

UC Santa Barbara
Volume 5, Issue 1 (Spring 2025)

Title

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Journal

UC Santa Barbara Undergraduate Journal of History, 5(1)

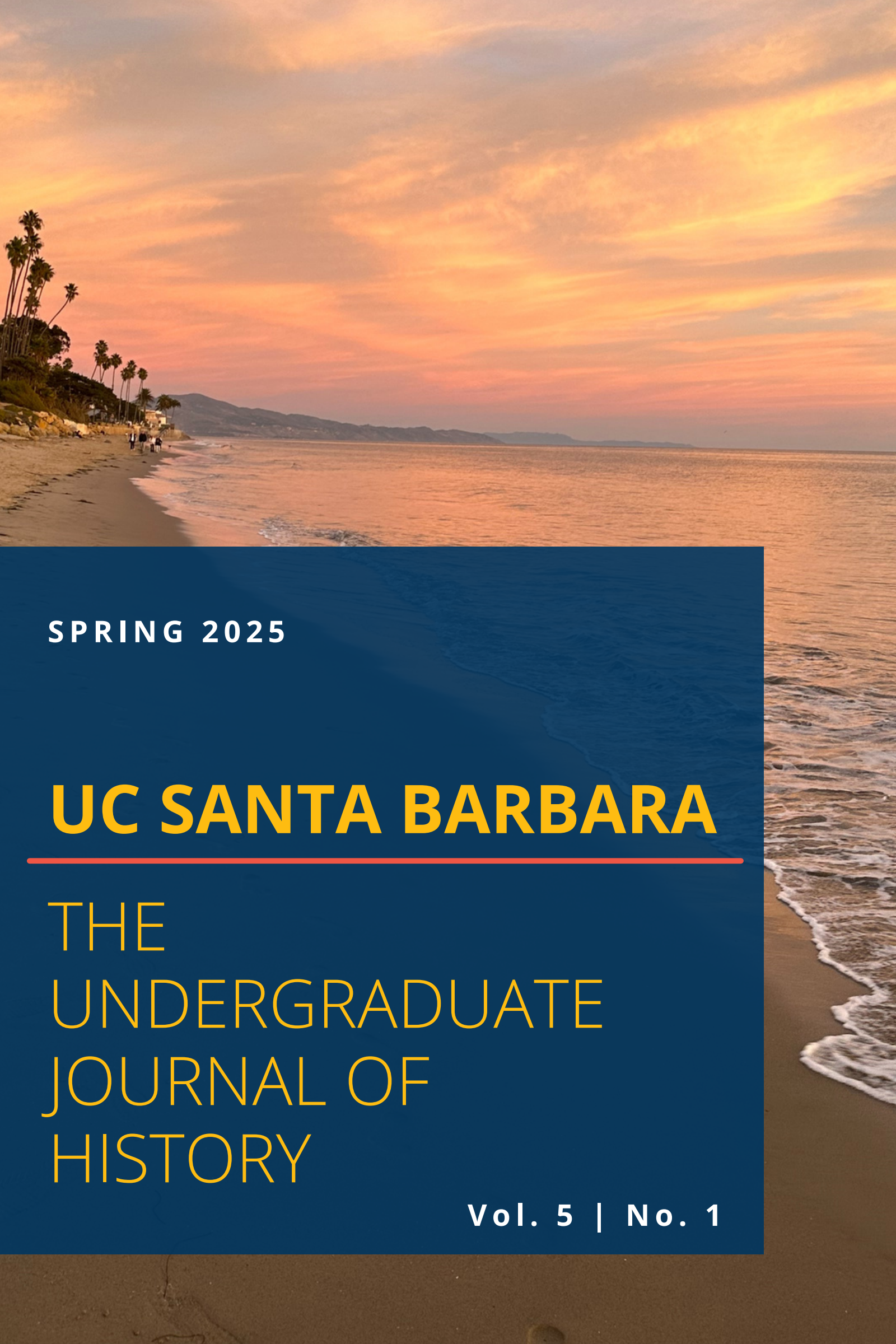
Author

Schwarz, Noah

Publication Date

2025-04-01

Peer reviewed



SPRING 2025

UC SANTA BARBARA

THE
UNDERGRADUATE
JOURNAL OF
HISTORY

Vol. 5 | No. 1

Contested Sexual Space: Britain's Socio-legal Sexual Debates and its Effects on Soho's "Immoral Geography"

*Noah Schwarz*¹

Introduction

London's Soho is a village-like area within the metropolis's West End. The half-square-mile (1.3 square kilometers) area is densely packed between four major arterial streets—Oxford Street, Coventry Street, Charing Cross Road, and Regent Street. While long being a place for newcomers to settle, Soho has also served as an apt home to creatives, writers, playwrights, and philosophers, perhaps most famously Karl Marx.² With this rise of bohemia in the neighborhood, it also became, by the mid-nineteenth century, the city's sexual space and social hub, with bars, clubs, theatre, music performances, and prostitutes all widely available in the small confines of the neighborhood.³ Amid the Second World War, Soho became a place of interaction between prostitutes and American servicemen.⁴ By the 1950s, Soho had solidified itself as a multifaceted space of subcultures, a heterosocial place for young, predominantly male creatives, writers, musicians, and members of the new left to socialize, and a site of both heterosexual and homosexual nightlife and eroticism.⁵ Since the 1770s, commercial sex in the form of female prostitution has been linked to the neighborhood, and by the mid-twentieth century, the area's female sex work had gathered significant attention from British lawmakers, the press, and the general public.⁶

¹ Noah Schwarz is a fourth-year History and Political Science student at the University of New Brunswick, Canada. His research interests lie in urban history and the history of sexuality. Immoral Geography borrowed from: Sanders-McDonagh, Erin, and Magali Peyrefitte, "Immoral Geographies and Soho's Sex Shops: Exploring Spaces of Sexual Diversity in London," *Gender, Place & Culture*, 25:3 (March 4, 2018): p. [351–67](#).

² Judith Summers, *Soho: A History of London's Most Colourful Neighborhood* (Bloomsbury Pub Ltd, 1991), p. [1, 2, 30](#).

³ This essay follows the bulk of historical literature on the topic in its use of the word 'prostitute.'

⁴ Paul Bleakley, "Cleaning up the Dirty Squad: Using the Obscene Publications Act as a Weapon of Social Control," *State Crime Journal*, 8:1 (2019): p. [19–38](#).

⁵ Catharine Arnold, *The Sexual History of London: From Roman Londinium to the Swinging City--Lust, Vice, and Desire across the Ages*, First U.S. edition (St. Martin's Press, 2010), p. 306; Mort, *Capital Affairs*, p. 212-13.

