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# A Dignified Life

How poverty fosters loneliness and how people manage to engage in alternative forms of socialization in an urban landscape

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## *Abstract*

Loneliness as a social issue has been gaining extensive interest in recent years, but the subject has lacked results stemming from qualitative research and the link between loneliness and low income has been understudied. This thesis is one minor part in covering these both gaps. I have aimed at using previous quantitative findings on loneliness among low income earners in order to expand on the lived experience on the matter as well as how alternative forms of socialization can help this group engage more in social life. I spent one month at the church *S:t Johanneskyrkan* (S:t Johannes' Church) in Gothenburg where I conducted participant observations and interviews with low income earners. The results portrait the experience of involuntary loneliness - how income was an obstacle to engage more in social life, finding a partner and in a few cases even impaired on family relations. The findings also draw a distinction between how the interlocutors experienced loneliness inside *S:t Johanneskyrkan* in relation to outside of it, in the city of Gothenburg, where they often felt lonely or odd. I have mainly used the concept of *sociality* to explain how consumption has an important social function in western urbanity and how *S:t Johanneskyrkan* successfully imitated a normal restaurant in certain aspects which facilitated its visitors to act within the current sociality of consumption. *S:t Johanneskyrkan* also proved to mitigate involuntary loneliness among my interlocutors in temporary vulnerable situations by providing a continuous place where people could activate themselves more in social life and make new friends without having a particular reason or interest. In the end, it enabled many visitors to live a dignified life.

**Keywords:** loneliness; low income; urbanity; sociality; important others; social anthropology

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## *Preface*

The idea to examine and write about loneliness came to me last year, during 2019, when I moved to Manchester, UK for an exchange term. About one month into my visit I remember sitting by the desk in my student room in Withington scrolling through both the Swedish and British news when I saw that recent sociological research from Sweden had found a new social group that is in great risk of poverty - people living in single households, due to a more restrictive unemployment insurance. In the British press that very same day I came across the appointment of the world's first minister for loneliness and the articles combined made me contemplate my own experience of moving to Lund the year before without knowing anyone. The vibrant social life I was used to from living on the Swedish west coast was far from replicated. It was a tough and tedious period. Student culture is extremely focused around binge drinking, partying and union life which is how students from all over the country get to know each other in a new city and for those who aren't interested in such activities it becomes difficult to navigate through social life, at least that was my experience. I thought all groups must have the same inherent problem, that there are certain norms of how new social relations are being formed, as a retiree or married couple, partying is probably not as central anymore.

This gave me the idea to examine a social group that experience high levels of loneliness and what they do in order to overcome the problem of initiating new relationships. When I moved back to Sweden the task was to narrow it down and see which aspect of it, and which social group, to study which was easier said than done. Loneliness within social science is such a fundamental issue that its scope is impossible to overview. It is related to what it means to be in a group, to have friends, to just belong to something, but social scientists have asked larger questions before, so I went ahead. This text became a portrait of the city of Gothenburg, about low income earners, how they experienced loneliness and managed to navigate through the social landscape with small means. Hopefully it says something about humans as social and cultural beings even though I began at the other end.

## *Chapter 1 - Introduction*

After a report concluded that 9 million Brits often or very often experience loneliness, Great Britain, as the first country in the world, responded by appointing a minister for loneliness in 2018 in order to reduce the social costs of loneliness and the individual suffering (SVT, 2018). Actually, in European social policy overall, the issue of loneliness and social exclusion has been a key theme since the early 21st century along with an increasing awareness of its social costs which we now see among the general public as well (Scharf, Phillipson and Smith, 2005: 76). In this research I have set out to explore the phenomenon further with ethnographic methods in order to learn about the experience of loneliness and how people manage to form new relationships.

The public discourse in Sweden has showed no exception to the increasing interest in loneliness and the matter has been noticeable lately where the discussion about loneliness was intensified after a tragic discovery of an older man who had been lying dead in his apartment in Stockholm for three years without anyone noticing when the police found him after a neighbour informed them that he had not seen him for a while (SVT, 2019). An upsurge of editorial pages and debate articles were published where the authors addressed politicians to improve elder care and encouraged citizens to care a little bit extra for their relatives and fellow human beings. The man's name was Branislav and he had come to Sweden from former Yugoslavia which had caused his social network and family ties to split up. He had no relation to speak of to his neighbours and he paid his invoices digitally and automatically which neither made the companies raise their eyebrows. He had been living a quiet and peaceful life in Sweden, no troubles with the authorities and did not make much noise at his workplace at a factory. Nobody knows if he was just living a placid, solitary life or if he was unbearably lonely, but his tragic death intensified the debate about loneliness as a social issue that needs to be taken seriously.

