

**'Hygienic articles, patent medicines and rubber goods':
Markets and meanings in early-twentieth century
Netherlands.**

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Remedies are not just pharmaceutical substances. They have form, colour, wrappings and labels, which contribute as much to their meaning, and to the ways they are perceived and used, as do the physiological effects that are ascribed to them. When the category 'remedy' is approached culturally, it does not have to be medically defined, or to be confined to particular substances. Operations, rituals, or indeed any sort of health-enhancing practice can be considered remedial, too. On a non-medical level, boundaries between remedies and cures are often blurred. Nor can curative and preventive measures always easily be discerned from each other. The question of whether contraceptives fall into the category of 'remedy' is linked to all these considerations. Should they be considered as an extraordinary remedy, because in preventing a pregnancy, 'a normal condition is being impeded'?¹ Or do we have to take the point of view of the user for whom a pregnancy is undesired and therefore abnormal? In this article I shall illustrate and elaborate these remarks by focussing on a very peculiar group of remedies, the so-called 'hygienic articles'.

The transmission of remedies took place in the context of particular medical markets. A medical market, however, is not just an economic category, it is also a heuristic device that facilitates the conceptualisation of health care. At least, the concept of a medical market is used in this way among Dutch social and cultural historians of medicine.² Although the historians highlight different aspects, they agree that the medical market should encompass the field of health and illness in its totality in any historical period and area. From the patient's point of view the medical market comprises all the available possibilities of finding a cure. This implies that the patient's definition of illness is decisive and that questions involving selection and choice of treatment are of particular relevance. Issues facing the

healer include personal popularity, specialisation of treatment, and competition among healers. Looking at medical markets also involves analysing processes, ranging from the first discussions about illness to the final reactions to cures. Here healers and patients constitute the focal points, not the remedies, drugs or instruments they apply.

The study of remedies thus provides a different approach to the medical market, and thereby a new dimension to the discussion about it. But remedies do not create their own demand, or their own meaning; there are still human agents involved. Besides healers and patients, a new group consisting of the producers and suppliers of remedies enters the stage. As a result, the interaction models have to be extended from two to three actors. Or, when the services from doctor and druggist overlap, it has to be determined what sort of authority was ascribed to the different kinds of specialist. Looking at 'hygienic articles' brings this abstract discussion about the medical market down to earth. Furthermore, 'hygienic articles' draw attention to the opposites of illness and health, or misfortune and well-being, which have not always been noticed by medical historians. What are they?

Advertisements

For the reader of early-twentieth century Dutch newspapers 'hygienic articles' would have been a familiar term. The oldest advertisement for 'hygienic articles' I have come across dates from 1907. Although at the time the name 'Hygiëa' was used by an Amsterdam depot, the designation 'hygienic articles' only appeared a little later.³ From then onwards advertisements proliferated. In the early years of the century a Maison Adler from Amsterdam advertised 'hygienic articles',⁴ as did many other firms in the capital. Newspapers such as the *Nieuws van den Dag* carried advertisements for 'hygienic articles' from the firm Boersma of the Heerenmarkt ('near the Central Station'), the firm Cramer of the Sarphatistraat ('next to the Weesperpoort station'), the firm Lafrene ('near the Central Station'), and many others.⁵ In Amsterdam cards were distributed, too:

Dear Madam, I kindly take the liberty of drawing your attention to my institution. I am always available to give all desired information about the articles I have available. I also gladly inform you about the hygiene of married life. Yours sincerely, Miss W. DEKKER, registered midwife, Leidscheplein 2, corner of Leidschestraat, Amsterdam.⁶

Another 'maison' with the name of Jasinski, even boasted of a chemical laboratory 'Hygiëa'.⁷ In 1919 in The Hague a company

'Hygienic articles, patent medicines and rubber goods'

with the name of 'de Noorderpost' offered 'hygienic articles, patent medicines and rubber goods'.⁸ Also the hygienic articles of Dr Stakman and Dr Stopes were brought to public attention.⁹

The Blue Cross is and will ever be the eldest and most trusted address in this town for hygienic articles, patent medicines and rubber goods,

ran an advertisement in the *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad* at the end of the 1920s. 'Hygienic articles, patent medicines, syringes, rubber goods', advertised a certain Maison Santé in the same paper.¹⁰

This array of announcements can easily be supplemented, based as it is on a selection of a random sample from Dutch newspapers. If the right newspaper is consulted, it can safely be assumed that there was at least one advertisement for hygienic articles in every issue between about 1910 and 1940.¹¹ Already by 1906 it was remarked about one of the Sanitas company advertisements that hardly a day passed without it appearing in several newspapers.¹²

The main question addressed in this paper is, what exactly was advertised? What kind of wares did the firms, houses and companies supply? What kind of afflictions were they meant to remedy? What did the term 'hygiene' mean in this context? In looking for answers I will analyse a historical phenomenon, in this case hygienic shops and their inventory, by way of the publicity they generated. Textual traces are among the few remnants left for the historian to build this story on.

