Critical Nets

Peoples' voices and psychiatric knowledge in social networks

Edited collection by PD Dr. Michael Dellwing and Dr. Martin Harbusch

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One of the remarkable features of contemporary knowledge construction is the ubiquitous presence of psychiatric framing in "everyday knowledge" in late modern societies. Legacy journalism and the entertainment media have been strongly supportive of the somatic stories of dominant psychiatry, with a steadfast conviction that psychiatric disease categories represent natural truths.

At the same time, the critique of psychiatric hegemony has historically largely been confined to the social sciences in the sociology of psychiatry, medical journalism, and dissident factions within psychiatry and psychology, which have become known as "anti-psychiatry." With the loss of influence of legacy media, this limitation is slowly, but steadily eroding. Today, with social media the more prevalent form of media that sidelines editorially-controlled legacy media, the conversation opens up, and with it the dominance of psychiatric narratives. Peer to peer communication not only reveals the prevalence of side effects, the failure of medication to "cure" a psychiatric disease and indeed the progressive worsening of the conditions with medication; it also opens up a new and wider structural consciousness that starts to question the reliance of contemporary society to medicalize, isolate, and medicate in favor of a wider critical reckoning with social structures and ills.

Initially, the prevalence of dominant psychiatry in the corporate media translated into social media as well. A great many discourse analyses and other studies on online communication and identification noted that the 2010s saw a wave of self-identification in what were often framed as "victim" groups, and prominent among them was self-identification with psychiatrised categories. Hotbeds of these forms of self-labeling were, famously, networks like tumblr. While much literature at the time surveyed this from a position of a defense of academic authority, bemoaning "amateur" labeling, for sociology this trend was much more interesting as a barometer of the social strength of psychiatric disease frames for understanding the self, and more widely, a barometer of the comparative strengths of hegemonic legacy communication versus peer to peer communication.

While the self-identification trend of the 2010s is still evident, there is now a mass of material posted on social media critical of psychiatric medication, and more profoundly, also critical of psychiatric frames of contemporary suffering. These criticisms often contain a sociological emphasis on social, economic, and structural questions and the now rather obvious structural shortcomings of modern society. They identify these shortcomings as at least one of the base reasons for contemporary misery. While often, this takes the form of noting that these may be causes of the disease, a growing number also consequently identify the constant drive to blame a physical defect, a "depression disease" and "anxiety disease", as attempts to shift blame for these structural shortcomings of society to the individual and their biology.

This criticism is not isolated; it is not a sudden trend towards "antipsychiatry" and, it has to be admitted, probably not a consequence of diligent academic work in the last 50 years. It is rather a consequence of social media's power to let flourish a host of critical discourses not pre-edited and

structured by legacy media landscapes, which has allowed an upswell of social criticism. This resistance comes not with academic anti-psychiatry, but with popular anti-capitalism and anti-imperialism, which have found expression in environmentalist protests, anti-war and anti-genocide movements as well as wider anti-establishment sentiments. The discovery that psychiatry has always been intertwined with these hegemonic discourses, where it grew to be a driving force of social and individual meaning-making (a point already discovered by critical academia in the 1950s), is then a re-discovery that owes its presence to the wider critical currents of contemporary society, where it was a "natural discovery", i.e., a discovery structured and anticipated by the conditions of the times.

The planned volume aims to deal with current psychiatric criticism, in and out of social media, in order to make their content and forms accessible to sociological criticism of psychiatry. For a volume in the Palgrave "Politics of Mental Health and Illness" series, it is particularly interesting to examine the ways in which critiques of psychiatry also emerge and initiate beyond academic pursuits, how they are formulated and work through media, pop-cultural and political issues, and how a contemporary counter-hegemonic movement emerges in connection with this, in whose representations political attitudes, academic knowledge and forms of social media self-presentation intermingle.

We invite contributions on the analysis of resistance to psychiatric framing in online discourse, analysis of the role of new media in existing consumer/survivor/ex-patients (csx) groups, their embeddedness in wider critical and anti-imperialist social movements, wider research on subaltern and resistance movements with connections to (resistance to) psychiatry (including analysis on the psychiatrization *of* resistance), as well as wider research within sociological criticism of and opposition to psychiatry within a media context.

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