Loneliness is a phenomenon which has been approached interdisciplinary and has confounded psychologists, gerontologists, sociologists and neuroscientists to mention only a few for a long time. Psychologists have for a long period studied loneliness in relation to

depression, anxiety and the individual's well-being. The academic field of gerontology has directed its gaze towards the social isolation of senior people specifically and sociologists have for example searched for groups or entire societies that are overrepresented in experiencing loneliness or are more resilient towards it. In 2014, a group of neuroscientists published a widely cited article which declared causality between involuntary loneliness and poor health, the researchers concluded that involuntary loneliness had an impact on health equal to that of smoking or obesity (Cacioppo, Capitanio and Cacioppo, 2014: 32). A selection of sociological and anthropological publications from Sweden have previously focused on loneliness as the lack of romantic relationships for men and masculine norms surrounding it (Nordin, 2011) or the narratives of students who experience a lack of social relations during their time as students in an environment otherwise characterised by society life, parties and new friendships (Eiroff, 2019). Children who grow up in relative poverty (<60% of the national median income, SCB, 2017) in families in Sweden have been studied qualitatively by sociologist Stina Fernqvist (2013) who conducted 17 interviews with children in such circumstances, her methodological approach has been influential for this study. This is only a selection of publications reflecting some of the interest in loneliness from different academic disciplines.

Despite the global urbanisation trend (UN, 2018) with increasing numbers of people living physically close to each other, the issue of involuntary loneliness has come to be more than ever in the limelight, especially in the city landscape due to this, to be honest, quite shallow paradox. Despite the urban scene providing multiple opportunities for the lonely person who wants to engage more in social life, one group that finds it particularly difficult to engage more with other people are those living with a low disposable income. In 2018, one British publication which directly influenced the creation of this study and which an extensive part of the material is based on, declared that social isolation (as is one part of loneliness) among adults peaked when earning <10 000 GBP annually and then gradually decreased when income rose (except another increase for those earning >100 000 GBP annually). This was found after a group of researchers analysed the results of 680 survey responses from people living in Sunderland, UK (MacDonald, Nixon and Deacon, 2018: 89, 91). Furthermore, the researchers found that even though *social isolation* rose among the wealthy from 4% among 50 000 - 100 000 GBP/year earners to 13% among >100 000 GBP earners, 0% of the latter



group wished to engage *more* in social activities outside the household. The same number for the respondents earning <10 000 GBP/annually was that 52% of this group wished to engage more in social life (MacDonald, Nixon and Deacon, 2018: 91). So even with a slight increase in social isolation among the very rich this was an intentional choice while living in poverty, it was not possible to engage more in social life even if desired. These findings are important as a quantitative foundation for claiming that people in relative poverty are lonelier than those with a higher income which is moreover linked to feelings of distress and serious health issues as mentioned above. Research conducted in Canada in 2019 confirms the picture of socially isolated people to oftentimes come from a low income background, a group which moreover tend to cluster in cities (Menec, Newall, Mackenzie, Shooshtari and Nowicki, 2019: 11-12).

Numerous journalistic coverages have been written about the Swedes as a lonely group of people and the actual truth-value of this has been discussed back and forth. Swedes are often portrayed as lonely due to an unusually high level of single households, social distancing to strangers and a highly valued individualism, but to find out if Swedes are more lonely than other nationalities is left to other researchers to delve into. This research is instead to explore the group that previous scientific research has already confirmed to experience high levels of loneliness and which exist in more or less every society, but is still left without much attention - low income earners. The extensive negative impact involuntary loneliness has in multiple aspects highlights the importance of expanding the knowledge of this particular group. By ethnographically studying the group and learning more about how they manage to escape or avoid loneliness I believe the conclusions can be valuable in the combat against involuntary loneliness within urban landscapes in Sweden and possibly also elsewhere.

What I identify, and hope this research will cover, is the lack of a more thorough ethnographic understanding of how a group of low income earners deal with social relations and how they find alternative forms to socialise and make new friendships when disposable income can be an obstacle. In an email, Sofie Lindh, communicator at Göteborgs Stadsmission (Gothenburg City Mission), said she commonly sees people suffering from poverty coming to their daily cost-free activities at their church S:t Johanneskyrkan (S:t Johannes' Church, the site where I ended up conducting the fieldwork) to seek a social

context and the priest at the church, Rebecka Petersson told me that the lunch at S:t Johanneskyrkan functions as a living room for many people (<sup>1</sup>; <sup>2</sup>). After having had contact with people from the organization I decided to analyse the function of the food serving at S:t Johanneskyrkan for people with scarce financial means which is one part of the purpose of the research together with expanding the qualitative knowledge of how they experience loneliness as a result of their economic situation. Even though loneliness has been studied from a range of different academic disciplines, the lived experience of it has mostly been left to fictional writing rather than to academic studies (Dahlberg, 2007: 197), this research's ambition is to, with an ethnographic approach, investigate such lived experiences.

