Among the male sex no such class exists.²⁸

Here, a medical doctor openly admits that it is was primarily working-class and poor women who were targeted by the Acts. These women usually worked as prostitutes for short periods of time before they took on different work. This is a failure of the system both in protecting women and stopping the spread of any diseases.

If a prostitute was suspected of having venereal disease, she was put in a lock hospital. Once a prostitute was declared infected, she was confined to that space. Hospitals were not the care-focused places they are known to be today. More specifically, lock hospitals were a means to control a population of women that people no longer wanted to see. These places were not sanitary or taken care of because they were a place to keep women hidden. William Broomfield was the founder of the London Lock Hospital, which was established in 1746 to treat venereal diseases. Eventually, the duties of this original hospital were expanded to include other specialized services. Even in the beginnings of lock hospitals, there were specific strict rules for patients to follow. An 1882 poster from the London Lock Hospital describes the rules some of the first patients were to endure:

Rules for patients in Hospital

1. At 6.0 a.m. Patients to rise, strip beds, turn mattresses, and open windows at the discretion of the Nurse, and leave beds to air. Wash and dress in lavatories.
2. Make beds and tidy wards before breakfast. Patients confined to bed will be attended by the Nurse.
3. 7 to 7.45, Morning Prayers and Breakfast.
4. 10 a.m., Ward, Lavatories, and bath room to be in perfect order.
5. Morning hours to be occupied in needlework, writing letters, reading, or attending in Surgery if required.
6. 12:00 p.m., noon, Dinner.
7. 2 p.m., The Afternoon and Evening to be spent in

²⁸ Lowndes, *Lock Hospitals and Lock Wards in General Hospitals, 1882*.

8. 4 p.m., Tea.
9. 6:30 p.m., Supper, followed by prayers.
10. 8:00 p.m., All patients to be in bed and lights lowered; no talking allowed afterwards.
11. Bad language and disorderly conducts or talking over past wrong-doing are all strictly forbidden.
12. All letters for patients will be opened by the Matron, and such as are objectionable will not be given.
13. The Nurses are authorized to report to the Matron any breaking of the rules, or disobedience to those in authority.²⁹

Whether doctors thought they were protecting people from spreading disease or another variation of protection, lock hospitals in this period were a simple and strict way to control a population of majority women. The lack of bedside manner was aggressive, and patients were treated more like prisoners than someone who needed care.

Medical doctors were able to manipulate the data and evidence they had to work in their favor in protection of the Contagious Diseases Acts because of their position in society. Since women were an oppressed group, medical doctors were able to take advantage of them. In order to keep lock hospitals open and receive funding from both the government and donors, medical doctors had to give rationale behind their practices. The data that doctors used to support the continuation of the Contagious Diseases Acts did not accurately represent what was happening. An article that was published in 1870 in the *Journal of the Statistical Society of London* called “The Statistical Results of the Contagious Diseases Acts,” discusses the diseases that were targeted during the Acts and how they were “improved.” The article states:

During the three years immediately preceding the Acts, 149 venereal males and 706 venereal females were admitted into the workhouses of Plymouth, Devonport, and Stonehouse. The diminution of the females sent to the workhouse, is doubtless due to the

²⁹ Rules for Patients in Hospitals, taken from the ‘sample of appeals’ scrapbook.
<http://surgicat.rcseng.ac.uk/Details/archive/110003575>

increased hospital accommodation, but the diminution in the males cannot be so explained for no increase in the hospital accommodation for them has taken place.³⁰

The article discusses how women are increasingly sent to hospitals to cure their diseases, but he fails to mention that men did not have to go unless they chose to themselves. The article on statistical results also mention how the Acts were used to prove the moral condition of prostitutes. “The effect of the Acts on the moral and social condition of the women subjected to them...a few statistics on this point may serve to show that the Acts have been as signally successful in ameliorating the moral condition of these unhappy persons, as they have been in improving their health.”³¹ This article is not completely statistical as it provides opinions that do not correlate with the facts represented in numbers.

