

## Summaries

Jan-Willem Gerritsen & Geert de Vries

### *Nuisance Value and Entrepreneurship. An historical sociology of social problems*

An awareness of social problems has become widespread in our type of society. To some extent, this is due to the fact that in the historical processes of differentiation and integration some people's troubles have come to affect more other people. This has enhanced everyone's potential nuisance value for others. More or less in tandem, our sensibility for the plight of others has grown, as well as our sense of moral responsibility towards them. A very heterogeneous group of people: priests, progressive members of the bourgeoisie, professionals, caretakers and members of deviant groups have taken on the role of moral entrepreneurs concerning social problems. These problems may be real, but they may also and sometimes exclusively be symbolic, e.g. their function may be to ward off fears accompanying the modernising process or express the social status of certain groups in society. People have always added force to their complaints and claims through drama, but under the regime of democracy and the mass media in the twentieth century, the need to dramatize social problems in the public arena has become paramount. Confronted with contemporary social problems, sociologists are torn between objectivism and alarmism on the one hand, subjectivism and quietism on the other. They might wisely stick to an attitude of sceptical realism.

Patricia Piekaar

### *Sexual Victimization of Boys. A new social problem?*

In Holland as in other western countries, child abuse and sexual victimization of girls are considered to be serious social problems. Recently, the sexual victimization of boys has been brought forward as a specific problem meriting separate attention. The present article discusses the nature and incidence of victimization of boys and discusses taboos, myths and prejudices surrounding it. It considers how and by whom the issue was defined as a distinct problem. Following North-American examples, a small circle of male psychotherapists, psychologists and social workers stressed the gravity of the phenomenon and its consequences for adult life. Considering themselves pioneers in a new field, they also stressed the necessity of treatment of victims and their own therapeutical expertise. Together they created a psycho-social regime over the issue of victimization of boys, differing both from the medical regime under which the child abuse has been brought by doctors, and from the political regime under which victimization of girls has been brought by feminists. Perhaps a reintegration might be beneficial.

*A Box for the Homeless*

In May 1993, the Rotterdam housing corporation 'Onze Woning' proposed to help the homeless by offering them a cardboard box to sleep in. The initiative drew much media attention. Left-wing journalists and political activists used the dramatic value of the box to endorse their own political point of view: for them the box symbolized the pulling down of the Dutch social security system. Workers in the helping professions used the box to convince the public of the urgency of their own efforts. In general, doctors, psychologists and social workers tend to view homelessness as a result of 'social incompetence', i.e. of individual illness or deficiency, thus depoliticizing the problem by drawing attention away from structural aspects. This makes it reasonable to develop professional expertise, to designate a corps of practitioners and to provide conditions for their employment in treating the homeless. From a sociological perspective however, homelessness is caused by structural conditions that systematically work to the disadvantage of individuals. Most tramps are not officially registered as 'homeless', which makes it difficult to estimate the number of homeless people. Homelessness is an attractive social problem for claiming state subsidy, as allegations of 'rising numbers' or 'worsening conditions' cannot readily be checked.

Martijn Kool

*Female Circumcision as a moral Problem*

Recently, women refugees from Somalia have confronted doctors and laymen in Holland with a new problem: female circumcision. A public debate broke out on whether or not Somali women should be allowed to have themselves and their daughters circumcised. The debate reached a climax after the publication of a report ordered by the Ministry of Health. Its authors advised to legalize one specific, nonmutilating and ritual form of circumcision, thus hoping to prevent other, mutilating forms and hoping to keep Somali women from seeking refuge with illegal practitioners. From a sociological point of view, female circumcision became a public issue because various norms and values of Dutch society clashed. On the one hand, the value of equal rights for men and women and the value of integrity of the human body forbids circumcision. On the other hand, the value of cultural relativism commands respect for the habits and rituals from other cultures. In the case of female circumcision, cultural relativism turned out to be considered less important than other values.

*The Recruitment of Migrant Workers as a Resultant. A social problem in an arena perspective*

In the 1950s and 1960s, thousands of migrant workers were recruited by Dutch employers. The Dutch government supported this by concluding recruitment treaties with the Italian, Spanish, Greek, Turkish, Moroccan and other governments. This article describes how the problem of labour shortage was defined in the political arena in such a way that the recruitment of migrant workers became a solution, while other potential solutions such as emigration restrictions, facilitating married women to work and restrictions on longer education for young people were not considered. The recruitment of migrant workers was not so much a political choice made between a number of alternatives, but a resultant of choices made in several relatively independent policy fields. Problems in these fields - child labour, housing shortage, family policy and population growth - had a higher priority and their solutions blocked alternative solutions for the labour shortage.

Amy Townsend Schalet

*Dramatization or Normalization? The cultural construction of teenage sexuality in the United States and the Netherlands*

This article examines the cultural conceptions that shape the way parents in the United States and the Netherlands view and manage teenage sexuality. Its point of departure is the fact that twelve out of seventeen Dutch parents interviewed said they would permit their teenage child to sleep with a boy- or girlfriend at home, while only one out of fourteen American parents would allow that. The article attempts to understand why what appears acceptable and normal to one set of parents is considered completely unacceptable and 'just not done' by the other set. It does so on four levels. The first level concerns views of teenage sexuality itself: what are the terms and expressions parents use to discuss teenage sexuality, and what are the characteristics they attribute to it? The second level pertains to images of the adolescent maturation process: how do parents' understandings of and hopes for this period of their child's life relate to their ideas about adolescent sexuality? Third, I look at how three principles which parents consider integral to family life influence their responses to teenage sexuality. Finally, I examine the relationship between parental views of teenage sexuality and differences between Dutch and American society.