### *Purpose*

The purpose of the research is to explore the lived experiences of loneliness and sociality of a group of low income-earners, without immediate social issues, in Gothenburg who regularly meet at a church food serving.

### *Research Questions*

Main research question:

1. How can alternative forms of socialization help urban low income earners engage more in social life and mitigate loneliness?

Further questions:

1. What kind of place is S:t Johanneskyrkan's food serving?
2. Why do people claim to attend the food serving?
3. How do the visitors of the food serving experience loneliness and sociality?

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<sup>1</sup> Sofie Lindh, e-mail conversation January 17, 2020

<sup>2</sup> Rebecka Petersson, personal conversation February 19, 2020

## *Definitions*

### *Low Income*

Being a low income earner or having a low disposable income is something approximately 15% of the Swedish population is currently experiencing (SCB, 2017). Statistics from 2018 also suggest that 1 out of 5 Swedes lack a cash margin as a financial backup for unexpected expenses (SCB, 2018). For these people the imagined unexpected expense was 11 000 SEK. Some people might have an average *disposable income* (total amount of income minus personal current taxes (Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d.)) but still have personal implications which obstruct saving money such as relatives or friends that require that the individual sends them a share of his or her income or an alcohol abuse which drains the account severely. What defines a low income is very much relative and asking people if their income reaches a fixed number bears ethical issues. Instead I have relied on observations and interviews as indicators of people's income. If a visitor of S:t Johanneskyrkan were often in line for bread handouts and mentioned that their financial means often prevented them from participating in normal activities or buying conventional items I assumed they lived with a low income. Some even said straight out that they had a very troublesome financial situation but I never asked specifically how much anyone earned.

### *Loneliness*

First of all, the subjective and relative nature of loneliness makes it a difficult phenomenon to study. Informants presumably have different perceptions of what loneliness is since it is not an unequivocal concept but on the other hand a complex and relative one that changes meaning over time and in relation to categories such as gender, age, class and ethnicity. Most studies concerning loneliness have either initially or as a result concluded that the concept can be divided into different meanings (de Jong Gierveld, van Tilburg and Dykstra, 2006; Dahlberg, 2007). One is social isolation which for many is burdensome and depressive but does not necessarily have to be, some individuals on the other hand enjoy being socially isolated. Being alone at times is necessary for many people, after a day of social contact, having the evening alone can be an opportunity to relax and regain energy. This positive form

of loneliness, also called privacy, will not be deciphered and analysed in this thesis even though a few interlocutors touched upon it. Another terminological distinction is usually made between emotional and social loneliness, both forms of involuntary loneliness where the emotional is a lack of partner or best friend which cannot be replaced by a broad social network, and social loneliness is the opposite - a lack of social contacts, which often occurs when moving to another location and in turn cannot be replaced by the relation to a partner or best friend (Weiss, 1973 see de Jong Gierveld, van Tilburg and Dykstra, 2006: 486-487). Throughout this paper I have used the concept of loneliness to refer to the collective term *involuntary loneliness* which includes both terms above - an unpleasant feeling of having a desire for a more socially active life with one or more people, but no possibility to engage in such. This definition applies when using the general term loneliness.

Since the research was conducted in Swedish but written in English there are a few linguistic differences in how the term loneliness has been used. The English term 'lonely' has more or less only negative connotations to a burdensome loneliness while the term 'alone' can be used as both a positive and negative word such as 'It's been an intense day, I need some time alone now' or 'I had to go there all alone'. The Swedish language has a similar distinction between the terms 'ensam' and 'själv'. The terms differ somewhat from their English counterparts in that *ensam* is used mostly with negative connotations but occasionally also with positive ones. *Själv* is widely used to refer to a neutral or positive experience of being alone. In conversations and interviews with the interlocutors the term 'ensam' was central, however it was used in a manner to refer to involuntary loneliness in the way questions were formulated in order to meet the purpose of the research. The Swedish language contains many such words that are related to loneliness as 'enskildhet' and 'avskildhet' but I will refrain from discussing them further since they never occurred during any conversations or interviews.

My initial belief was that loneliness would be a sensitive subject in similarity with income but to my surprise the interlocutors were often more than willing to discuss loneliness and one person even came back to me multiple times after our interview to describe times of difficult loneliness that she had forgotten to talk about. The major explanations to this openness I believe derives from the overall tolerance at the church where it is encouraged to

share one's thoughts and feelings and also due to the relatively high age of the interlocutors for which not much is considered embarrassing anymore.