⁶ Mort, *Capital Affairs*, p. 232-34; Male sex work has historically been framed as a piece of legislation concerning homosexuality, while female sex work is framed as legislation concerning prostitutes. For

As Henri Lefebvre theorized in his work *De L'État* (of the State), the state and space are banded together, and “the production of social space as such [is] an edifice of hierarchically ordered institutions, of laws and conventions upheld by values.”⁷ This paper examines the relationship between social values, the state, and Soho’s reputation as a space for female prostitution in the last fifty years of the twentieth century.⁸ In doing so, it asserts that the transformation of Soho’s female sex-working space reflects recurring socio-legal trends that solidify the notion of a public-private sexual binary. While the sexualization of the public environment is seen as indecent, the liberalization of sex within private spaces is acceptable; the female sex worker is marginalized regardless of whether her trade is public or private. A set of examinations underpins these assertions. First, the essay looks at the 1950s social mores regarding public solicitation by prostitutes and their effects on Soho’s sexual space. Next, it examines a set of ‘permissive’ laws that gave greater individual freedom in private space. It then looks at how the laws examined, meant to keep sex private, had effectively given Soho’s space to a host of indoor sex industries. The final piece of analysis links Soho’s contemporary gentrification to the 1950s moral panics regarding street prostitution.

Historiography

The study of Soho was pioneered by Judith Summers in 1991 with her work *Soho*. The work’s ninth chapter, “In the Grip of Vice,” focuses mainly on exacerbating notions of public and private decency after the creation of the *Wolfenden Report*. While Summers concentrates primarily on the neighborhood’s community, her analysis does spend some time critiquing the 1959 *Street Offences Act* or, as she names it, “the pimp’s charter,” for the consequences it had on the female-sex worker’s autonomy.⁹ Moreover, Summers argues that another piece of legislation, the 1959 *Obscene Publications Act*, aimed at targeting hard porn, was just as problematic, allowing for legal objectivity and corruption

more see: Victor Michinello and John Geoffrey Scott, eds. [*Male Sex Work and Society*](#), (Harrington Park Press, LLC, 2014).

⁷ Henri Lefebvre, *Space State and Place: Selected Essays*, ed. Neil Brenner and Stuart Elden (University of Minnesota Press, 2009), p. 224.

⁸ In this essay, “Sexual Space” is used as a term to define the neighbourhood’s (Soho) sexual character.

⁹ The *Street Offences Act* was enacted in July 1959, with the principal aim of limiting prostitution by making it an offence to “loiter or solicit for the purposes of prostitution.” See J. Laite, *Common Prostitutes and Ordinary Citizens: Commercial Sex in London, 1885-1960* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2011), p. 201.

to overburden the neighborhood with pornography.¹⁰ Frank Mort's 1996 *Cultures of Consumption* and 2010 *Capital Affairs* both provide an understanding of the *Street Offences Act*'s wrongdoings, arguing that it drove prostitutes off the streets, allowing for "a vacuum" of new forms of commercial sex to take over Soho's space.¹¹ Judith Walkowitz's 2012 book on Soho, *Nights Out*, makes no mention of the *Street Offences Act* but heavily critiques the *Obscene Publications Act*, arguing that pornbrokers could influence legal action. She states, "The entire Obscene Publications Squad was on his [Bernie Silver, a Soho sex entrepreneur] payroll."¹² Yet, newer works from Paul Bleakley and Oliver Carter contend this idea put forward by Walkowitz, arguing that it was the *Obscene Publications* Enforcement Squad that was setting the bribes and blackmailing the porn dealers.¹³ While these works focus on the effects of the acts on Soho, they spend little time explaining the context surrounding the social mores that triggered these debates. Scholars from different eras—Jeffrey Weeks in 1982, Helen Self in 2003, Julia Laite in 2011, and Laite and Samantha Caislin in 2020—fill this missing gap. They agree that the media, following the Festival of Britain and the London Coronation, played a significant role in creating the *Wolfenden Committee* and the Subsequent 1957 *Wolfenden Report*—an examination into prostitution that would lead to the 1959 *Street Offences Act*.¹⁴

Moreover, while much of the work is missing the voices of sex workers—likely for reasons outlined in Gilfoyle's "Prostitutes in the Archive: Problems and Possibilities in Documenting the History of Sexuality"—most secondary sources examined have analyzed "the prostitute" through a revisionist historical lens. This means that, as Gilfoyle states, "these historians have rescued prostitution

¹⁰ Judith Summers, *Soho*, p. 214-215; *The Obscene Publications Act*, made law in July 1959, intended to "provide for the protection of literature; and to strengthen the law concerning pornography." See "[Obscene Publications Act 1959](#)" (King's Printer of Acts of Parliament).

¹¹ Frank Mort, *Cultures of Consumption: Masculinities and Social Space in Late Twentieth-Century Britain* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 156; Frank Mort. *Capital Affairs: London and the Making of the Permissive Society*. (Yale University Press, 2010).

¹² Judith R. Walkowitz, *Nights out: Life in Cosmopolitan London* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), p. 295.

¹³ Bleakley, "Cleaning up the Dirty Squad." p. 26; Oliver Carter, "Original Climax Films: Historicizing the British Hardcore Pornography Film Business," *Porn Studies* 5:4 (October 2, 2018): p. 411–25, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23268743.2018.1489301>, p. 416.

¹⁴ J. Laite, *Common Prostitutes and Ordinary Citizens: Commercial Sex in London, 1885-1960* (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2011), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/unb/detail.action?docID=851034>; Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics, and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800*, 2nd ed, Themes in British Social History (London: Longman, 1989); Helen J. Self, [Prostitution, Women, and Misuse of the Law: The Fallen Daughters of Eve](#), 1 online resource (Frank Cass, 2003).

from the literature of deviance and crime. Prostitutes are considered not ‘fallen women’ but rather females who made rational and sometimes desperate choices when confronted with limited possibilities.”¹⁵ This shift reflects changes from sex being not simply studied as a facet of biology but as a function of social structures and constructs; this idea was famously championed by Michel Foucault in his *History of Sexuality* works published in the late twentieth century.¹⁶

The sex trade was not limited to female prostitutes in Soho; much of the space was focused on other forms of commercial sex. Since the 1990s, the study of Soho has looked at the effects that the expansion of sex establishments has had on the space. Recent studies have provided a much more sophisticated analysis of the unfortunate reality that, by kicking out the ‘vice,’ the Soho Society allowed financial speculators to take advantage of a neo-liberalized council and gentrify the neighborhood through “a... neoliberal and hegemonic form of gentrification.”¹⁷ Moreover, they argue that it was not only the Soho Society– the local community conservation and improvement organization aimed to “preserve the character” of Soho, and to protect the interests of Soho’s residents, its traders and its craftsmen–that removed sexual businesses but also the council led, strategic gentrification process enacted by the Westminster Council in the early 1990s that specifically targeted sex shops in an attempt to ‘sanitize’ the neighborhood.¹⁸ Overall, exploring gentrification as a strategy to kick out the ‘vice’ needs more attention from scholars in the future.

