

## Call for Papers Public Relations Inquiry Special Issue

### Taboos in Health Communication: Stigma, Silence and Voice

Health is an important, yet challenging area of professional communication. With the expansion of social media, rise of alternative ways of treatment, civic movements and citizen's voices entering the debate, health communication is used and misused for blatant misinformation and stigmatisation on the one hand, and debunking myths, breaking silences and enabling individuals to make healthier choices, on the other. There have been important achievements in public health and wellbeing across the globe – from containing tuberculosis, HIV/Aids and preterm birth complications, which have been amongst top global causes of death (WHO, 2018), to higher quality of food, health products and environmental standers that led to increased life expectancy of many populations worldwide. Yet a variety of illnesses, their conditions and treatments remain taboos. They are often locked in cultural norms of inappropriate communication such as stereotypes about agency of sexually transmitted diseases and in strategic designs of silence such as framing mandatory vaccination as abuse of human rights.

Health communication is at the forefront of the struggle for improving public health. It is a rich field for interdisciplinary and critical studies with strategic communication and public relations at its core. A number of areas for further exploration open up in that regard. What influence do public communication and health campaigns have on co-shaping media discourse, public knowledge and attitudes? Who are the primary definers of what constitutes an illness and how voice and silence are distributed in the public sphere? How are voice and silence situated in broader socio-cultural and political contexts? How are the health taboos associated with stigma, power, violence, coercion, discrimination and injustice? When does silence hurt and when does it protect?

In line with the interdisciplinary nature of the journal, we welcome a range of theoretical perspectives from a variety of disciplines, including public relations, media, communications, public health, cultural studies, anthropology, political communication, sociology, political science, law, languages, organizational studies, management, marketing, literature, philosophy and history. We would invite contributions on topics including, but not limited to:

- Invisible health issues which result from economic conditions such as austerity, unemployment and depopulation
- Taboos about mental health, self-harm and suicide
- Voices and silences around terminal illnesses, deadly diseases, mortality and euthanasia
- Stigmas in gender health and wellbeing for women, men as well as minority sexual and gender identities (LGBTIQ+)
- Silences in reproductive health, including pregnancy, parenthood, childlessness, infertility, miscarriages, abortions and FGM
- Voice and silence around inequalities in right to health and access to healthcare provision
- Stereotypes about health and wellbeing of ethnic minorities
- Information wars and myths in vaccination programmes and anti-vaccination movements (for humans and animals)

- (Not) talking about forgetting, from Alzheimer disease to other types of dementia
- Communicating and miscommunicating disability
- Public secrets about alcoholism, drug and other forms of addiction
- Health taboo issues in the workplace
- Speaking on behalf of those who cannot, from oppressed and marginalised groups in society to climate change victims, animal health and extinct species
- The power of voice and the power of silence in health structures and processes

We welcome research papers, conceptual papers as well as short essays and review papers that contribute to critical and/or new ways of thinking about theory, policy and practice in health and wellbeing communication, particularly in relation to taboos, voices and silences. All submissions will be blind-reviewed in line with the standard practice of the journal. If you have any questions regarding the special issue, please contact the editors Alenka Jelen-Sanchez ([alenka.jelen@stir.ac.uk](mailto:alenka.jelen@stir.ac.uk)) or Roumen Dimitrov ([roumen.dimitrov@upf.edu](mailto:roumen.dimitrov@upf.edu)).

### **Deadlines**

Papers should be submitted by **15 November 2019** via the journal's manuscript central submissions system. Please visit the journal website (<https://journals.sagepub.com/home/pri>) for full submission instructions, including information about word length, format and referencing style. Papers should adhere to the guidelines and risk being rejected if they do not. The target publication date for the special issue is Summer/Autumn 2020.