

SECLUSION FROM PUBLIC SPACE IN PANIC AND ANXIETY DISORDERS. A SYMBOLIC GEOGRAPHY OF ANXIETY

MONICA OANCEA¹

Panic and anxiety disorders are often accompanied by avoidance behaviours. This paper aims to present how cultural norms significantly influence them, and how these so-called deviant behaviours are in fact socially constructed. Discrepant emotions related to particular circumstances, emotions which violate feeling rules and display rules, seem to be the major factors that cause individuals' seclusion from public space and social interactions. Panic and anxiety disorders provide specific sets of emotions and bodily sensations, not themselves pathological, but that often may seem so through the social practices that regulate when and which emotions to be felt. Based on field data I intend to show the way a natural and normal emotion as fear can be read as a deviance, and it can sometimes disrupt individual everyday life.

Key words: feeling rules, mental disorders, seclusion.

INTRODUCTION

Panic and anxiety disorders, with or without secondary associated disorders (depression, agoraphobia) have a significant impact not only on physical and mental health of those affected, but also on all others aspects of individual's life: work, family relationships, and so on. Such disorders are not isolated to specific groups or cultures, on the contrary, mental disorders have a very long history, being important marks of cultural paradigms and socio-political systems varying over time. How mental disorders were read and managed in societies give them the status of cultural variables, directly related with others' constructs as health or normality.

The very contemporary concept of mental health has an important social component. According to World Health Organization:

“Mental health is defined as a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.” (World Health Organization)

¹ PhD Candidate, Doctoral School of Sociology, National School of Political and Administrative Studies., monicaoancea@yahoo.ro. Beneficiary of the project “Doctoral scholarships for the development of the knowledge-based society”, co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund, Sectoral Operational Programme Human Resources Development 2007–2013.