This paper aims to add to the literature by bridging the study of Soho with the broader study of UK “vice laws.” In doing so, it frames Soho not solely as a *sexual space*, but as a microcosm of England’s socio-legal attitudes concerning sex. This is a unique interpretation, as studies on Soho often only mention law reform in passing. Conversely, studies on UK law reform only mention Soho with little analysis of the neighborhood’s sexual geography itself, despite Soho’s long-standing notoriety and

¹⁵ Gilfoyle, “Prostitutes in the Archives: Problems and Possibilities in Documenting the History of Sexuality,” p. 522-23.

¹⁶ Gilfoyle, “Prostitutes in the Archives: Problems and Possibilities in Documenting the History of Sexuality,” p. 517. This framing is seen throughout the works examined and is most apparent in Laite (2011), Laite and Caislin (2020), and Self (2003).

¹⁷ Erin Sanders-McDonagh, Magali Peyrefitte, and Matt Ryalls, “Sanitising the City: Exploring Hegemonic Gentrification in London’s Soho,” *Sociological Research Online* 21:3 (2016), p. [128-33](#).

¹⁸ Sanders-McDonagh, Peyrefitte, and Ryalls, “Sanitising the City: Exploring Hegemonic Gentrification in London’s Soho,” p. 128–33; Marco Venturi, “Out of Soho, Back into the Closet: Re-Thinking the London Gay Community,” (University College London, 2018), p. 92; for more on Soho society see: “[The Soho Society](#),” The Soho Society, accessed December 26, 2024.

infamy, in both popular culture and parliamentary debates, as the English capital's "hot-bed of vice."¹⁹ By focusing on Soho, this paper elucidates the direct impact that legal reform can have on the social geography of a space; in this case, how sex law reform can directly influence Soho, its sex working space, and the people within that space. Using Soho as a case study allows for a critical understanding of the impacts of these reforms. Moreover, this paper adds to the literature by linking the analogous socio-legal attitudes towards Soho's sex workers in the mid-twentieth century and early twenty-first century.²⁰

The Shame of London and the Removal of Female Prostitution in Public Space (1950-1959)

Soho's female prostitutes began to face increasing legal challenges triggered by *spatial panic*. In the early post-war era, Soho was, as "it had been for many decades: the most popular site for commercial sex" in the capital city.²¹ The prostitutes in Soho were reliant on public space to solicit and attract clientele; Julia Laite, in *Common Prostitutes*, describes the spatial aspects of the trade in Soho, stating:

"In its tangle of streets, women from Britain and Europe catered to a large and varied clientele, walking their beats and dropping into lively cafés, mingling with the nightclub and theatre-going traffic, and dining at late-night restaurants...rooms were expensive, and some women chose to forgo the overhead in favour of using alleys, St. Anne's Churchyard, [and] darkened doors."²²

Importantly, in the early post-war era, due to the departure of troops and subsequent loss of income, prostitutes in Soho and London generally began working more nights. In the Metropolitan Police's C Division—Soho's division—officers noticed that women worked five or six nights a week, compared to

¹⁹ Summers, *Soho*, p. 214; Judith R. Walkowitz, "The Emergence of Cosmopolitan City," in *The New Blackwell Companion to the City*, ed. Gary Bridge and Sophie Watson (John Wiley & Sons, 2011), p. 421-22, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/unb/detail.action?docID=675232>; "Private Places of Entertainment (Licensing) Bill [h.l.] (Hansard, 3 February 1967)," accessed December 29, 2024, <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1967/feb/03/private-places-of-entertainment>; "Obscene Publications Bill (Hansard, 3 June 1964)," accessed December 29, 2024, <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1964/jun/03/obscene-publications-bill>.

²⁰ Based on the literature, it seems the UK's primary concern regarding prostitution was its public visibility, not public health.

²¹ Laite, *Common Prostitutes and Ordinary Citizens*, p. 173; for more on interwar prostitution and prostitution in second-world war Britain see: Stefan Slater, "Pimps, Police and Filles de Joie: Foreign Prostitution in Interwar London," *The London Journal* 32:1 (March 1, 2007): p. 53-74, <https://doi.org/10.1179/174963207X172911> and Judith R. Walkowitz, *Nights out: Life in Cosmopolitan London* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).

²² Laite, *Common Prostitutes and Ordinary Citizens*, p. 173.

their wartime four. This led to increased arrests in the 1950s, with 6,501 arrests in London in 1950 and 11,173 arrests in 1955.²³

Amid this rise, London hosted two important events—the Festival of Britain in 1951 and the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953. These events triggered, as Weeks states in *Sex, Politics, and Society*, “moral panics about the visibility of prostitution in the imperial capital ... particularly concerning the influx of foreign visitors.”²⁴ As Smart adds in her work *Controlling Women*, this panic stemmed from “the shameful reputation that the capital was acquiring as the vice centre of the Western world.”²⁵ These ideas proliferated through papers leading up to the coronation; in November 1952, *Reynold’s News* wrote on the “prostitutes who planned to invade London in Coronation Year,” and another article in *People*, in May 1953, shortly before the coronation, detailed how the entirety of Soho had been engulfed by ‘vice.’²⁶ Thus, in the 1950s, the increase in prostitution and arrests created panic around the notion that ‘vice’ was pervasive to the capital’s reputation and too visible to the public spectacle.

These concerns about prostitution in public spaces partially ushered in reform to laws regarding sex and sexuality. The perception that London’s street prostitution was out of control and a string of high-profile cases relating to homosexual offenses motivated the creation of a new committee on April 28th, 1954—The *Wolfenden Committee*.²⁷ As Frank Mort elucidates in *Capital Affairs*, prostitution and homosexuality were grouped together due not only to their public attention but also because of the “extensive historical pedigrees” held by the two forms of gendered sexuality.²⁸ Likely due to the current and historical saliency of prostitution and homosexuality, the committee received, as *the Times* reports, “a warm welcome in the House [of Commons] ” for “a committee to examine the subject of homosexual offences and the law relating to prostitution.”²⁹ The eventual *Wolfenden Report*

²³ Laite, *Common Prostitutes and Ordinary Citizens*, p. 175

²⁴ Weeks, *Sex, Politics, and Society*, p. 240.

²⁵ Carol Smart, *Controlling Women: The Normal and the Deviant*, ed. Bridget Hutter and Gillian Williams (Croom Helm in association with the Oxford University Women’s Studies Committee, 1981), [p. 50](#).

²⁶ Laite, *Common Prostitutes and Ordinary Citizens*, p. 182; almost every newspaper ran an article on “London Vice.”

²⁷ Laite and Caslin, *Wolfenden’s Women: Prostitution in Postwar Britain*, p. 22; Weeks, *Sex, Politics, and Society*, p. 24; The National Archives, “[The Long Road to Reform: The Wolfenden Report](#),” (The National Archives, July 20, 2017).

²⁸ Frank Mort, *Capital Affairs: London and the Making of the Permissive Society*, p. 139.