Hill used tables to represent data on different groups affected by the Contagious Diseases Acts and venereal disease. At the end of the document, there is a table included with the towns in which the Acts were applied, number of discharged incurables, number of times in which women returned to their former pursuits (prostitution) free of disease, number of cases of diseases admitted to the hospital, and number of examinations in which no disease was found. These cases spanned from 1864 at the beginning of the Acts in Legislation until 1870. In total, throughout all of the towns the CD Acts affected, the number of cases in which no disease was found was 49,389 women.³² This means that there were at least 50,000 women documented throughout a six-year window who were unfairly subjected to forced examination who did not

³⁰ Hill, Berkeley, “Statistical Results of the Contagious Diseases Acts.” *Journal of the Statistical Society of London* 33, no. 4 (1870): 485.

³¹ Hill, “Statistical Results of the Contagious Diseases Acts,” 463-485.

³²Hill, “Statistical Results of the Contagious Diseases Acts,” 485.

have any disease. This statistic alone proves that the Acts were not beneficial to women or the hospitals in profitability. Medical and statistical reports were used to persuade people into thinking that the Acts were helping fallen women from immoral behavior, but those women were just immorally regulated.

Medical reports supported the Contagious Diseases Acts, written by doctors who sought to use the issue to broaden their claims to expertise and advance their professional profiles. Matthew Berkeley Hill was a general surgeon at a London Lock Hospital. Hill wrote an article titled “Statistical Results of the Contagious Diseases Acts” in the *Journal of the Statistical Society of London*. In this article, Hill gravitates towards the idea that women are better off with the Contagious Diseases Acts in place: “The effect of the Acts on the moral and social condition of the women subjected to them. Without delaying you longer, a few statistics on this point may serve to show that the Acts have been as signally successful in ameliorating the moral condition of these unhappy persons, as they have been improving their health.”³³ Medical professionals such as Hill believed that women needed the Contagious Diseases Acts in order to stay in good health.

Controlling prostitution failed to prove helpful in preventing disease because men did not stop paying prostitutes. The Contagious Diseases Acts being repealed meant that medical doctors would lose their biggest group of people being admitted. Around 1869, many people began to feel that the laws were oppressive. This would create financial loss for medicine, as they would no longer receive funding for locking up women suspected of being a prostitute and having disease. Medicine was a place where power could be extended through control over groups of

³³ Hill, “Statistical Results of the Contagious Diseases Acts,” 472.

people. The care of venereal disease was focused on men; if they were found to be infected, they were not confined to a space until they were cured otherwise. Medical doctors were complicit in the abuses women faced as prostitutes in their operation of lock hospitals, reports, and invasive practices. Doctors were able to persuade Parliament by stating that women were happier and better managed through the Acts.

Medical doctors were becoming more professionalized, so people began to invest trust in their opinions, medical treatments and procedures. Education in the medical field was making exciting advancements. However, education was not valued – power was. Given their lauded position, medical doctors had the ability to create and try new (sometimes socially invasive) procedures, even if they had no chance of working. Lock hospitals were an example of this, as they never actually healed anyone from venereal disease itself. Medical reports supported the Contagious Diseases Acts by doctors who did not want their egos to be diminished.

Leaders began to trust medical doctors on their opinions in regard to laws. Doctors would give people their opinions on whether or not the Contagious Diseases Acts and lock hospitals were working to protect men. Bias towards medical doctors shows how their position in society allowed them to gain control over the legislature in different ways. The medical profession was the main contributor to the suppression of women in the nineteenth century as doctors misconstrued numbers for their professional benefit, making medical practices exploitative towards women. Doctors thought invasive, noncurative methods were working, so treatment was not progressing into a cure as fast as it could have.