## *Chapter 2 - Previous Research*

This section will discuss previous research in the field of loneliness more in-depth than was mentioned in the introduction. An extensive part of my selection of publications comes from sociological research but some has also been conducted in the field of anthropology such as Lissa Nordin's doctoral dissertation for example. Firstly, I will present the prominent and widely cited publication by J. de Jong Gierveld, T. G. van Tilburg and P. A. Dykstra which contains some key findings on loneliness in relation to socioeconomic status, followed by Stina Fernqvist's dissertation on what it implies to, as a child, live in poverty in Sweden. Lissa Nordin's dissertation *Man ska ju vara två* (2011) (*You're supposed to be two*, own translation) will be discussed lastly. These publications provide important and valuable insights on loneliness. In the following chapter I will present works on loneliness which contains findings of more theoretical value for this particular research. On further notice, a substantial part of previous publications on loneliness pushes for more research on the connection between socioeconomic status and involuntary loneliness.

One of the most substantial works on loneliness was produced by J. de Jong Gierveld, T. G. van Tilburg and P. A. Dykstra, their article *Loneliness and Social Isolation* (2006) provides an overview of the field at the time written and covers a wide range of variables to loneliness. The authors come from the fields of sociology and social gerontology but adapt a rather wide social science perspective on loneliness. They begin by assessing individual level characteristics such as relationship standards, personality and background characteristics in order to see connections between the cognitive approach and level of experienced loneliness. The most applicative section of the article for the purpose of this research is the characteristics evaluated such as sociocultural and socioeconomic factors. Their conclusion was that cultural differences and economic standards affect the experienced level of loneliness (ibid. 492-493). Especially the socioeconomic effects on involuntary loneliness (an unusually high level of income can increase *voluntary* loneliness (MacDonald, Nixon and

Deacon, 2018: 91)) applies to the aim of this research. de Jong Gierveld, van Tilburg and Dykstra (2006: 492-494) stated in their article that socioeconomic equality is a contributing factor to an increasing frequency of interaction and group cohesiveness which in turn affects the incidence of loneliness negatively and that the opposite goes for socioeconomic *inequality*. The authors also found this matter to be seriously understudied and pushed for researchers to pursue the link between socioeconomic inequality and loneliness. The authors argued that further exploration into the socially isolating effects of economic and social deprivation at community level is required (de Jong Gierveld, van Tilburg and Dykstra, 2006: 493, 495), something I agree is still the case almost 15 years later.

In her Ph.D. dissertation *En Erfarenhet Rikare?: en kvalitativ studie av barns strategier och barnfattigdomens villkor i välfärdsstaten* (2013) (*One Experience Richer?: a qualitative study of children's strategies and the terms of child poverty under the welfare state*, own translation), sociologist Stina Fernqvist explores child poverty in Sweden. The decision to include her study as previous research is due to the fact the Fernqvist uses interviews as her main method and focuses on the experience and strategies children develop in order to orientate among friends that are financially better off. She describes a similar lack of qualitative methods research in the field of child poverty as I see in the intersection of poverty and loneliness. In an ethnographically traditional manner Fernqvist also tries to examine *everyday life* and what it actually means for children to live in poverty in Sweden. One of her conclusions was that economic vulnerability not only had a significant impact on children's material lack of resources, but also on the strategies that the children developed in relation to economic responsibilities. Fernqvist argues that in the families she studied the scarce economy affected how the positions in the family was created where the children saw their own role in the family economy and that their actions could have an effect on their parent's economy (Fernqvist, 2013: 75). How the children related their family's economic hardship to their peers in the school environment also showed how they developed strategies to conceal the fact that they were poor due to the stigma around it (ibid. 75-76).

Lissa Nordin's ethnography *Man ska ju vara två* (2011) bears similarities with my own research since her writing is taking on a similar phenomenon and also within the discipline of anthropology which makes our methodological approach similar in many aspects. Her work

thus becomes relevant as previous research for the purpose of my research. However, her focus is not directed towards loneliness and socioeconomic status but rather on masculinity and masculine norms in the countryside of northern Sweden. Nordin concludes that in order to live up to the expectations of a middle-aged heterosexual man in the regions, having a permanent female partner was of absolutely central importance in escaping loneliness and social restraints. Her results also declared that it was crucial to find the ‘right’ partner in the ‘right’ way for the relationship to be accepted in the community. Unless it was done correctly the man could be perceived as too traditional and retrogressive. To Nordin’s male interlocutors it was the lack of a partner which caused feelings of inadequacy and loneliness and the relationships with family members and friends was seldom brought up as contributing factors. Being single in the areas where Nordin conducts her study lacks all of the glamorous urban single life so often portrayed in TV-shows resulting in romantic relationships being even more important for the individual. Even though our approach is similar in a number of aspects, Lissa Nordin’s fieldwork is conducted in a distinctly different setting. While she lives with and interviews people in the sparsely populated area of the midlands of Västerbotten where everyone knows each other in the neighbourhoods and where socioeconomically deprived clusters do not form as easily, my work is set in an urban environment where I interview people who live in the different districts of Gothenburg. Thus, our work differs the most in the geographical aspect and thereby also social context.