²⁹ “Homosexual Offences and Solicitation,” *The Times*, April 29, 1954, The Times Digital Archive; There were similar concerns surrounding the prostitute in public spaces across Europe. For examples from Germany, the Netherlands and the USSR see Annalisa Martin, “‘Cleaning up the Cityscape’:

argued that the function of law concerning the ‘deviant’ sexual behavior of homosexuality and prostitution should be framed to “preserve public order and decency...to protect the citizens from what is offensive...and, to provide a safeguard against exploitation and corruption.”³⁰

This framing is evident through the solutions put forward regarding prostitution by the committee in their 1957 report.³¹ The document emphasized that the problem with prostitution was not the sexual aspect but the *public* nuisance aspect. It states:

“It is not our view the function of the law to intervene in the private lives of citizens or to seek any particular pattern of behaviour...we do not believe it to be the function of the law to attempt to cover all fields of sexual behaviour...the criminal law does not cover all such actions at the present time: For instance, adultery and fornication are not offences...Nor indeed is prostitution as such.”³²

Instead, prostitution and homosexuality, to the *Wolfenden Committee*, were only criminal if they damaged “public order and decency.” In terms of prostitution, the act asserted that the law should focus solely on street prostitutes, not clients, as the prostitutes “parade themselves more habitually and openly than their prospective customers and do so by their continual presence affront to the decency of the ordinary citizen. In doing so, they create a nuisance which the law is entitled to recognize and deal with.”³³ These notions repudiate the framing of the earlier 1885 *Criminal Law Amendment Act* that strictly suppressed brothels and criminalized homosexual acts.³⁴ Importantly, as Helen Self analyzes, the 1885 Act was a large reason for the influx of street prostitutes as women were being pushed out “of

Managing Commercial Sex and City Space in Cologne, 1956–1972,” *European Review of History: Revue Européenne d’histoire* 29:2 (March 4, 2022): p. [311–30](#); Manuel B. Aalbers and Michaël Deinema, “Placing Prostitution: The Spatial–Sexual Order of Amsterdam and Its Growth Coalition,” *City* 16:1–2 (April 1, 2012): p. [129–45](#); Siobhán Hearne, “Selling Sex under Socialism: Prostitution in the Post-War USSR,” *European Review of History: Revue Européenne d’histoire* 29:2 (March 4, 2022): p. [290–310](#).

³⁰ “[Homosexual Offences and Prostitution](#),” (Hansard, 26 November 1958), accessed December 30, 2024

³¹ “House Of Commons,” *The Times*, April 29, 1954, The Times Digital Archive; the report is often viewed as highly representative of John Stuart Mills’ *Of Liberty*

³² Jo Phoenix, “Governing Prostitution: New Formations, Old Agendas Urban Governance and Legality from Below,” *Canadian Journal of Law and Society* 22:2 (2007): p. 73–94., p. 78; emphasis added by author.

³³ Phoenix, “Governing Prostitution,” p. 78.

³⁴ “[1885 Labouchere Amendment](#),” (UK Parliament), accessed December 30, 2024.

their accommodation and onto the streets.”³⁵ In short, the report spurned previous ideas and was shaped by the idea that prostitutes were a public nuisance rather than concerns about sexual activity.³⁶

The idea, expounded by the *Wolfenden Report*, that prostitutes were a risk to decency in public spaces was solidified by law in 1959. The panics propagated by the Festival of Britain, the coronation, the media, and the *Wolfenden committee's* report incited the 1959 *Street Offences Act*.³⁷ In her work, Smart argues that this string of small ‘moral panics’ in the 1950s created the singular ‘moral panic’ in the form of the *Street Offences Act*. She states: “Hall et al. (1978) have defined the moral panic as a principal form of ideological consciousness through which the silenced majority comes to support coercive forms of control... in the case of soliciting, the moral panics of the 1950s achieved precisely this end. The 1959 act, based almost entirely on Wolfenden’s recommendations, was warmly received.”³⁸ In a 1959 debate regarding the then Street Offences bill, MP Rees-Davies argued, “The Country’s problem is that unfortunately our tourists and our young people who go to London see this filthy, shameful sight on the streets. It is a very bad thing, and we must deal with it.”³⁹ Rees-Davies’ comments show that the early concerns regarding residents’ and tourists’ perceptions were still at the top of legislators’ minds—and the central justification for the act’s passing.⁴⁰

The 1959 *Street Offences Act* allowed authorities to control and repress the prostitute’s ability to practice her trade within public space. The Act did not govern or repress the sexual acts involved with prostitution. Instead, it governed and repressed the prostitute’s right to public space—only the visibility of prostitution was illegal. This framing of the law made loitering and soliciting on public “streets” (including bridges, roads, lanes, subways, squares, and alleys) a hazardous practice as sex-working women suspected of such action were given only two warnings before being charged—and

³⁵ Importantly, as Helen Self analyzes, the 1885 Act was a large reason for the influx of street prostitutes as women were being pushed out “of their accommodation and onto the streets.” See Helen Self, “History Repeating Itself: The Regulation of Prostitution and Trafficking,” *Law, Crime and History* (2004): p. 1.

³⁶ While it didn’t shape the report, there were concerns that young men who went to prostitutes for pleasure would never learn the value of sex within a monogamous married relationship. See Weeks, *Sex, Politics, and Society*, p. 240.

³⁷ The Street Offences Act is based almost entirely on the Wolfenden Report. See Smart, *Controlling Women*, p. 52.

³⁸ Smart, *Controlling Women*, p. 52.

³⁹ “[Street Offences Bill](#),” January 29, 1959.

⁴⁰ Weeks argues that the Tory government rushed to pass the act, using global perceptions as the primary reason. See Weeks, *Sex, Politics, and Society*, p. 240.

given the legal title of a common prostitute.⁴¹ The 1959 Act's impetus on control of sex workers reflected long-standing ideas surrounding the use of control of women to protect the general public in Britain; the *Contagious Disease Acts* of 1864 and 1866 gave the authorities the power to stop any women suspected to be a prostitute in public and bring them before a magistrate to legally identify them as "a common prostitute," and test them for venereal diseases.⁴²

Moreover, the *Street Offences Act* enacted heavier penalties for street prostitution. The maximum fine was forty shillings before the act, and imprisonment was not a consequence. The implementation of the act allowed for a ten-pound fine for the first offense, a twenty-five-pound fine for a second offense, and, for a third offense, a twenty-five-pound fine, imprisonment, or both.⁴³ Due to these increasing penalties, the legislation was effective in its purpose. The legislation forced a mass exodus of street prostitutes in the city— one that happened "almost overnight."⁴⁴ This departure was seen as triumphant to some, such as Law Scholar J.E. Williams, who flaunted "the success which it [the act] seems to enjoy" and rejoiced that overseas visitors would no longer mention the "London prostitute."⁴⁵ Similarly, while opinions differed between legislators, it is clear that some were very content; Mr. Brooke's words from a 1963 session elucidate this. He states, "The main purpose of the Act was to deal with loitering or loitering prostitutes in public places. It has been successful."⁴⁶ Similar beliefs were expressed by Lord Robert Chorley, who claims, in 1968, that "the 1959 Act was effective in improving conditions in the streets of London."⁴⁷ Yet, in reality, the street solicitation would only result in a new form of spatial 'vice'—Soho's commercialized sexual space.