The process, however, is not as straightforward as it may seem. By the early-twentieth century the term 'hygiene' had restricted and elaborate meanings. The public had been confronted with news about international 'hygienic' exhibitions in Paris (in 1900), Berlin (1908) and Dresden (1911). Amsterdam was only to follow in 1921. There were also discussions about racial hygiene. Less newsworthy but probably more effective in influencing changes in public practice were sanitary programmes of clean drinking water, sewers, refuse collection and many other preventive health measures. Women were especially targeted by an army of (semi-) official health visitors, inspectors and district nurses promoting household hygiene. In the Netherlands, as elsewhere in western Europe, most of those officials were connected to local clinics or to one of the 'societies of the cross'. The White Cross, for instance, provided help in case of epidemics. The aim of the Green Cross was to improve home nursing and to popularise hygiene.¹³ Women were also inundated with 'hygienic pamphlets', dealing with all kinds of preventive health-measures they

could adopt at home and apply to their children.¹⁴

Undoubtedly, hygienic shops were linked to these general developments in preventive health care. But they also differed from them, in the sense that they gave their own interpretation to the concept of 'hygiene'. Notwithstanding their visibility in daily life, hygienic shops have curiously not been at the forefront of historical research. Social historians of medicine have devoted more attention to public than to publicised hygiene.¹⁵ Few studies on abortion and contraception mention the shops or the hygienic articles.¹⁶ 'Hygienic articles', it is noticed, were often an euphemism for contraceptives.¹⁷ That, however, is only a part of the story. The study of 'hygienic articles' not only leads us to contraceptives, but also to the whole shadowy realm of abortion, contraception and sexually transmitted diseases. In short, to aspects of sexuality. As such, the story presented here should be taken as only a first cultural probe into these topics.

Sources

An important source on hygienic products and shops stems from their critics. Most important are judicial files and reports by opponents of 'quackery'; hygienic shops left very few substantial texts of their own. Most of the relevant reports of court proceedings and verdicts were drawn up in the course of prosecutions based on sections 251bis and 451ter of the Dutch penal code, which were in operation since 1912. Section 251bis concerned abortion and section 451ter the open display and distribution of articles to prevent pregnancy. A third series of legal documents pertaining to hygienic products resulted from prosecutions based on the Medical Act of 1865. Sections 30 and 31 declared it illegal for unqualified persons to sell remedies weighing less than 50 grams. Professional qualifications were dealt with in section 436 of the penal code. Conclusions about the range and distribution of 'hygienic articles' remain tentative if only based on the available judicial sources. Since the violation of articles 451ter and 436 concerned misdemeanours rather than crimes, they were in the first instance dealt with by the Dutch lower courts, the condition of whose archives prevents any systematic research. Moreover, information from the prosecution cases is naturally biased towards their original purpose, the crime of abortion, or the illegality of advertising contraceptives or remedies, rather than the people who provided them and the businesses they ran, or those who actually bought the products. The prosecution cases nevertheless provide a cross-section of 'hygienic articles' and of the shops where they were sold.

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In their turn the editors of the *Monthly journal of the Dutch Society for the Repression of Quackery* (the *Monthly against Quackery*) made yet another selection of the available information. This Society, founded in 1880 and unrelated to the Dutch professional medical societies, acted as a consumer organisation combating health fraud. Its aim was to inform the general public about the intentions of unscrupulous healers (including licensed physicians) and about unsubstantiated claims of cure. Because of its public function, the *Monthly against Quackery* was extremely reluctant to discuss abortion, contraception and sexual diseases. 'Our paper is no medical paper and it comes to the attention of all kinds of male and female readers,' stated the editors in defence of the decision to use euphemisms such as 'secret disease' (Dutch: *geheime ziekte*) without explaining them. The journal portrayed itself as 'too decent' to quote from a Sanitas pamphlet, since its aim was to be available for 'everyone, young and old'.¹⁸ Thus, combating quackery boiled down to showing the divergence between promise and fulfilment in the case of morally less thorny remedies. An analysis of Sanitas pills proclaiming to ease difficulty in urinating concluded:

Urotropine is indeed prescribed by doctors in case of disease of the urinary passages ...but it is only without danger when under medical supervision.¹⁹

In other cases remedies were revealed as ineffective or simply too expensive.

Hygienic shops also produced their own, albeit textually meagre sources. Advertisements are one example. Some of these also point to books. One 'expert' directed her public to 'Our illustrated book, in which all hygienic remedies are discussed, also the newest ones'.²⁰ Sanitas advertised with: 'Secret D... The book for "MEN" with all information and description of the diseases[,] and the book for "WOMEN"'.²¹ The Noorderpost offered "'For women", the corrected and extended Book with all Information and Advice'.²² 'WOMEN', announced Miss Edeling in Rotterdam, 'my booklet (36 pages) provides you with advice and [information on] all hygienic products'.²³ This probably looked momentous, although it only concerned thin brochures or pamphlets.²⁴

The three different sources all have their specific limitations and grant only partial views of a market whose outlines remain nebulous. However, the picture can be made a little sharper when we look at what the sources tell us about the most prominent chain of hygienic shops.

Sanitas

The Sanitas chain was the oldest of the specialist hygienic shops, notwithstanding other claims. As early as 1902 there was a Sanitas store in Amsterdam, selling 'pills for women'.²⁵ From 1905 at least the main depot was located in The Hague. The formula proved successful, for in 1916 there were branches in Amsterdam, Haarlem, Leiden, The Hague, Rotterdam, Dordrecht, Utrecht, Arnhem, Nijmegen and Groningen.²⁶ The chain was set up by a certain Van Dijk ('a man of ill-fame'), who, according to an article in the *Telegraaf*, had died by 1922, when the business went bankrupt. As the newspaper article explains, the policy was to found as many branches as possible (by 1920 there were probably as many as 30). Branch managers had to put in fl.2000 as guarantee and they were paid a set weekly salary of fl.35. They also received 5 per cent commission on all goods sold. This scheme failed when turnover dropped below costs. For a while the deficit was obscured by finding new managers who paid the guarantee and by selling existing shops to old branch managers; but these were merely makeshift measures that only resulted in a (temporarily) higher density of sales outlets and consequently even lower turnover.²⁷ Nevertheless, parts of the organisation survived. While some of the shops changed hands (for instance, two Sanitas shops in The Hague were taken over by the firm Schneider & Kolsteeg), others, like those in Amsterdam and Amersfoort, kept the name.²⁸ In 1927 the 'pharmaceutical wholesale business' Sanitas Novum operated from Heerlen in the province of Limburg, with branches in Roermond and Utrecht.²⁹ Sanitas also distributed its wares among druggists.

