

Pressure for normalcy and struggle for recognition. The German Newspaper for the deaf (*Deutsche Gehörlosenzeitung*) in the 1950s and 1960s.

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My contribution looks at the history of deaf people in Western Germany during the 1950s and 1960s. I analyze the question why and how deaf people as a group came to be considered a “community by fate” (*“Schicksalsgemeinschaft”*). I examine samples from the German Newspaper for the deaf (*Deutsche Gehörlosenzeitung*, DGZ) to find out about the most important topics for deaf people in the postwar period. These were: Work and productivity, education, promoting language development in early childhood, and welfare. Interestingly, the Nazi past played hardly any role.

The reports in the DGZ illustrate deaf people’s ambivalent position in Western German society during the post war period. On the one hand, they advocated to be recognized as full and worthy members of society. They had pursued this goal vigorously since the 1920s. On the other hand, they lived within a hearing majority society and had to adapt to a hearing norm, namely: People who could not correctly understand or speak German were considered less worthy. They experienced discrimination. Using signs or German sign language was not yet widely accepted—not even in the deaf community itself. This resulted in massive disadvantages for deaf people in their education and professional careers. Such all-encompassing discrimination in society is called audism.

The ambivalence [that existed for deaf Germans striving for autonomy while being subjected to audist norms] marked the contributions to the DGZ, which were written by deaf people and hearing “experts” such as teachers for “deafmutes.” Social disadvantages were

mentioned. Yet at the same time, deaf people received clear instructions: They were told to be good workers, to be diligent in their strife to improve their education, and to sign in an inconspicuous manner. It was insinuated that by following these specific directions, deaf individuals could counter social prejudice. In order to do so, they had to subject themselves to the norms of hearing society. It becomes clear, then, that majority society did not see them as equals and were not willing to see the social dimensions of discrimination.

The notion that deaf people formed a specific community on account of their shared fate (*"Schicksalsgemeinschaft"*) was thus important for political claims and the struggle for recognition. My contribution shows how this community was constructed in contrast to hearing majority society. With the term "deaf," I denote people with different forms of hearing loss. More research is necessary to look more closely at collective identities and heterogeneity within the deaf community.