Doctors argued that fewer people were getting the disease as a result of the Contagious Diseases Acts. Men were not arrested or searched if they were to pay a prostitute for sex. Men

were also not arrested if they were prostitutes. This is because men in power were both paying women and men for sexual acts. If men were to be held to legal consequences, the people in highest power would be in trouble. There were women who also believed that the Contagious Diseases Acts were beneficial to society regardless of the law's intrusion on women's rights. For example, in 1870 medical doctor Elizabeth Anderson published *An Enquiry into the Character of Contagious Diseases Acts*³⁴, and as a medical professional she thought that state control over a woman's body meant that families would be protected against the members who may have venereal diseases.³⁵

Elites who paid prostitutes were the most at risk if men were to face legislative consequences. The Buggery Act of 1533 was the first time in England where sex between males became a crime. This act stayed in place for more than 300 years and sodomy remained a capital offense punishable by hanging until 1861. This law surrounded the acts of anal sex, not the payment of sex or transmission of disease. These men were evil in the eyes of Parliament not because they were paying prostitutes, but because they were participating in sexual activities with other men. In 1885 there was an amendment to the Buggery Act of 1533, which made any sexual contact between men illegal.

Male prostitutes still existed despite the fact that sexual relations between men were punishable by death until 1861. Although men and women both participated in prostitution, it was a problem that did not reflect the moral values of nineteenth-century England. Both men and women upheld the feminine standard. Men who were prostitutes were not subjected to the same treatment as women because their actions were unspeakable. Sexual policing of men was not

³⁴ Anderson, Elizabeth Garret. "An Enquiry into the Character of the Contagious Diseases Acts of 1866-1869 (London 1870).

³⁵ Saunders, Lisa. "'Equal Laws Based upon an Equal Standard': the Garrett Sisters, the Contagious Diseases Acts and the Sexual Politics of Victorian and Edwardian Feminism Revisited", *Women's History Review*, 2015.

worthy of a description because it was too uncomfortable for public discourse, even though it was clearly happening. Jack Saul, an Irish prostitute who worked in London is one of the only male prostitutes from the Victorian era for whom we have a contemporary representation in *The Sins of Jack Saul*.³⁶ There were no official acts stating that men who were prostitutes be regulated or subjected to unfair measures by police.

Although many medical doctors had subscribed to the idea of controlling women, some medical doctors openly objected to the contents of the Contagious Diseases Acts. In 1869, medical doctor, Charles Bell Taylor, published his professional opinion on the matter in *Observations on the Contagious Diseases Act, (Women, not Animals)* where he informs medical doctors and surgeons to rethink their support of the Acts:

There is no necessity to refer to eminent physicians and surgeons for the decision of this question. I appeal to the male population of this country – to men and gentlemen of all ranks – some have suffered, many have escaped, but where are those who have never incurred the risk? Let their common sense and individual experience speak ; those who have escaped may readily understand that the disease is not so common as represented ; while the numbers who sometime or other have suffered from such affections, whose health is vigorous, whose children healthy, who slices insured (first-class) without a question referring to such delicate matters, I trust will exercise their own common sense ere they permit themselves to be frightened from their propriety by a phantom that has no real existence, or before giving in their adhesion to a scheme which barter away the birthright of the Englishmen for a mess of very dirty pottage.

Taylor then describes the corruption of police and their jobs as spies: “The policeman is disguised in plain clothes, and his functions are those of a spy. When “he has spied out a woman,” he informs her, in the language of the force, that “he shall run her in,” that is, take her before a magistrate, unless she consents to the operation I have described.”³⁷

³⁶ Chandler, Glenn, *The Sins of Jack Saul: The True Story of Dublin Jack and the Cleveland Street Scandal* (London: Grosvenor House Publishing 2016).