As a merchandising strategy, all Sanitas shops had a similar design. A visitor in 1915 noticed 'much similarity between kinds of products, wrapping, etc.'³⁰ This was copied by other companies. The director of the Noorderpost, Jakob Brommet, had started his career as a branch manager of Sanitas in Groningen. In around 1914 he opened his own shop there and branched out to Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague.³¹ He took the Sanitas concept with him, 'using everything he had seen and learned when he had worked for Sanitas as a branch manager'.³² By the end of the 1920s he had added shops in Utrecht and Leeuwarden to his chain.

Other hygienic shops seem to have been merely local. Apart from the Noorderpost the town of Groningen had a shop by the name of the 'Seinpost' (literally: 'signpost'). Both names referred to mail order businesses. Others stayed within the domain of health and echoed

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Sanitas by labelling themselves with Latin-sounding names starting with an S: 'Sanitum', 'Salutair', 'Securitas'.³³ It shows the appeal of Sanitas, as well as the medical respectability attached to the Latin language. Again others tried to enhance their status by adding the word 'Maison' to their own name; whereas the Rotterdam 'Maison Santé' played safe by connecting to both traditions.

Contraceptives

One of the meanings of 'hygienic articles' alluded to contraceptives. As it was illegal to display them, subterfuges were needed, especially in labelling. The regulation in section 451ter concentrated on the nature of the display. Contraceptives as such were not offensive, it was only their public exhibition that was considered to cause moral offence among adults and to be highly morally corruptive of adolescents.³⁴ The problem was how to define public display. Did wooden boxes with the word 'never-rip' printed upon them in a shop window present a case for prosecution? Several times shopkeepers were acquitted because the contents of the box had stayed hidden from the public gaze.³⁵ This argument centred on the formal question, which of course did not diminish its impact. In contrast, other judges and lawyers took a moralistic stance. They stressed that the wrapping was insubstantial and based their decision on the presumed awareness of the purpose of the objects.³⁶ Others disagreed. According to one Attorney General even those without any command of English knew what the word 'never-rip' hinted at.³⁷ These debates reveal a certain disdain for discussing contraceptives openly. Lawyers stuck to the designation 'preservatifs', a French rather than a Dutch word. 'Gummiwaren' (rubber goods), which had more of a Dutch ring to it, or more specifically 'sanitaire gummiwaren' was initially ranked as an innocent collective noun.³⁸ By the end of the 1920s, however, the moralistic approach had gained the upper hand. Judges now accepted a direct and meaningful link between labelled box and contraceptives. English was no longer an obstacle, the brand name 'never-rip' ('silk finish, guaranteed for one year') had become generally known.³⁹

A broader assortment of contraceptives was displayed in the *Books for Women*. So far, my research has only unearthed one copy, namely a brochure from the hygienic shop, The Salamander, in Groningen.⁴⁰ Other 'books' will have been similar. The brochure was written by an 'expert' (Dutch: *deskundige*, see below) purporting to deal with 'hygienic remedies for women'. On the inner title page the brochure advertised 'hygienic articles and rubber goods for men and women'.

It opened with a plea for Neo-Malthusianism. While the 'book' was careful not to associate directly with the Neo-Malthusian League, its case was supported by referring to the work of Johannes Rutgers, its founder and long-term driving force, among others. The unknown author juxtaposed the helplessness of the professionals (doctors, judges, priests and philanthropists) to prevent large families and the population increase, with the dire necessity of solving these problems, which all professionals accepted. It was furthermore suggested that publications of a more scientific nature were always available and that they proclaimed contraceptives as totally harmless. Any notion that they were unsafe and detrimental to one's health was described as a prejudice of the lower classes. Next the female reproductive organs were discussed. From this the most effective way of contraception was to prevent the sperm from reaching the womb. Thus introduced, the contraceptives were presented: the irrigator that every woman should possess, the sperm-killing paste, the diaphragm, the pessary, the douche and the syringe. The male contribution was distilled in a brief remark about the dangers of withdrawal before ejaculation because it caused headache, dizziness and insomnia. A whole page was dedicated to the theme of condoms, of which six different brands were on offer.⁴¹ Although the published judicial texts on contraceptives (concerning 451ter) seem to show a virtual monopoly of one brand, promotional material demonstrates otherwise.⁴² Apparently 'never-rip' functioned as a front for other condoms precisely because it was English.

The brochure *For Women* was composed of different texts for each product, with slight variations of style and presentation. Descriptions of uses of the wares were as plain and detached as possible with occasional references to the medical doctors who had invented them, such as the German gynaecologist 'Mensinga' and 'Dr. Mary [sic] Stopes'. While the text mentions the continuous presence of competent 'deskundigen' in the shop, abortion is not mentioned anywhere. The hygiene discussed in the brochure is the hygiene of sexuality. 'Hygienic articles' stands exclusively for 'contraceptives'. The wares protect women from pregnancy and diseases, they are clean, antiseptic and, by implication, rational and modern. The brochure also issued a warning against 'so-called addresses, which, by their cheap prices, try to draw the public.' The title of 'deskundige' was not protected and everyone could pose as one. Prospective clients should always be careful. In this way, the brochure followed the lead of the Neo-Malthusian League, drawing a sharp distinction between contraception, which was favoured, and

abortion, which was publicly decried. Yet the very same terms used for contraceptives were also applied in offers of abortion services.