### *Chapter 3 - Theory*

In this chapter I will describe five different academic pieces that constitute the theoretical framework of this research. Firstly, a publication that has provided extensively to both the theoretical framework and also the methodology section is professor in nursing science Karin Dahlberg’s *The Enigmatic Phenomenon of Loneliness* (2007) which makes an attempt at explaining the existential meaning of the phenomenon of loneliness. Dahlberg herself was the main teacher of a course in phenomenological research in Sweden where she assigned a task to her students to carry out interviews on the experience of loneliness as part of the course. The respondents were asked to answer questions such as ‘Tell me about a time when you felt lonely.’, ‘How was that experience to you?’ and ‘How did you feel?’ (ibid. 196). I came to use

these questions as well along with many others in my interview guide. Dahlberg later came to use these interview results to analyse them herself. The result of the study revealed that loneliness as a phenomenon, according to Dahlberg, can only be understood as a 'figure' against a 'background' of community, fellowship and partnership. Only by understanding people's perception of fellowship as fundamental to existence one can begin to understand loneliness (ibid. 197). During my days at S:t Johanneskyrkan I did exactly this, I tried to understand people's perception of what community and family relations was in order to understand if, and in that case *what* they lacked in their relations. Dahlberg stresses that the respondents felt an urge to connect with *important* people in their lives which could be a partner or close friends which in turn meant that even around acquainted people they experienced loneliness because there was a particular someone or a particular group that was missing. For the individual this leads to feelings of exclusion, rejection and abandonment (ibid. 198). Many of the respondents in the article replied that loneliness can be shameful, strange and taboo if you grow up with those preconceptions. If your surrounding consists of people with qualitative social networks you will experience a higher level of loneliness if you lack it yourself, you feel odd, like 'when one is sober when everyone else drinks alcohol, and then one feels lonely.' one of her respondents says (ibid. 200, 202). The most important theoretical aspect that I came to use from Dahlberg's article is the normative nature of the phenomenon of loneliness while her neglect of more superficial social contacts as equally important as close friends and family will be under discussion in the chapter *Normative Socialisation and Important Others*.

Dahlberg draws her phenomenological analogy from Jean Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* (1998) where he describes how he was supposed to meet his friend Pierre at a café in Paris, but he runs late and when he arrives Pierre is nowhere to be found. In this situation, Sartre discovers that Pierre is not absent from the particular part of the café where they used to sit, instead Sartre feels as if Pierre is absent from the entire café and thus changes the atmosphere in the entire building. Similarly, loneliness is an absence of what should be present according to Dahlberg. Also fundamental to the understanding of loneliness as a phenomenon is that it characterises a whole situation and everything becomes affected by the absence, not only the seat where Sartre and his friend Pierre usually have their coffee (Dahlberg, 2007: 205) or the Christmas holiday when one is 'supposed' to be with the family,



it can have an effect on the entire life of the lonely person long before and after that holiday for example.

In the chapter *The Social Embeddedness of Consumption* the ethnographic material produced has been analysed through the theoretical concept of *sociality*. This concept is described by social anthropologist Christina Toren (1990, see Long and Moore, 2012: 41) as similar to a set of social rules or customs of how to be social and how to form social relationships with the exception of instead of perceiving sociality as a static concept independent of the individual who is to be socialised within it, it comprehends the individual as more active in the process. Terms such as *social rules* or *customs* have an implicit meaning of being static which anthropologists Nicholas J. Long and Henrietta L. Moore argue can be avoided by instead thinking through this concept of sociality (ibid.). Social anthropologist Jo Vergunst and M.A. graduate Anna Vermehren used sociality in a representative manner in their article *The Art of Slow Sociality Movement, Aesthetics and Shared Understanding* (2012) in which they examined an art project in Huntly, Scotland. The project's purpose was to slow down Huntly by having participants cycle through the city at an unusually slow pace. By having people carrying out the activity in the company of other locals the artist hoped to challenge the current norm of which pace one generally moves through the city. To start moving slower was something that had to be learned in relation to others, it could therefore not be done individually. In sociality the relation between humans are also connected to the geographical site where the relational exchange takes place. It was therefore important to carry out the art project in the participants' hometown in order to change their sociality there. Through sharing new bodily experiences Vergunst and Vermehren (2012: 140) meant participants could create new forms of understanding and intersubjective knowledge, i.e. that the sociality of cycling could shift from a high speed to a slow speed sociality, the accentuation on process rather than structure was the advantage in using sociality as a concept in relation to social norms for example and exemplifies very well how I have used the concept in my own analysis.

