

Call for Papers Mental Health Communication from past to present

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The publicly discussed topic of “mental health” is currently a rapidly growing research complex that has gained further momentum due to the coronavirus pandemic and the associated lockdowns. However, the discourse on this topic as well as the social challenges in dealing with and caring for individuals with mental health problems or psychological strain are not new and have developed as clinical pictures and medical diagnoses in the past. Within the public sphere, which we define as intermediary space, the concepts of “melancholy”, “hysteria” or “insanity” are negotiated. The public sphere also influenced the change of perception of individuals with mental illnesses in the 19th century, when patients were “freed from their chains” and recognized as medically treatable. At the beginning of the 20th century, “asylums” for them were established in Austria and Germany, making psychiatry and psychiatric clinics an integral part of the health and medical system which were tested, developed and shaped of the century, particularly during World War I and II. Care institutions were equipped with new tasks, while other issues no longer belonged to this field. Diagnoses and, above all, the treatment therapies became more diverse when psychotropic medications came onto the market in the 1950s. In the 1970s and 80s, new approaches to individual, group and creative therapy were approved in Austria. In recent decades, new concepts of “mental health” have re-established themselves: “burn-out” and “work-life balance” are buzzwords that are more than ever associated with society’s expectations of success and performance. Not least due to the increased use of social media, public communication about mental disorders has also changed once again: Experts from the field, individuals affected, and those informed through various means share their experiences, knowledge, and opinions on the same platforms. The comment function fosters exchange and engages the audience. Today, individuals seeking clinical treatment are often well-informed, having identified themselves in “reels” or postings, and may even actively seek a diagnosis that resonates with their experiences.

This issue of *medien & zeit* focuses on the topic of “Mental Health Communication” from a historical perspective that builds a bridge to the present. The aim is to reflect on and discuss public communication about mental health over time. In this context, mental health communication is understood as a comprehensive complex of topics that deals with mental health issues on a cultural, state and systemic level in relation to public participation. The focus lies on negotiation processes within (global and transnational) publics and subpublics. Transfer studies between public and private spaces (such as doctor-patient contact both *offline* and *online*) can also be included in the issue as original contributions.

The main question on *the conditions, by whom and in which media mental health is and was negotiated in public*, will be differentiated on the basis of the following questions:

- Who was considered mentally ill and who had the privilege of seeking help according to a societal public opinion? Who was considered to be (not) in need of help and what changes occurred in this regard over time? How much understanding did society and the public show towards individuals suffering from mental disorders at different times? What

influence did events such as wars, epidemics but also breakthroughs in psychiatric medicine, (pop- and sub-)cultural negotiations of mental health have on (global and transnational) (sub)public spaces?

- What sources (such as files, reports, oral history interviews) provide information about the organizations that treat, admit, examine, and diagnose the mentally ill? What effect do these have on the representation respectively how do they influence the perception of these organizations in the private and/or public sphere? How were the institutional and private opportunities of help depicted and reported in the public sphere? What resources were available to these organizations to (positively) influence the media's image of them? Which representations prevailed in which public formats?
- Which historical “psychological guides” came onto the market at different times, and (how) did they influence and inform private and (sub)public spaces? Which target groups were addressed and how?
- What communication cultures and strategies of inclusion and exclusion have existed and still exist in the history of mental health? What characteristics of stigmatization are and were attributed to individuals suffering from mental disorders in the public sphere, and why? What role do and did intersectional contexts play? Which principles of inclusion or exclusion still exist today, and which have changed or disappeared over time?
- What role do new public arenas of exchange about mental disorders play and how are disorders constructed there? Who talks about whom, from what perspective and who is granted expert status? How do narratives of self-diagnosis about the appropriation of knowledge via social media surface in diagnostic processes?

Submissions are welcome in English or German. Submitted abstracts (no more than 500 words and a meaningful title) outlining a prospective contribution will be reviewed by the issue editors. On this basis, authors will be invited to submit full papers (max. 7,000 words including title, abstract, tables, figures and bibliography). All full papers will undergo a double-blind peer-review. In a possible revision phase after the review, authors can extend the length of the article to a maximum of 8,000 words, taking into account the suggestions of the reviewers and editors. *medien & zeit* is fully open access and does not charge its authors any fees for editing the articles (no apc).

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Please send submissions by email: cfp@medienundzeit.at