Abortion

In the early-twentieth century the expanding Dutch abortion market was primarily operating underground. It was forbidden to advertise abortion services openly. Women who had undergone an abortion were not prosecuted, since they were needed as prime witnesses for the prosecution, but they ran the risk of becoming socially stigmatised. Abortionists on the other hand were liable to be prosecuted, the more so after the implementation of the Morality Acts of 1911. One of the unforeseen effects was a manipulation of daily speech. Certain terms acquired, for the initiated, specific connotations referring to abortion, whilst officially retaining their more innocent meanings. The language of abortion was even more concealed than that of contraception. For instance, the expression 'the restoration of menstrual regularity' depended for its meaning on context, speaker and addressee, and could refer directly, or not, to abortion. This way of speaking was widespread throughout Europe. The substitution of 'seamstress' for abortionist seems to have been more specifically Dutch. Most of the time, however, speech was extremely indirect and only made sense if one already knew what it was about.⁴³ One of the more direct ways of mentioning abortion was to refer to 'hygiene'. When, for instance, several women in The Hague were asked by the police (and later in court) how they had found their abortionists, they said they had been directed by advertisements about 'hygienic articles'.⁴⁴ 'It is curious, how the interest in hygiene has risen lately,' a reader wrote to the main Dutch judicial weekly. 'Especially the sale of hygienic articles has soared.' This reader's astonishment was a pretence, however, because he had noticed that many of the people advertising hygienic wares had called themselves 'deskundigen' before.⁴⁵ He thus replaced one oblique reference with another. The title of 'deskundige' had been introduced by the Neo-Malthusian League for their consultants, but had then been adopted by commercial abortionists. Since the two groups overlapped, this was quite logical.⁴⁶ Thus the reader actually emphasised that abortionists were hiding behind the label of hygienic articles. Indeed, many of the proprietors of the Amsterdam firms were prosecuted for having procured abortions.

The 'deskundigen', especially those who were trained by the Neo-Malthusian League, were supposed to give advice on birth control and to provide contraceptives. Notwithstanding the permeable

boundaries between abortion and contraception, the latter is hardly mentioned in court reports based on section 251bis of the Dutch Penal Code. The dissemination of information on methods of birth control and family limitation was in itself not punishable, and the Supreme Court interpreted the title of 'deskundige' in its broad, innocent, sense.⁴⁷ This fact was immediately used by the abortionists. 'In case the police interrogate you,' a 'deskundige' advised one of her clients, 'just tell them that I placed a cap'.⁴⁸ In the context of the prosecution of abortionists, contraception figured merely as an excuse used by the prospective suspect.

The Amsterdam 'deskundigen' may have been instrumental in substituting 'hygienic articles' for 'abortion services', but they did not have a monopoly on the term. According to an 1918 editorial of the *Monthly against Quackery*, shops and so-called 'laboratories', which were mainly occupied with the distribution of 'deplorable and dangerous quackeries', had mushroomed recently.⁴⁹ The first shops that came to the editor's mind were Sanitas and the Noorderpost, the two most high profile chains of 'hygienic' shops in the Netherlands. But in this case 'quackery' did not refer to abortion indirectly. The names of these two companies turn up only occasionally in the abortion files. Some Sanitas chain branch managers were convicted for having promoted abortion: in Groningen by selling a syringe and liquid, in Amsterdam by referring a client to an abortionist, and in Delft by performing an abortion.⁵⁰ On the whole, the keepers of the hygienic shops have to be distinguished from the 'deskundigen'. The former were foremost salesmen and only abortionists in the sense that they were sometimes convicted because they had sold abortifacients to women seeking an abortion. In most areas the Sanitas shops merely figured as the places that provided abortion instruments to 'deskundigen' and other abortionists. Selling douches or catheters was only illegal when the customer wanted them to use for an abortion, otherwise there were no prohibitions as the instruments could be used for other purposes as well. The articles could also be obtained from special druggists, such as the 'people's apothecary', Spetter, in Rotterdam.⁵¹

If the content and meaning of 'hygienic articles' is only to be derived from judicial documents on abortion, then it is narrowed down to 'abortion'. In that context 'hygienic articles' did not even denote specific abortifacients or abortion techniques. The article for sale was abortion and the 'deskundigen' and their 'firms' thus had consulting, rather than just opening, hours.

Medicines

A third area in which 'hygiene' could provide a linguistic cover for practices that the moral majority deemed unspeakable consisted of sexually transmitted diseases. Of the several measures that could impede the operation of hygienic shops, policing the sale of medicines seems to have had the lowest priority. This was probably due to the fact that each product had to be analysed chemically to establish whether it contained ingredients from list C, which could only be legally sold by pharmacists if the product contained less than 50 grams. Samariter Crème, for example, was sold by Sanitas and among others advised to counter a drain of 'life force'. This medicine contained calomel (mercurous chloride), which figured on list C.⁵² The 'zekerheids pastilles' from the same company contained boric acid.⁵³ A second reason for the low level of this particular kind of prosecution will have been the high number of offenders. According to a report from pharmacists, the Netherlands counted over 3000 chemists who were selling some kind of patent medicine with illegal ingredients. In contrast the number of unqualified salesmen was relatively small, estimated 'far below a hundred'.⁵⁴ The fact that druggists and branch managers of Sanitas in small towns, such as Steenwijk and Arnhem, were reported to sell medicines illegally, does however indicate the geographical extent of this phenomenon.⁵⁵

The *Book for Men* dealt with venereal diseases, but the *Monthly against Quackery* concealed this (so far, the *Monthly against Quackery* is the only source to reveal anything at all about this particular pamphlet).