³⁷ Taylor, Charles Bell, *Observations on the Contagious Diseases Act (women, not animals): showing how the new law debases women, debauches men, destroys the liberty of the subject, and tends to increase disease, being a reply to Mr. W. Paul Swain's paper on the working of the Act at Devonport, 1869.*

The Repeal Movement

The first two Contagious Diseases Acts of 1864 and 1866 did not have many challenges when they were put in place. The law was quietly passed without any debate. The acts were said to be sanitary measures that would protect important soldiers and sailors from venereal disease. All classes participated in prostitution, but the regulation was only towards one specific group – the poor. People who worked to repeal the acts still faced challenges when advocating for women and prostitutes. The fight that medical doctors were putting up to keep the Contagious Diseases Acts in place was different from what women wanted. Even though wealthy, white men held the most power in society, women were able to come together with male allies in an effort to repeal the Acts.

There were key figures who worked diligently to repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts during the nineteenth century. These people and groups strived for equality through campaigning for women and prostitutes. Elizabeth Wolstenholme was an advocate for political, economic, and educational rights of women. She wrote in different feminist publications to get her message across about campaigns including the Ladies National Association against the Contagious Diseases Acts. Justice and equality for women were Wolstenholme's focus and main feature of her work. Her work often addressed the injustices of the world, but she put in an effort to fix them.³⁸ Josephine Butler was involved in different movements in regard to equality and gender. Butler's stance on prostitution was that it was a social problem because of men. She claimed that men were the primary payers for prostitution and that women be treated as equals. Many people started to see that it was unfair to blame women for a problem that was not their fault. The disease was not something only women could spread. A women's ability as a mother defined her

³⁸ Wright, Maureen, "Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy and the Victorian Feminist Movement" *The Biography of an Insurgent Woman* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013) 37.

femininity. In 1868, activist Josephine Butler describes how many people equated motherhood with woman's worth. "The tone in which certain foolish popular writers speak of unmarried and childless women betrays both coarseness of feeling and ignorance. They speak of these women as having altogether missed their vocation, and as necessarily dwarfed in affection and motive, because they have not performed certain physical functions."³⁹ The way in which authors wrote about women who were "fallen," childless or unmarried painted a negative image of those women in literature. Butler broke down people's writing to critique their ideas about gender roles and women's status. Butler's work helped reform social ideologies during the Victorian era by fighting back through campaigning.

The work done by the Ladies' National Association was successful in its efforts to demand repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts. In 1869, both Elizabeth Wolstenholme and Josephine Butler created the Ladies' National Association (LNA) as a response to the Contagious Diseases Acts throughout the previous years. Prostitutes themselves were not able to create these associations for repeal because of what they represented to people in higher classes. Middle-class women saw the Contagious Diseases Acts as a way to advocate for all women, crossing class lines. Middle- and upper-class women were able to get the Acts repealed through their alliances with like-minded men because they were respectable people who were in a moral position to be heard.⁴⁰ The Ladies' National Association was successful in its support from the Royal Commission, and the eventual suspension of the Acts. The establishment of these organizations eventually ended legislated prostitution, which was successful for the repeal campaign. The LNA

³⁹ Butler, Josephine Elizabeth, *The Education and Employment of Women* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1868), 23.

⁴⁰ Walkowitz, Judith R., *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in late-Victorian London*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1992).

published an article in 1870 that revealed the reason why they were upset with the treatment of prostitutes: “Because it is unjust to punish the sex who are the victims of a vice, and leave unpunished the sex who are the main cause, both of the vice and its dreaded consequences; and we consider that liability to arrest, forced medical treatment, and (where this is resisted) imprisonment with hard labour, to which these acts subject women, are the punishment of the most degrading kind.”⁴¹ It was agreed among different classes of women that it was unfair to subject those who were suspected of participating in prostitution to incarceration and medical examination. These women truly believed that men were responsible for the spread of the disease, so it was unfair that women be punished for their vices.