The fourth publication that has been fundamental to the theoretical framework of this research is French sociologist Marcel Mauss' most acclaimed book *The Gift: the form and reason for exchange in archaic societies* (first published in 1925). A more comprehensive description of his theory and how it has contributed by my own analysis can be read about in

the chapter *The Social Embeddedness of Consumption*. In short terms he described the social codes that apply to gift giving, general rules that he outlined after having studied different forms of potlatch ceremonies among different groups of people in various parts of the world. What he found as a common denominator for all the material objects given between people and groups was that they did not necessarily have any practical function, instead the gifts were given with the purpose of forming social bonds or establishing hierarchies. Mauss found that a gift always comes with a tacit promise of reciprocity, that gifts had a form of intrinsic meaning above that of its material value. Thus, a gift cannot be given without affecting the social relation between the givers in one way or the other. It all depends on *if* and *how* the gift is reciprocated. How Mauss' theory on gifts came to be used in relation to the food serving at S:t Johanneskyrkan can, as mentioned, be read about in chapter *The Social Embeddedness of Consumption*.

Lastly, Richard Wilk and Lisa Cliggett's *Economies and Cultures* (2007: 171-172) discusses the two different economic schools of thought - *formalism* and *substantivism* where the first is known for reducing economic transactions to pure calculation and self-interest and explains economic behaviour with rationality while the substantivists have emphasized the social, cultural and moral tendencies in choices concerning economy. Wilk and Cliggett argue that none are completely correct and that instead we see a mix of the both systems in every society. No system is based on either egocentrism and selfish choices or altruism and sociality. Wilk and Cliggett's description of the two different schools of thought is described further in the chapter *Why S:t Johanneskyrkan*.

## ***Chapter 4 - Methodology***

### *Interviews*

These initial sections in this chapter on methodology concerns the sheer method practised followed by a more extensive deliberation on the methodological choices and concerns. The primary method for the research has been semi-structured interviews with people with meagre incomes, some of them were in financially precarious situations while others had a

more stable but low income. This selection of informants has been found at S:t Johanneskyrkan in Gothenburg. Eight formal interviews were held, all with different visitors of the church. During these interviews I have led the conversation into three different topics. The first one concerned the community at Stadsmissionen in order to find out what they thought about the community at site as a whole and how they interact with other visitors at the church. The second concerned loneliness where I have been interested in if they ever experienced loneliness and how this theme has followed them in their life. The last topic was a few questions about economy and how their financial situation has affected their social level of activity and what they thought about their social life.

Using interviews as a social scientist has become the norm for good reasons and for the purpose of this research it came naturally. Interviews are almost obligatory in qualitative research and it is difficult to imagine a qualitative study of a phenomenon, in this case loneliness, without asking how people they themselves see that phenomenon and how they experience it. This is where the longer interview comes in handy for receiving a great amount of knowledge without interrupting the respondent's entire daily lives (McCracken, 1988: 10-11). In terms of the interviews, this research has adopted a creative view of the interview as a method, rather than seeing participants as sources of information that the researcher can extract through asking the right questions, the interviews have instead been used as a *situation* wherein knowledge is created through both parties, which is the premise of the book *The Active Interview* by Holstein and Gubrium (1995: 14). As an active interviewer one tries to understand the experiential narratives about the past as depending partly on the perspective the past is being described from. Describing the same person from the perspective of a friend or business partner will yield two very different answers. By making the interview active, as 'history-in-the-making', I have tried to encourage the interlocutors to rethink positions in their answers. By sometimes asking critical questions the interviewer can receive answers from various perspectives where the informant actively contemplates and formulates his or her responses in the interview situation. It was not unusual that when being asked about loneliness the interlocutor wanted to analyse the current national situation while I found more usable results when they discussed their personal relation to loneliness. I never perceived it as people being reluctant to talk about their personal life, rather the opposite, but some had a hard time understanding why I was so interested in their personal opinions, a reappearing

issue I believe most anthropologists recognise. The example described above was one situation in which I had to actively discuss different viewpoints of a theme with the visitor in order to receive results from similar perspectives throughout all the interviews (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995: 31, 36-37). Without such a method the validity would have been negatively affected as the interlocutors would have interpreted the open questions very differently, particularly in a conversation or interview without a rigid structure where my own formulations differ. The active interview approach upholds that the interviewer and informant together formulate answers in the situation, the answers are not there from the beginning to simply collect and this is what I have tried to keep in mind in all interactions at S:t Johanneskyrkan.