In agreeable language... the different so-called secret diseases are described in a quasi-scientific way; it really looks like a booklet that could be given to youngsters.

But it was all pretence. 'The effects of the diseases are extremely exaggerated,' warned the *Monthly against Quackery*. It only served to make the remedies on offer extra appealing. According to the *Monthly against Quackery*, the pamphlet aimed at making sufferers buy the remedies without consulting a licensed doctor. It promoted self-help and thus invited danger. This is about as far as the anti-quacks' textual analysis went, they had more expertise in chemical analysis. As they had to keep silent about the ('secret') purpose of the remedies, all they could reveal was that one remedy was meant to help in case of 'lack of power, dreams, and loss of life-force'.⁵⁶ This can be interpreted as impotence and premature ejaculation. Male

sexuality, it can be concluded, was threatened by venereal disease and unproductive loss of semen.

The total stock of hygienic shops went beyond contraceptives. In their public presentation the shops may have stressed (non-) procreative issues, among others, by displaying Neo-Malthusianism in their windows,⁵⁷ but they had much more for sale. Even in the brochure *For Women* a few pages are filled with the pictures of bandages, trusses, elastic stockings and all kinds of nursing articles (without explanatory texts). Still other wares can be perceived from advertisements. Because the Sanitas company offered a blueprint for the later shops, I have used their advertisements for an overall view. Of course texts like 'All articles for Women and Men. Largest assortment, reasonable prices. Illustrated Books and price list' mainly conveyed the name of Sanitas to those who already knew what kind of articles were being offered.⁵⁸ Other texts are more precise.

One of the regular schemes was to offer a reward of 1000 guilders to every sufferer who was not healed totally 'after having followed the treatment correctly'. This was offered in the case of Kawasan 25350, a remedy meant to ease painful urination, and also in the case of 'Dr Roland's Drink', a Belgian concoction supposed to cure epilepsy.⁵⁹ The authority of mainly foreign physicians was also evoked in the case of the American 'enforcement pills' of Professor Janson (against wet dreams) and those of his colleague Professor Dr Spencer.⁶⁰ Dr Pieter's name was attached to trusses.

As was the case with the brochures, most of the remedies Sanitas offered were meant for men or for women. 'All rubber goods for gentlemen, brand Venus' was obviously aimed at men,⁶¹ although the incorporation of condoms in the *Book for Women* leads to the suspicion that women were supposed to buy them (and to fit them?). Presumably women would have washed them out when re-use was in order. As far as can be seen mainly men were supposed to suffer from venereal disease and (sexual) enfeeblement. Women, on the other hand, were addressed in texts offering douches and syringes and even more in advertisements showing bust developers (with illustration) and 'Pasta de Beauté' for erasing skin irregularities such as freckles, pimples, black heads and 'red spots'. 'Oriental power powder' was proclaimed against leanness and contributed 'to obtain full and pretty bodily forms'. 'Bust shapers' (also with illustration) not only gave women an elegant figure but were also pleasant to wear.⁶² A similar obsession with appearances is shown by a hair-dye advertisement ('absolutely harmless'). And when obesity struck, then defatting pills would surely help.⁶³ Women's 'hygiene' was

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individually oriented and for important parts directed at her appearance, her sexuality and her procreative functions. Men's interest in 'hygiene' was only evoked in case of trouble.

Distribution

The complaints of the Society for the Repression of Quackery about the proliferation of hygienic shops at the end of 1910 not only points to a heightened awareness of the trade, but also to a real increase.⁶⁴ This occurred on two levels: within the big cities in the West and in provincial towns all over the Netherlands. 'Until very recently only a few of these shops existed, operated by the Sanitas company,' lamented the Health Committee of The Hague in 1922. 'Now one can see these shops in every part of the town.'⁶⁵ The nationwide spread of Sanitas and the Noorderpost has already been mentioned above. However, the final picture of the distribution of hygienic shops and sales outlets on the Dutch medical markets will remain vague, as it is not always clear from the sources whether it concerned specialist hygienic shops, druggists who sold hygienic products on the side, or 'deskundigen' and others who sold merchandise from private addresses.

There was also a marked difference in the localities in which specific 'hygienic' products could be obtained. Women from the Dutch countryside, for instance, who sought abortion from other women had to travel to the bigger market towns. The published judicial texts on contraceptives indicate the availability of condoms in the big cities of Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague. But if reports seem to show a wider distribution of patent medicines than of contraceptives, it does not follow that the countryside was totally deprived of the latter. It was always possible to obtain the merchandise by travelling to market places, by mail order, or from travelling salesmen. To what extent people did so is uncertain, but the information was certainly disseminated to even widely remote places. Thus, the Noorderpost distributed cards advertising 'hygienic articles, patent medicines and rubber goods' in Rinsumageest, a small village in the province of Friesland.⁶⁶ A commercial male abortionist from the town of Utrecht had his address cards distributed in Baarn.⁶⁷

Only a thorough and time consuming analysis of newspaper advertisements covering the different regions in the Netherlands could establish how exactly the business in hygienic products fluctuated over the years. So far, only disparate evidence is available, such as the statement by an abortionist from The Hague in 1929, who declared to a policeman that 'the trade in hygienic articles didn't

prosper, as he didn't know how he would make a living in the long run'.⁶⁸ On the basis of current material, no conclusions can be drawn about a possible increase or decrease in the popularity of contraceptives, abortion or venereal disease remedies. There are also no contemporary Dutch surveys available.⁶⁹ However, the evidence of the availability of the various 'hygienic' products offers a contradiction to the dearth of sexual education material that can be found in contemporary textbooks.⁷⁰ Dutch morality prospered on a foundation of its antithesis. At the same time, hygienic shops fitted neatly into the general Dutch culture. Their spirit of enterprise and salesmanship was recognised and validated (if not secretly admired) and the gender norms as portrayed by 'hygienic' advertisements were totally in line with dominant opinion.