As a part of their efforts to repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts, Elizabeth Wolstenholme and Josephine Butler established a journal called *The Shield* in 1870. The journal was labelled “The Anti-Contagious Diseases Acts Associations’ Weekly Circular” for the Ladies National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts. “These Acts of Parliament deprive all women resident in the districts to which they apply of all the safeguards of personal liberty and unblemished character; they subject those submitted to their operation to indecent outrage or cruel imprisonment they lend the protection of the law to sin, aiming exclusively and professedly at rendering safe indulgence in vicious pleasures; and they tax the virtuous and the hardworking for this immoral purpose.”⁴² The newspaper explained that if some women are not safe from legislation in controlling women’s bodies, then no women are safe. Personal liberty is something

⁴¹ Butler, Josephine Elizabeth, *Personal Reminiscences of a Great Crusade* (H. Marshall, 1896).

⁴² *The Shield*, *The Anti-Contagious Diseases Acts Weekly Circular* (Tweedie for the National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts), March 7, 1870.

that is valued, and the CD Acts took away the autonomy that prostitutes had, whether they had a disease or not.

The LNA did not stop its work once the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts was complete; they focused their work on different social issues. Their work repealing the CD Acts was good practice for their part in the women's suffrage movement. In 1886, the *Englishwomen's Journal* by the LNA was advertising items such as a "Women's Suffrage Calendar," a "Women's Suffrage Journal," international societies for the welfare of women, and scholarships for women entering the field of medicine. The Women's Suffrage Calendar and Journal were two separate advertisements that mentioned all foreign and domestic matters surrounding women's suffrage.⁴³ These items were advertised because the LNA's journal targeted specific women who were interested in advancing their rights. The LNA were the first to start a movement that was organized by women for women while also becoming successful in the CD Acts' repeal. These women were among the first to develop a platform for the future of women's rights.

⁴³ Janet Horowitz Murray and Myra Stark, *The Englishwoman's Review of Social and Industrial Questions* (London: Englishwoman's Review, 1886), 15.

Conclusion

There have been many moments throughout history where men have used their power to regulate women through legislation. The position of prostitutes in Victorian society is representative of the attitudes Britons had towards women and even more specifically women of the working class. Men were able to use their high-status occupations to manipulate laws surrounding women. Through the Contagious Diseases Acts, members of Parliament, physicians, and the metropolitan “secret” police in different cities and port towns were able to control women at different lengths that were suspected of being prostitutes. Police officers had vague guidelines to follow in terms of who they should arrest, which meant that any woman who fit their stereotype of a prostitute was subject to being examined and locked away. Police officers handed off these women to medical doctors who then used physical institutions to lock women into against their will. Men were not forced to abide by any law relating to prostitution, which was a double standard that women had to face. All of these forms of regulation were made possible by legislation that painted a negative picture of prostitutes, without recognizing the demographic of men that also participated.

Advocates for the repeal of the Acts like Josephine Butler and Elizabeth Wolstenholme worked with many allies to organize safe spaces for women to speak out against male domination through legislation. Many middle- and upper-class women started to see that men were enforcing an oppressive feminine ideal on all women, not prostitutes alone. Repealers brought significance to the idea that men did not have their vices under control. To many women who advocated against the Contagious Diseases Acts, it was not the prostitute’s morality that needed to be questioned, but the men that continued to pay them. The goal of the Ladies’

National Association spread to other issues regarding women's rights. Due to the CD Acts' restriction of only a generalized group of women, the LNA and other women's rights organization were able to promote equality throughout other sectors. Increased independent financials and women's suffrage are just two of the crucial fights that women had to work for after the CD Acts were appealed.

Today, there are international movements for women's rights that work together from different places to fight current biases and stereotypes against women. Grassroots organization from women of different classes in Victorian England were significant during the time, but also today. The discrimination of women often mirrors their class and who they are connected to in society. Without organizers from the upper classes, prostitutes would have had a much harder fight to go through without support, because they were not seen as having any morality for themselves. Although wealthy women were not controlled under the Contagious Diseases Acts, they saw the problem with blaming women for the problems that men were having. Governments have repeatedly failed to acknowledge the constraints that governed the lives of the working class. Legislation has been put in place to benefit the elite men of society. It has always been important to accept the group that you are in because hidden behind socioeconomic status are the underlying stereotypes lurking, which place all women at a systemic disadvantage.

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