Sophisticated techniques about ordering questions were not going to make much notable difference when the interviews were casual in nature. Hence, I focused on asking open questions to encourage interlocutors to think and talk in broad terms. Having an overall respect for the person on the other side of the table where you avoid pushing anyone to an answer or keep them in the interview situation for too long for example was also important for me as I felt they gave me a lot of their time. Holstein and Gubrium (1995: 2) support the approach of relying on basic knowledge about fair communication and they describe the advantages of asking mainly open questions which I have relied on.

One very common and equally important occurrence in interview situations that I have become familiar with during various minor fieldworks is that I will not be the only one asking questions, informants will also ask questions to me, oftentimes critical ones. A theoretical school described by Aull Davies (2008: 112ff) which I adhere to on this matter is that which says that for both ethical reasons as well as information efficacy, the interviewer must be open to share his or her own knowledge. If the interviewer does not invest anything into the conversation (s)he will yield generally more scarce results. Thereof, I perceived it not as unscientific to answer questions such as 'Have you ever tried drugs?' or 'What do you think of those people sitting over there?', but on the other hand essential in showing that the purpose of my presence is not to 'extract' information from anyone, it is rather to create it by participating to the best possible extent.

### *Participant observations*

As a complementary method, participant observations proved to be incredibly rewarding in receiving a deeper knowledge of the visitor's life-worlds. The most efficient approach to S:t Johanneskyrkan as a field site and its visitors was to travel to Gothenburg and enter the church around 1PM, one hour before lunch ends serving. That way I could sit down and have lunch in a natural way in relation to the conventions and scout the environment for potential people to interview. I quickly realised that no one would approach me out of nowhere so I would have to approach them - a technique I have become rather used to after various fieldworks, equally rewarding as mentally tiresome for an introvert. Some people sat alone and some in groups when I approached them, however, I always began by stating the purpose of my presence to avoid anyone from feeling secretly studied. The participant observations were always an initial step to see how interested people were in my topic and if there was any idea to ask them to participate in an interview. It was also a rewarding method for learning more about how the social network at S:t Johanneskyrkan was assembled, people's opinions about the organization in general and their financial situation. The topic of loneliness was more prevalent in the formal interviews.

In terms of choice of method, this research has been following a traditional ethnographic model of initially entering the organization and its activities with participant observations pursued by semi-structured interviews with people I managed to establish some kind of relationship with, a frequently used combination in social sciences in general and anthropology in particular (Aull Davies, 2008: 105-106). In an environment such as S:t Johanneskyrkan it was difficult for someone like me to conduct non-participant observations, which was my initial idea, as many people I talked to mentioned that I did not fit in, mostly due to my young age. It was not possible for me to just sit down beside a group in the church without them asking me what I did there, some of them asked why I was there and not in school for example. Early on into the fieldwork I realized I had to actively engage in the social life at site which turned out to be a positive initiative. By engaging in the lives of others the researcher's perspective is intertwined with the participant's which opens up for learning about certain activities and relationships which non-participant observation cannot

yield and this I took advantage of. I assume my initial idea to avoid participating the first days was only due to a lack of courage.

Much of the information gathered came from informal conversations with visitors who did not have time or interest in conducting any interview, however I always told people the intention of my presence in order to avoid them feeling secretly studied. In some cases they declined an interview but told me after a conversation that 'You can write that down' which I interpreted as them being uncomfortable or too stressed with an interview situation but not being reluctant to be part of the final product. This way participant observations and informal conversations were suitable for the shyer visitors or those who lacked time. With those who were obviously not interested in being part of the study I never talked to about loneliness or economy, our conversations were more casual in nature.

### *Selection of Informants*

In order to conduct an ethnographic study and gain qualitative knowledge concerning how people with a currently low income experience loneliness, the choice of site to do fieldwork at landed on S:t Johanneskyrkan in Gothenburg where people actually spent time and had time on their hands to talk with a student like me. However, S:t Johanneskyrkan as a site for the purpose of this particular fieldwork is not ideal in every aspect; the clientele is male dominant, mostly above the retirement age of 65 but below 85, the steep hill up to the church might explain the latter. Furthermore, the visitors are *usually* not socially isolated if they spend the majority of their week at the church which led me to begin at the other end by finding people who socialize and are part of a community and ask them about their experiences of loneliness. Finding currently socially isolated or lonely people from a large age span with ethnic and gender diversities is challenging. Rather soon though I recognized how many of the visitors were actually there with the purpose of avoiding social isolation and that more or less everyone I talked to had experienced loneliness and was in a poor financial situation. I soon came to terms with S:t Johanneskyrkan as a fully appropriate site and I also saw the advantages of examining the function of an organization providing urban people with a social 'living room'.