Meanings

The term 'hygiene' in the early-twentieth century did not solely refer to cleanliness or to other preventive health measures as they appeared in the official medical propaganda. 'Hygiene' not only covered public works and household matters, but also the individual body. Female bodies were affected rather differently than male bodies. As it turned out, 'hygiene' incorporated a range of activities within the sexual sphere that were otherwise unspeakable. These different meanings of 'hygiene' were clearly interrelated. When people used 'hygiene' in its restricted, sexual meaning, they toyed with its elaborated, public meaning. This is particularly evident in Amsterdam where one of the authors of social hygienic pamphlets was the physician H. Pinkhof. He was also a declared opponent of Neo-Malthusianism in general and abortion in particular.⁷¹ By adopting the term 'hygiene', the 'deskundigen' thus played a mean trick on their main enemies, also because the *Nieuws van den Dag*, where many of their advertisements appeared, featured many an article on the then fashionable orthodox medical hygienic measures. Other examples of adaptation occurred when the so-called 'societies of the cross', known for their repositories of nursing articles, were imitated in different colours, such as the Blue Cross, quoted earlier in this paper. The Sanitas company had a white cross within a black circle printed with its advertisements. Following the official hygiene offensive at the turn of the century, pharmaceutical manufacturers, distributors and retailers were quick to appropriate the general acceptance of the positive image of hygiene. Public hygiene was connected to modernity and rationality and in these they strove to implicate their version of sexual hygiene.

Apart from adaptation, plain copying took place. 'Deskundigen'

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raided the repertoire of the Neo-Malthusian League, enterprising merchants imitated the Sanitas formula, and druggists tried to get a share of the pie too. It showed the strength and appeal of the initiatives and probably the real underlying need for remedies to regulate sexuality and procreation.

Specific settings will have determined when particular meanings of 'hygiene' were thought of and which kinds of categorisation were applied. Those who advertised contraceptives, abortion or remedies for venereal disease were certainly aware of the subtle distinctions between one kind of 'hygiene' and another. Most of the clients probably also knew this, as did the people opposing them. After all, only some of the salesmen of 'hygienic articles' were abortionists and not every abortionist sold contraceptives or beautifiers. But the exact composition of the different groups in terms of social, economic and religious characteristics remains largely unknown. While it is possible to obtain some data on the supply side of the market for hygienic products, questions about demand for the respective wares and its possible fluctuations are largely unanswerable. Judicial sources may have captured some of the abortionists' clients, but the buyers and users of the other 'hygienic' products remain unknown.

It is, however, possible to reach some tentative conclusions about whether the distinction between the different meanings of 'hygiene' was situated between medical and lay use of the term. Presumably medical personnel mainly used the public meaning of 'hygiene' and refrained from evoking its sexual connotations, except when they fought advertisers. Dutch doctors, after all, were on the whole dismissive about abortion, although during the interbellum there was a very modest move towards the acceptability of abortion not just on medical but also on social grounds.⁷² Opinions about contraceptives and venereal diseases were hardly less moralistic and puritanical. Precisely because sexual issues could not easily be discussed openly (and if people did try to do so they were immediately contradicted), the distinction between 'hygiene's' open public meaning and its hidden sexual counterpart arose. Yet in practice things were not as clear-cut as this. As I have not fully researched the medical literature on the use of the word 'hygiene', the final remarks of this article are restricted to a single example, the Dutch book, *Hygiene for Women*.

Its author was a gynaecologist, who, according to the blurb, had lectured on the topic to thousands of women within 'het Gooi', a region south-east of Amsterdam. Although not mentioning his disdain of abortion or contraception explicitly, he did fulminate against such practices as irrigation of the vagina, a widespread

method of birth control, which in his opinion would endanger a woman's life. He called women who wanted to avoid pregnancy 'mentally deranged'. A woman's life, he wrote, revolved around procreation and the education of her offspring. A woman was defined by her bodily functions.

She is almost constantly involved in reproduction, whether she wants it or not, or whether she knows it or not. It is her 'natural duty'.⁷³

Nevertheless, even though the author's use of the term 'hygiene' differed from that of unmentionable establishments, it was still sexual. This gynaecologist was probably considered as liberal by his contemporaries, since he dared to discuss parts of the female body that most members of his public found it necessary to hide even during the sexual act.⁷⁴ The gender division underlying the different meanings of 'hygiene' ran straight through the boundary between doctors and those without an official medical education.