Out of Sight, Out of Mind (1959-1960)

⁴¹ "[Street Offences Act 1959](#)," Text (Statute Law Database), accessed December 27, 2024; "Governing Prostitution," p. 78. Smart argues that the 1959 act was only a reformulation of the 19th Century Vagrancy Acts, 'changing the definition of a common prostitute from an "idle and disorderly person" to a public nuisance. In doing so, the socio-legal perception remained the same. See Weeks, *Sex, Politics, and Society*, p. 52.

⁴² Margaret Hamilton, "Opposition to the Contagious Diseases Acts, 1864-1886," *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 10:1 (1978): p. [14-27](#); F.B Smith, "The Contagious Diseases Acts Reconsidered," *Social History of Medicine* 3:2 (August 1, 1990): p. [197-215](#).

⁴³ J. E. Hall Williams, "The Street Offences Act, 1959," *The Modern Law Review* 23:2 (1960): p. 176.

⁴⁴ Laite, *Common Prostitutes and Ordinary Citizens*, p. 115.

⁴⁵ Williams, "The Street Offences Act, 1959," p. 176.

⁴⁶ "[Street Offences Act](#)" (Hansard, 4 April 1963), accessed December 27, 2024.

⁴⁷ "[Street Offences Bill](#)" [H.L.] (Hansard, 8 February 1968)," accessed December 30, 2024.

As the *Street Offences Act* came down on female prostitutes, removing them from the urban fabric, the commercial, indoor sex industry and the lucrative “soho typescript” trade prospered, creating a new kind of commercialized sexual space. As mentioned, the *Street Offences Act of 1959* was not interested in regulating indoor prostitution. Instead, it was solely committed to getting prostitutes out of the public eye.⁴⁸ This led sex entrepreneurs to take advantage of a new commercial sex landscape—one based indoors. In her work *Common Prostitutes and Ordinary Citizens*, Julia Laite argues that the most critical effect of the *Street Offences Act 1959* was that “the push off the streets fed an already booming business of commercial sex real estate.”⁴⁹ The inability of prostitutes to practice their trade on the streets of Soho led to two opportunities for sex entrepreneurs: the loss of street prostitution left a void in the market, and it led to an influx of sex workers searching for an indoor space to work, moving to ‘legitimate’ strip clubs, peepshows or brothels “masquerading as clubs.”⁵⁰ Helen Self, in her work *Prostitution, Women and Misuse of the Law*, argues that these new developments “led to an overall increase in prostitution and a general lowering of sexual morality” as more men felt comfortable searching for sex indoors than outdoors.⁵¹

In addition, sex entrepreneurs began taking advantage of the new street-prostitute-free environment via a process of extensive marketing and property development in Soho. Various sex entrepreneurs who were already established started pushing more ‘vice’ into the area by acquiring cheap leases or purchasing inexpensive property to support clubs, porn shops, and cinemas. Walkowitz notes, in her work *Nights Out*, that one entrepreneur, Bernie Silver, operated a sex-and-property empire. Silver purchased twenty-five to thirty premises within Soho and leased them out to the new forms of sex business coming out of the new opportunities handed by the *Street Offences Act*: neon-laden strip clubs, sex cinemas, sex shops, call-girl establishments, and peepshows all proliferated in the area.⁵² While these establishments often pushed—or broke—the boundaries of the law and were

⁴⁸ Phil Hubbard, “Cleansing the Metropolis: Sex Work and the Politics of Zero Tolerance,” *Urban Studies* 41:9 (August 2004): p. 1687–1702, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0042098042000243101>, 1692; Laite, *Common Prostitutes and Ordinary Citizens*, p. 207.

⁴⁹ Laite, *Common Prostitutes and Ordinary Citizens*, p. 207.

⁵⁰ Mort, *Cultures of Consumption*, 156; Walkowitz, *Nights Out*, p. 294; Brothels existed prior to the Street Offences Act, but the act furthered the inability for a prostitute’s agency and autonomy. See Arnold, *The Sexual History of London*, p. 306.

⁵¹ Helen J. Self, *Prostitution, Women, and Misuse of the Law: The Fallen Daughters of Eve*, 1 online resource (viii, 318 pages) vols. (London: Frank Cass, 2003), p. [209](#).

⁵² Walkowitz, *Nights Out*, p. 295; Mort, *Cultures of Consumption*, p. 156; Sanders-McDonagh, Peyrefitte, and Ryalls, “Sanitising the City,” p. 2.; Laite, *Common Prostitutes and Ordinary Citizens*, p. 209.

frequently subject to police raids, the complexities of national and local jurisdictional powers made it difficult to shut them down, and they were able to remain open; many of these establishments had obtained leases legally only to bend the law within the buildings.⁵³ Regarding this shift from outdoor to indoor ‘vice,’ the Josephine Butler Society—an advocacy group for the safety of sex workers whose namesake – argued that, as their report states, “the atmosphere engendered by many clubs in Soho is suggestive and stimulating to sexual desire to a degree fully equal to that of outdoor solicitation in the streets.”⁵⁴ Thus, the *Street Offences Act* created a new form of Soho ‘vice’—new indoor spaces of sexual ‘immorality.’

Not only did the ‘vice’ stay in Soho, but the women engaged in prostitution became increasingly subject to mistreatment and marginalization. The move from the streets to indoor spaces caused by the *Street Offences Act* forced prostitutes into, as Judith Summers states in *Soho*, “the arms of pimps and organized criminals.”⁵⁵ As sex workers were unable to solicit for customers on the street, many now became entirely reliant on pimps to publicize their services or arrange meetings in indoor spaces—strip clubs, saunas, and massage parlors. Similarly, for some ex-prostitutes, their new jobs as hostesses put them in an uncomfortable situation. Men searching for a prostitute were often convinced by solicitors to pay entry into a club where they may meet one, yet to maintain legality, some clubs didn’t allow sex within the building, often forcing women to exit into unknown situations.⁵⁶ In her work, Laite outlines some of the significant consequences that the privatization of prostitution had, stating:

“There was evidence throughout the period [early-post *Street Offences Act*] that young women were very vulnerable indoors as well. The ASHM [Working Party to study the Street Offences Act] enquiry into the workings of the new act [Street Offences Act] found that after beginning

⁵³ Phil Hubbard, Roger Matthews, and Jane Scoular, “[Legal Geographies—Controlling Sexually Oriented Businesses: Law, Licensing, and the Geographies of a Controversial Land Use](#),” *Urban Geography*, February 1, 2009; Bill Thomson, *Soft Core* (London: Cassel, 1994), p. 42; There was also corruption within the Clubs and Vice Unit. See Bleakley, “Cleaning up the Dirty Squad,” p. 22.

