

MEDDELANDEN FRÅN ENSKILDHETEN

En sociologisk studie av ensamhet och avskildhet

av Niklas Westberg



GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET
INST FÖR SOCIOLOGI OCH ARBETSVETENSKAP

Akademisk avhandling för filosofie doktorexamen i sociologi vid institutionen för sociologi och arbetsvetenskap, Göteborgs universitet, som med tillstånd av samhällsvetenskapliga fakultetsnämnden läggs fram fredagen den 9 november 2012 kl 10.15 i sal Sappören, Sprängkullsgatan 25, Göteborg

Abstract

Title: *Messages from seclusion. A sociological study of loneliness and solitude*

Written in Swedish, summary in English, 320 s.

Author: Niklas Westberg

Doctoral Dissertation at the Department of Sociology and Work Science, University of Gothenburg

Box 720, SE 405 30 Gothenburg, Sweden

ISBN: 978-91-7173-393-1

Distribution: Bokförlaget Daidalos, Gothenburg

In this study I explore and analyse how loneliness and solitude are constructed as problems and how they are explained by "society" in different forms of texts and by people who themselves define their situations as characterized by loneliness or solitude. The latter forms a special focus and my ambition is to understand how they answer to a social situation that in different ways problematize them as persons and construct their life situation as an anomaly. Even if the situation is characterized by loneliness or a search for social distance the task of explaining the situation is not taking place in a social or cultural vacuum; as the situation is viewed as an anomaly society creates its own interpretations and discourses which influences individuals and groups understanding. Therefore two different kinds of empirical material have been used. First, texts from research and science concerning loneliness and solitude as well as representations from other textual genres. Second, texts written by self defined lonely people and persons who expressly seek solitude and these are collected from two "places" on Internet. From a dating service specialised in lonely people and a community of people who strives towards solitude as a way of life. The main unit of analysis consists of the language in these texts and are interpreted by a textual analysis influenced by discourse analysis.

A major problem regarding loneliness and solitude is "the social". Even if solitude are about social inattention, discourses are often occupied by social life in different manifestations; mostly in form of a social dissatisfaction that motivates freedom from society and community. In loneliness discourses lack of social connection, naturally, represents a central theme. Because solitude is understood as motivated by the individual and loneliness as caused by forces that the individual usually doesn't control, the individual in discourses of solitude appears as one of pride and agency while the individual in loneliness discourses appears as a shameful victim. Solitude and loneliness are deviances which are managed with help of explanatory "accounts": 1) *Excuses* in form of "scapegoats" where other peoples deficiencies is singled out as cause or motive to both loneliness and solitude. 2) *Excuses* with reference to illness and psychological problems, which to a large extent explains loneliness. 3) Justifications of solitude with reference to freedom to self-realization and communion. Based on my analysis a composed situation appears wherein lonely people and people seeking a private space seems to have a lot in common: social dissatisfaction and alienation, designation of scapegoats, a longing for authenticity etc. It is even possible that they, to a degree, share a life-situation characterized by alienation and despair but "chooses" different vocabularies or discourses for rendering the situation as intelligible, which makes a shared situation into different ones.

Keywords: loneliness, solitude, alienation, discourse, question situation, impression management, accounts, social psychology, micro sociology.