Notes

1. Margaret Stacey, *The Sociology of Health and Healing. A Textbook* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 216.
2. Willem de Blécourt, Gerrit van Vegchel (eds), *De medische markt*, special issue, *Focaal*, 21 (1993); Willem de Blécourt, Frank Huisman, Henk van der Velden (eds), *De medische markt*, special issue, *Tijdschrift voor sociale geschiedenis*, 25(4) (1999).
3. See *Maandblad tegen de kwakzalverij*, 27(9) (1907). There are no examples of 'hygienic articles' among the advertisements presented as evidence by the Amsterdam Society for the repression of Neo-Malthusianism to the municipal counsel, see: *Adressen van de afdeling Amsterdam der vereeniging tot bestrijding van het Nieuw-Malthusianisme* (Amsterdam: June 1907).
4. *Het Leven*, 7 (1912), 36, 72.
5. *Nieuws van den Dag*, (2 January 1915, 3 and 10 March 1917).
6. *Tijdschrift voor Praktische Verloskunde*, 20 (1916), 184.
7. *Maandblad tegen de kwakzalverij*, 34(12) (1914).
8. *Haagsche Courant*, (8 July 1919).
9. *Haagsche Courant*, (4 July, 8 August 1925).
10. *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, (1 July 1929).
11. I have not consulted newspapers later than 1939, but the hygienic shops seem to have survived into the early-1960s.
12. *Maandblad tegen de kwakzalverij*, 26(2) (1906).
13. Myriam Daru, 'Hygiënisering en moralisering van de

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- gezondheidszorg', in: Rineke van Daalen, Marijke Gijswijt-Hofstra (eds), *Gezond en wel. Vrouwen en de zorg voor gezondheid in de twintigste eeuw* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1998), 31–51. Compare with Perry Williams, 'The laws of health: Women, medicine and sanitary reform, 1850–1890', in Marina Benjamin (ed), *Science and Sensibility. Gender and scientific enquiry, 1780–1945* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 60–88.
14. Godelieve van Heteren, 'De troost voorbij: medische instructies voor het kinderlijk leven in de negentiende eeuw', in Willem de Blécourt, Willem Frijhoff, Marijke Gijswijt-Hofstra (eds), *Grenzen van genezing. Gezondheid, ziekte en genezen in Nederland, zestiende tot begin twintigste eeuw* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1993), 203–52, especially 230–1.
 15. Compare with Dorothy Porter (ed.), *The history of public health and the modern state* (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 1994).
 16. See, for instance, Cornelia Osborne, *The politics of the body in Weimar Germany. Women's reproductive rights and duties* (London: MacMillan, 1992), 80. Compare with the overview of the American literature in which 'hygienic articles' should have figured, but hardly do: Susan E. Cayleff, 'Self-help and the patent medicine business', in Rima D. Apple (ed.), *Women, health, and medicine in America. A historical handbook* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 303–28, especially 314.
 17. Angus McLaren, *A history of contraception. From antiquity to the present day* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 185; James Woycke, *Birth Control in Germany* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), 50.
 18. *Maandblad tegen de kwakzalverij*, 23(5) (1903); 25(11) (1905); 51(8) (1931).
 19. *Maandblad tegen de Kwakzalverij*, 38(2) (1918).
 20. *Maandblad tegen de Kwakzalverij*, 27(9) (1907).
 21. *Nieuws van den Dag*, (1 May 1915).
 22. *Ibid.*
 23. *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, (11 May 1925).
 24. Compare the leaflets distributed by the Neo-Malthusian League. See: Gé Nabrink, *Seksuele hervorming in Nederland* (Nijmegen: SUN, 1978), 106–7.
 25. *Maandblad tegen de kwakzalverij*, 22(12) (1902).
 26. Advertisement in *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, (19 May 1916), reprinted in *Maandblad tegen de kwakzalverij*, 37(2) (1917). See Nabrink, *op. cit.* (note 24), 112.
 27. *Maandblad tegen de kwakzalverij*, 42(4) (1922), from the *Telegraaf*. Compare *Maandblad tegen de kwakzalverij*, 37(3) (1917), in which a

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- Frans van Dijk, director of the 'NV Binnen- en Buitenhandelsmij', is mentioned. A statement of a branch manager can be found in RAGr, arr. Groningen, inv.nr. 332, nr. 391.
28. RANH, arr. Amsterdam, inv.nr. 95, nr. 970 (1920); RAU, arr. Utrecht, inv.nr. 297, nr. 11 (1926).
 29. *Weekblad van het Recht*, (11621) (1927); (12067) (1930); *Nederlandsche jurisprudentie* (1927) 1456-8; (1930) 145-6. Compare RAL, arr. Maastricht inv.nr. 20, nr. 337 (1928); inv.nr. 23, nr. 344 (1929).
 30. *Maandblad tegen de kwakzalverij*, 35(11) (1915).
 31. In Groningen, Brommet's older sister was branch manager, RAGr. arr. Groningen, inv.nr. 317, nr. 239 (1914); inv.nr. 335, nr. 148 (1918).
 32. RANH, arr. Amsterdam, inv.nr. 744, nr. 821 (1916).
 33. *Het Leven*, 14 (1919), 894; *Haagsche Courant*, (5 July 1922; 5 August 1925).
 34. *Nederlandsche jurisprudentie*, (1913), 1056.
 35. *Weekblad van het recht*, 11184 (1924).
 36. *Weekblad van het recht*, 10930 (1922).
 37. *Nederlandsche jurisprudentie*, (1927) 48.
 38. *Nederlandsche jurisprudentie*, (1925) 1231; see also *Weekblad van het recht*, 11621 (1927).
 39. *Weekblad van het recht*, 11737 (1927).
 40. *Ons inlichtingenboek voor de vrouw* (Groningen: De Salamander). The pamphlet is not dated but was probably issued in the 1930s. The company had a shop in Rotterdam as early as 1925, *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, (7 May 1925).
 41. To name: Venus, Never-rip, Tip Top, Amulette, Transparent, and Salamander.
 42. On the basis of my material, no conclusions can be drawn about a possible increase in the popularity of contraceptives. There are no contemporary Dutch surveys available either. For details about the USA, see Andrea Tone, 'Contraceptive consumers: Gender and the political economy of birth control in the 1930s', *Journal of Social History*, 29 (1996), 485-506.
 43. See Willem de Blécourt, 'Cultures of abortion; daily practice in The Hague, early twentieth century' in Franz Eder, Lesley Hall, Gert Hekma (eds), *Sexual cultures in Europe* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 195-212.
 44. RAZH, arr. Den Haag, inv.nr. 458, nr. 222 (1912); inv.nr. 460, nr. 412 (1912).
 45. *Weekblad van het recht*, 9810 (1915).