⁵⁴ Laite and Caslin, *Wolfenden’s Women: Prostitution in Postwar Britain*, p. 22; (Josephine Butler Society –Northumberland Archives), accessed December 27, 2024; Josephine Butler was an advocate for the abolition of vice, particularly the Contagious Diseases Act, for more on Butler see her autobiographical memoir: Josephine Elizabeth Grey Butler, [Josephine E. Butler, an Autobiographical Memoir](#) (J. W. Arrowsmith; Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co., Ltd, 1909).

⁵⁵ Judith Summers, *Soho*, p. 214.

⁵⁶ Judith Summers, *Soho*, p. 214.

indoors, the girls had less freedom to choose her customers, to pursue her profession without the aid of ponces, and to withdraw from the life of prostitution.”⁵⁷

These consequences were pointed out by parliamentarian Benjamin Parkin in 1964, who asked for “an enquiry into changes in the pattern of the commercialised exploitations of vice since the passing of the Street Offences Act.” The honorable Alan Fitch expresses similar concerns, stating, “since the Act began to operate, the call-girl racket has increased.”⁵⁸ Yet these inquiries were denied; in response to Benjamin Parkin, the Secretary of the State for the Home Department, Henry Brookes, argued that “the main change since the passing of the Street Offences Act has been the removal of prostitutes from the street” and that there was “no evidence that a further inquiry is necessary.”⁵⁹ A similar argument was made in response to Fitch by Under-Secretary of State, Dennis Vosper, who belies Fitch’s complaints, arguing that the act had “been remarkably successful.”⁶⁰

The dangers were even worse for those who stayed on the street. As women fled from prostitution spaces—such as Soho—into more liminal, less-neon-laden spaces or men’s vehicles, they were subject to increased dangers.⁶¹ In the four years after the *Street Offences Act*, there were eight prostitutes violently murdered in London.⁶² Due to all these consequences, Laite argues, in her contribution to *A Global History of Prostitution*, that “the legacy of the 1959 Street Offences Act...created a hierarchy of commercial sex in which street sex workers became the poorest, most vulnerable, and most marginalized.”⁶³ In short, the *Street Offences Act* and subsequent switch to indoor commercial sex in Soho did not remove the ‘vice.’ It only created a more dangerous and precarious environment for sex workers in a new sexual space. This switch would create a booming ‘red-light district.’

The Permissive (if private) Moment and the Spatial Takeover of Vice in Soho (1959-1970s)

The separation of private and public ‘morality’ that underscored the *Wolfenden Report* and the *Street Offences Act* became the socio-legal norm of managing sex in the late 1950s and early 1960s. This separation would allow for more ‘permissive’ private sexual practices and, in turn, allow for Soho’s

⁵⁷Laite, *Common Prostitutes and Ordinary Citizens*, p. 209.

⁵⁸ “Street Offences Act (Hansard, 5 November 1959).”

⁵⁹“[Vice](#)” (Hansard, 11 March 1964), accessed December 27, 2024.

⁶⁰ “Street Offences Act (Hansard, 5 November 1959).”

⁶¹ Laite, *Common Prostitutes and Ordinary Citizens*, p. 192-198.

⁶² Laite, *Common Prostitutes and Ordinary Citizens*, p. 209.

⁶³ Julia Laite, “[A Global History of Prostitution: London](#),” in *Selling Sex in the City: A Global History of Prostitution, the 1600s-2000s* (Brill, 2017), p. 135.

sexual space to expand.⁶⁴ While the *Street Offences Act* represented concerns about keeping the vice out of sight, the 1959 *Obscene Publications Act* allowed—unintentionally—for ‘vice,’ in the form of pornography, an already blossoming, albeit hidden, industry in 1950s Soho, to come out of Soho’s hidden backrooms.⁶⁵ The act intended to adjust the UK’s censorship laws by permitting promiscuous artistic and literary works to be consumed privately while ensuring that works that, as the act states, “as taken as a whole, tend to deprave and corrupt persons...likely to read, see or hear them” be removed.⁶⁶ Yet, this act lacked clarity and made no enumeration of what specific materials should be considered explicit, instead basing “obscene” entirely on the subjective decisions of officers and judges. This ambiguity led to confusion surrounding what was considered ‘obscene’; works of art were being declared as obscene and removed from Soho’s public sphere—the streets and shops— while pornographic books and magazines were displayed without issue.⁶⁷ Thus, the *Obscene Publications Act*, in practice, was paradoxical in its intention, allowing pornography to enter the public sphere. Importantly, the new act could be easily skewed to fit the needs of Soho’s porn industry.

Due to the porn trade’s economic possibilities, Soho pornbrokers and corrupt officers used the ill-defined regulations to their advantage. The metropolitan police, in response to the *Obscene*

⁶⁴ Jeffrey Weeks coined the term ‘Permissive moment’. See Weeks, *Sex, Politics, and Society*, p. 252.

⁶⁵ Judith Summers, *Soho*, p. 214; In the early 1950s, Soho became the central location of an alternative economy of illegal pornography. Local pornography entrepreneurs, in the form of gangsters, brothel and bookshop owners, began commissioning the new locals, the oft-financially deprived writers, to produce pornographic manuscripts. This Pornography, colloquially called “Soho Typescripts,” and the alternative economy it rested on relied on a series of bribes between bookshop owners and selected policemen. To limit police suspicion (from those not involved in the trade), the bookshops divided themselves into two sections: a front area with shelves full of legally accepted material and a hidden back area in which the shelves had the illegal vice. In 1958, an anonymous informant described the space; they stated: “The outer part displays more or less legal stuff. At the end of the shop, there is a counter, door, partition...behind the partition are boxes of roneoed obscene books.” To keep this back room (full of gay and straight erotica) safe from the law, customers needed to make what Wickstead calls “coded requests,” asking if there was “anything new” or “anything more curious.” The 1950s were marked by the rise of Soho “typescripts,” these pornographic manuscripts would be the beginning of a mass influx of pornography in the neighbourhood, transforming it into an increasingly commercial sexual space. For more, see Wickstead. Helen Wickstead, “Soho Typescripts: Handmade Obscene Books in Post-War London Bookshops,” *Porn Studies* 7:2 (April 2, 2020): p. [187–211](#).

⁶⁶ Weeks, *Sex, Politics, and Society*, p. 265; Ben Mechen, “Dirty Magazines, Clean Consciences: Men and Pornography in the 1970s,” in *Men and Masculinities in Modern Britain* (Manchester University Press, 2024), p. [253–68](#); L. Z. Sigel, “Censorship in Inter-War Britain: Obscenity, Spectacle, and the Workings of the Liberal State,” *Journal of Social History* 45:1 (September 1, 2011): p. [61–83](#).

⁶⁷ Judith Summers, *Soho*, p. 215.

Publications Act, created the “Obscene Publications Squad”—colloquially the “Dirty Squad”—to patrol and remove pornographic and other obscene material from Soho’s streets.⁶⁸ Yet, the squad was quickly enticed by the economic opportunities at play and began using their powers for personal monetary gain.⁶⁹ They did so by creating an unofficial licensing system where pornbrokers would have to pay a monthly fee, typically 100-200 pounds per shop, to sell and display their pornography; shop owners who ignored these demands would be raided and arrested.⁷⁰ Moreover, after 1973, when the corrupt officers were caught and prosecuted, the “ironic result” was that pornography was able to proliferate without any control. Thus, regardless of the efforts to keep pornography out of the public eye, it remained and grew in Soho, with five shops in 1955 (before the act) and fifty-four in 1978.⁷¹

If the *Obscene Publications Act* strengthened the ‘vice’ in Soho’s space, so did the 1968 abolition of theatre and cinema censorship. These acts, again trying to liberalize what was allowed in private, indoor spaces, allowed for Soho’s ‘sex theatres’ to prosper by removing the need for theatre scripts to be submitted to Lord Chamberlain—the national censorship board—for approval and by allowing much more explicit portrayals of sexuality on stage. As for cinemas, film censorship was modified, allowing for more visual openness, with particular reference to the sexualization of the female body.⁷² By 1978, there were thirty-nine cinemas, cinema clubs, and sex theatres, such as Raymond’s Revue bar, which

⁶⁸ Bleakley, “Cleaning up the Dirty Squad,” p. 26.

⁶⁹ Bleakley, “Cleaning up the Dirty Squad,” p. 26. Oliver Carter, “Original Climax Films: Historicizing the British Hardcore Pornography Film Business,” *Porn Studies* 5:4 (October 2, 2018): p. 411–25. p. [416](#).

⁷⁰ Carter, “Original Climax Films,” p. 416; Due to the financial incentives involved with ‘extreme’ pornography, the pornography in Soho became more and more ‘hard’ during this time. See Wickstead, “Soho Typescripts.”

⁷¹ Wickstead, “Soho Typescripts,” p. 13; Thomson, *Soft Core*, p. 45.

⁷² Morrison, p. 30; Weeks, p. 264.

had prospered.⁷³ Thus, Soho's commercialized sexual space was, in part, a product of a set of laws that were intended to liberalize private sexual promiscuity. Soho's sexual space would be met with scrutiny shortly after these developments.

“A Vice Closes in on the Vice”: The Fall of Soho's Sexual Space (1970s-1980s)⁷⁴

The *Wolfenden Report*, *Street Offences Act*, *Obscene Publications Act*, and the liberalization of theatre and cinema all had the intention to keep ‘indecent’ sexual commerce out of public space while allowing for more within private space. Yet, these measures allowed indoor sexual commerce to thrive in Soho and, in doing so, created, to the community's non-sex-related stakeholders, a disturbance; Soho, in its entirety, had become a disruption. According to a group of lobbying community members—the Soho Society—the growth of the sex trade in the neighborhood created an environmentally offensive space due to its neon signs and loud music, a sharp decline in the residential population, and a loss of local shops and services, including a doctor's office.⁷⁵ In the mid-1970s, the society, a community group formed in 1972 to combat the ‘vice’ and other urban redevelopment issues, began its war on the spatial takeover of the sex industry.⁷⁶

⁷³ Walkowitz, *Nights Out*, p. 295; Thomson, *Soft Core*, p. 45. Ironically, while cinemas began to sexualize the female body on the stage and the big screen, women were subject to increased scrutiny in the public sphere due to new moral panics. In his book *Hotbeds of Licentiousness*, Benjamin Hallan explores the rise of “an anti-permissive front” in the early 1970s. One of the main concerns of this front was, as Hallan describes, “the Soho-isation of day-to-day society” (i.e., the sexualization of society). With this worry came an argument eerily similar to the 1950s prostitution debate—women were public nuisances, acting in an indecent manner in *public spaces*. This excerpt from *Encounter Magazine* in Hallan's book states: “Never have styles among women during the summer been so openly flaunting. Knee-high black boots focus the spectator's eye on the full length of the thigh that, through a vestigial skirt, can be seen to merge, on seating, into the opulent rotundities of the buttocks...For men can hardly be expected to avert their eyes from the manifest eroticism of fashions that have made otherwise ordinary females an essential part of the furnishings of the sex-permissive society...To put it mildly, it is a nuisance for an ordinary healthy man to be exposed to sexually inviting attire on the way to work.” See Benjamin Halligan, *Hotbeds of Licentiousness: The British Glamour Film and the Permissive Society*, (London: Berghahn Books, 2022), p. 94.

⁷⁴ Denis Herbstein, “Now a Vice Closes in on ‘The Vice,’” *The Times*, December 2, 1983, The Times Digital Archive.

⁷⁵ Walkowitz, *Nights Out*, p. 296; Mort, *Cultures of Consumption*, p. 156.

⁷⁶ Phil Hubbard and Baptiste Coulmont, “Consuming Sex: Socio-legal Shifts in the Space and Place of Sex Shops,” *Journal of Law and Society* 30:2 (2009): p. [192–93](#); Mort, *Cultures of Consumption*, p. 156.

The battle began when the society went to court to cease a 400 percent rent increase and a series of evictions aimed to encourage long-standing tenants to leave.⁷⁷ By December 1979, the Soho Society published an article in *the Times* outlining the ‘vice’ issue and their demands to eradicate it; it states:

“In the last few years, over 200 shop, craft workshop and restaurant premises have been taken over by the pornographers to the detriment of the resident and business community. On November 7, the Soho Society handed to Mr. Peter Brooke, MP for the City of London and Westminster South, a petition to the Secretary of State for the Environment that he ‘control by means of legislation, if necessary, the continuing proliferation of the Sex industry in Soho, which operates to the disadvantage of residents, visitors, and business alike, and which is expanding...in addition to requiring all sex to be licensed ... it would also appear necessary for legislation to be passed enabling swingeing [swinging] fines to be levied for unlicensed shops.’”⁷⁸

In the article, the Soho Society framed the issue as “not on grounds of sexual morality; the Soho community are tolerant, but their tolerance has been strained to the limit.”⁷⁹ Thus, the Soho Society’s complaints laid not in the fact that sex work was present and visible, but were based on the increase of private vice clubs generated by the opportunities that lay after the *Street Offences* and *Obscene Publications Acts*.