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46. Nabrink, *Seksuele hervorming*, (note 24) 125; H. Q. Röling, *'De tragedie van het geslachtsleven'. Johannes Rutgers (1850–1924) en de Nieuw-Malthusiaanse Bond* (Amsterdam, Van Gennep, 1987), 202–3.
47. *Weekblad van het recht*, 9348 (1912).
48. RAZH, arr. Den Haag, inv.nr. 466, nr. 1136 (1912).
49. *Maandblad tegen de kwakzalverij*, 38(1) (1918).
50. RAGr, arr. Groningen, inv.nr. 332, nr. 391 (1918); RANH, arr. Amsterdam, inv.nr. 95, nr. 970 (1927); RAZH, arr. Den Haag, inv.nr. 597, nr. 668 (1925).
51. RANB, arr. Breda, inv.nr. 511, nr. 6715 (1916); inv.nr. 692, nr. 1122 (1925).
52. *Maandblad tegen de kwakzalverij*, 35(11) (1915). Calomel was used as a prophylactic against syphilis, compare Annet Mooij, *Geslachtsziekten en besmettingsangst. Een historisch-sociologische studie* (Amsterdam: Boom, 1993), 108.
53. RANH, *kantongerecht* Haarlem, inv.nr. 115, nr. 1009 (1916). 'Zekerheid' can be translated as 'safety' and as 'certainty' and 'confidence'.
54. *Maandblad tegen de kwakzalverij*, 36(4) (1916), from *Pharmaceutisch Weekblad*, (1) (April 1916). Obviously complaints of apothecaries about patent-medicines were part of the repertoire used in their struggle with druggists. This does not imply that the number of 3000 is exaggerated; it rather obscures that apothecaries also sold patent-medicines.
55. *Maandblad tegen de kwakzalverij*, 33(12) (1913); 35(1) (1915).
56. *Maandblad tegen de kwakzalverij*, 35(11) (1915).
57. *Maandblad tegen de kwakzalverij*, 22(12) (1902).
58. *Het Leven*, 9 (1914), 2, 36, 72, 100, 133, etc.
59. *Haagsche Courant*, (8 April 1915); *Maandblad tegen de kwakzalverij*, 26 (1906), 2. The 'san' in *Kawasan* was derived from 'santal', as is shown by an earlier advertisement, *Het Leven*, 9 (1914), 5, 134. The remedy was thus epistemologically linked to the 'Santal pearls of Dr. Dumon', also advertised in case of problems in the urinary passages and venereal disease, *Maandblad tegen de kwakzalverij*, 23(5) (1903); 25(10) (1915). These 'pearls' were also for sale at druggists known for their dabbling in 'quackeries', compare with the advertisements in the *Telegraaf*, (8 May 1916).
60. *Nieuws van den Dag*, (1 April 1915); *Het Leven*, 9 (1914), 3, 66.
61. *Nieuws van den Dag*, (13 June 1915).
62. *Haagsche Courant*, (7 April 1915), 2, 3.
63. *Het Leven*, 9 (1914), 1, 34.

64. The Netherlands remained neutral during World War One and the Dutch armed forces were only mobilised. An increase in military demand of hygienic articles will only have had an indirect effect on the Dutch market.
65. *Tijdschrift voor sociale hygiene*, 24 (1922), 329–34, quotation on page 332.
66. RAE, arr. Leeuwarden, inv.nr. 378, nr. 83 (1929). At the time Rinsumageest was well known for its (irregular) healer Jan Monsma, see: Willem de Blécourt, 'Duivelbanners in de noordelijke Friese Wouden, 1860-1930', *Volkskundig bulletin*, 14 (1988), 159–87, especially 174–6. Brommet's cards, however, were distributed among the inhabitants of the hamlet. Whether they were also handed out to Monsma's foreign patients is not indicated.
67. *Nederlandsche jurisprudentie*, (1926), 1392.
68. G. A. Den Haag, gemeentepolitie, inv.nr. 2558, nr. 78. The abortionist could have lied, of course.
69. Compare Andrea Tone, *op. cit.* (note 42).
70. Compare with H. Q. Röling, *Geveerde vragen. Geschiedenis van de sexuele opvoeding in Nederland* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1994).
71. Jan de Bruijn, *Geschiedenis van de abortus in Nederland* (Amsterdam: Van Gennep, 1979), 71–7.
72. *Ibid.*, 109–12.
73. W. F. Bijvoet, *Hygiëne voor vrouwen* (Amsterdam: Kosmos, 1937). Quotes on pages 10, 17, 31, 32, 70, 71, 82, 89.
74. The publisher, Kosmos, also issued books written by medical consultants of the Aletta Jacobs clinic in Amsterdam, as well as books about how to deal with venereal diseases and about naturopathy.