The Soho community rallied for the Society’s campaign and successfully enacted change in the neighborhood. The change began with the successful decree of the demands for licensing action outlined in *the Times* article; the Soho Society, with the help of the Westminster City Council (Soho’s council), triumphantly petitioned the national government, the *Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act (1982)*. This act gave the Westminster City Council the power to issue licenses for “any premises, vehicle, vessel, or stall used for a business that consists to a significant degree of selling, hiring,

⁷⁷ Thomson, *Soft Core*, p. 265; before combatting the area’s sex trade, the society, successfully campaigned that Soho be deemed a “conservation area.” Making it impossible for urban renewal or redevelopment. See John Young, “Conservation Area Proposed for the Whole of Soho,” *The Times*, September 23, 1975, The Times Digital Archive; Walkowitz, *Nights Out*, p. 298.

⁷⁸ Dorothy Donaldson Hudson, “Licensing Pornography,” *The Times*, December 13, 1979, The Times Digital Archive.

⁷⁹ Hudson, “Licensing Pornography,”; Walkowitz argues moralism played a role, albeit a small one. See Walkowitz, *Nights Out*, p. 298.

exchanging, lending, displaying, or demonstrating sex articles.”⁸⁰ The new act turned the tables, making it so, as *Times Reporter* Denis Herbstein states, “A vice closes in on ‘the vice.’”⁸¹

The *Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act (1982)* quickly controlled the sexual marketplace takeover of Soho. By November 1982, the *Times* reported that Soho’s sex shops would be cut by two-thirds, allowing only ten to twenty of the sixty-five establishments to remain.⁸² By 1984, only thirteen shops remained; by 1989, the total number of sex establishments (i.e., shops, cinemas, strip clubs, peepshows) went from 185 to twenty.⁸³ Thus, the spatial takeover of commercial ‘vice’ was coming to an end, but it brought with it consequences—it meant “a swing to the pendulum to the up-market ways” of the rest of London’s central area.⁸⁴

Gentrification and the Displacement of Sex Workers into the New Millennium (1990s-2000s)

At the same time ‘vice’ was being removed from Soho’s space, a new commodified Soho emerged—the space was monetized once again. Instead of ‘vice,’ Soho became a luxurious, commercialized, and, due to this, gentrified space. This switch was motivated by the Westminster City Council’s business-oriented ontology that sought to maximize the neighborhood’s value. In a 1986 interview provided in Mort’s work, Peter Hartley, a city councilor, argues that a swift pendulum swing from Soho’s promiscuous ways to a luxurious neighborhood was necessary, stating, “If it’s a choice between upgrading the area with a possibility that it would become a bit too upmarket or trendy or leaving it to be an *absolute junk-heap*, the council has taken the view that the first was better.”⁸⁵ The councilors’ desire to clean-up the “junk-heap” entailed the removal of prostitutes from the area.

In the late 1990s, the Westminster City Council began using legal loopholes based on the ambiguity of the *Street Offences Act* to reduce the visibility of prostitutes in the ‘new’ Soho. While prostitution was (and is) legal in the U.K., the Westminster City Council, arguing that Prostitutes were using residential premises for commercial purposes, conducted a series of raids and top-down evictions (i.e., evictions perpetrated by compulsory purchase orders) to remove prostitutes from their flats,

⁸⁰ Hubbard and Coulmont, “Consuming Sex: Socio-legal Shifts in the Space and Place of Sex Shops,” p. 192.

⁸¹ Denis Herbstein, “Now a Vice Closes in on ‘The Vice,’” *The Times*, 2 December, 1983, The Times Digital Archive.

⁸² “Soho Sex Shops to Be Curbed,” *The Times*, November 17, 1982, The Times Digital Archive.

⁸³ Walkowitz, *Nights Out*, p. 298; Mort, *Cultures of Consumption*, p. 157.

⁸⁴ Herbstein, “Now a Vice Closes in on ‘The Vice.’”

⁸⁵ Mort, *Cultures of Consumption*, p. 159. Emphasis added by author.

which were used for commercial purposes.⁸⁶ Moreover, in the early 2000s, a series of new orders, particularly Sections 46 and 47 of the *Criminal Justice and Police Act*, became legitimate. These sections made it a legal offense to display advertisements, usually calling cards, in public areas (telephone boxes being the main place cited in the article).⁸⁷ These measures are, according to Urban Geographer Phil Hubbard, used to “make it increasingly difficult for sex workers to have any visible presence in the public spaces of the city, whether physically, or symbolically, through the calling cards that proved an effective means for sex workers to advertise to clients.”⁸⁸ More recently, the 2012 Olympics, like the coronation of 1953, showed another spike in prostitution panic, this time surrounding the possible influx of trafficked prostitutes coming to the city for the global spectacle. These panics resulted in a series of attempts to close apartments used by female sex workers in Soho, among other places in the city.⁸⁹

All these measures mark an apparent continuance and, at the same time, evolution of the strict public and private dichotomy regarding attitudes toward sex and prostitution that created the spatial takeover of ‘vice’ in Soho. Like the 1950s panic that prostitution was bringing ‘vice’ to the capital and the subsequent passing of the *Street Offences Act*, the measures taken in Soho at the turn of the century also represent ideas of removing the neighborhood’s ‘vice’ from the public eye. Thus, from the 1950s to the present, there has been a, for lack of a better framing, spatiotemporal glitch: as English society became more permissive, the prostitute still became increasingly pushed out of the public sphere—pushed off the streets in the 1950s to pushed out of their neighborhood at the turn of the century.

Conclusion

Soho’s environment—as a sexual space—reflects recurring patterns of legislation that exacerbated a public-private binary. The half-century-long legislative goal of keeping sexuality out of public space would shape the trajectory of Soho’s sexual space. The post-coronation *Wolfenden Report* and subsequent *Street Offences Act* forced sex workers out of public spaces, allowing other forms of sexual commerce to burgeon in the area. This shift was detrimental to sex workers, who became reliant on third parties, such as clubs, striptease shows, or pimps, to make their income—those who stayed on the

⁸⁶ Phil Hubbard, “Cleansing the Metropolis: Sex Work and the Politics of Zero Tolerance,” *Urban Studies* 41:9 (August 2004): p. [1687–1702](#).

⁸⁷ Hubbard, “Cleansing the Metropolis,” p. 1695.

⁸⁸ Hubbard, “Cleansing the Metropolis,” p. 1695.

⁸⁹ Phil Hubbard and Eleanor Wilkinson, “Welcoming the World? Hospitality, Homonationalism, and the London 2012 Olympics,” *Antipode* 47:3 (2015): p. [598–615](#).

street had to face increased challenges and risks. As the law went after female prostitutes, a set of 'permissive' legislation allowed 'private vice'—pornography and sex shows—to further increase in the area. While the mid-century legislation attempted to entrench a private-public dichotomy—where only the private was acceptable—Soho's 'vice' behind closed doors became a public disturbance. This resulted in a local group, the Soho Society, successfully petitioning against the spatial takeover of commercialized sex; the *Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act (1982)* gave the Westminster City Council enough power to limit the number of commercial sex establishments. Yet, the removal of the 'vice' brought a process of gentrification, and a push to remove prostitutes out of Soho's space yet again; due to this, the sex workers' place in Soho remains contested.