Which people at the church I came to talk to was decided at the site as, which I will expand upon later on, the clientele at the church were in certain aspects also genuinely diverse. First of all the church has a share of frequent visitors dealing with serious alcohol and narcotics abuse and/or homelessness. I occasionally spoke with these people but we never carried out any formal interviews since they were moderately interested in me and appeared to have more practical reasons for being at the church. Interviewing them about loneliness would, I concluded, have been a different research project. In the beginning of this project I became especially interested in low income earners as a social group; they can easily be forgotten since they are not in an immediate vulnerable situation. Those were the reasons I wanted to focus on this group particularly. However, to argue that substance abusers and homeless people were altogether excluded from the research is a stretch. For instance, a man named Lindh who contributed extensively to the results was a former alcoholic who had now come clean and Alf who I talked to during more informal circumstances a few times mentioned that he had been homeless during a period in his life. I still decided to include them in the research due to their knowledge about S:t Johanneskyrkan's social function and their previous social issues were not affecting their everyday life as much anymore.

To tell if someone was an abuser or not was also an aspect of the choice of informants which I have spent a great deal of time considering. A heavy substance abuse over a long period often leaves a mark on a person's physical attributes, but someone can also be in the initial stage of a substance abuse or abuse other things like food, sex or hazard games which might not be visible. I had to constantly keep in mind that whoever I interviewed could possibly have serious social issues as foregoing examples which directly affected that person's sense of loneliness without me knowing. Even if the financial situation can be the deciding variable to why that person has trouble activating him- or herself more in social life the validity would be severely inaccurate if it turned out I had interviewed eight alcoholics or narcotic abusers without knowing. Here the environment of S:t Johanneskyrkan supported me considerably with its openness and rehabilitation focus which, as I interpreted it, made people very open to talk about such problems. If I had met all those people who discussed their current or previous problems with me in another setting outside of the church they would probably not have mentioned any of it. Therefore, I believe I had decent information about which

interlocutors had more serious problems of substance abuse and which frequented the church for other reasons.

Besides those with a heavy ongoing abuse, I tried to actively avoid another group which was the workers, both professionals such as rehabilitation assistants and priests and also the volunteers who mostly worked in the kitchen. The purpose of the research was not intended to focus on a holistic view of the entire operation that Stadsmissionen organize which many workers thought at the beginning of our brief conversations, but rather to understand the reasons why people came to the church in the first place and what made them stay - seen from the visitors' perspective. Interviewing the personnel of a philanthropic organization about the organization also bears an issue of validity which is difficult to avoid, namely the probability that they will glorify it, an issue reflected upon by Blunk and Lindgren (2006: 8) who wrote a B.A. thesis on Stadsmissionen in Malmö. Another reason to not include the professional's perspective was that this was exactly what Blunk and Lindgren did in their thesis. Worth mentioning is that I neither sought contact with the rather ambiguous groups of ethnic minorities which tended to keep to their compatriots. They will mostly be present in one scene which will be described in the chapter *The Social Embeddedness of Consumption* in which the interlocutor Peder is playing chess with a group of people, all with different ethnic backgrounds. A few of them spoke decent Swedish but most did not understand a single word. This group would undeniably have been interesting to interview but the language barrier was too difficult to overcome. Some of these groups were from various middle eastern and east European countries. There was also a group of Chileans, which often sat together in the church but had no issues with the Swedish language since they immigrated during the 70s and 80s, that I talked to on a regular basis while other ethnic minorities were non-prioritized in this research.

Participants of the study have not included anyone under aged (qualitative studies on children already exist, see Fernqvist, 2013), or enrolled in full-time education since the economic differences among this group is smaller and less people therefore have an economic situation which differs from their peers', this group is also relatively well studied already. Other than this, both men and women, with or without partners or children, of any age group have been qualified for the study.



On the note of the selection of informants in relation to validity, I have considered if I was accurately researching what I set out to do. In other words, did the people at S:t Johanneskyrkan have a low income? After a few days at the church observing and conversing with visitors I came to the conclusion that this was the case. Certainly, there were exceptions, but the further the fieldwork went the more I experienced that the selection of informants in this case was highly accurate for the purpose of the research. For ethical reasons I never asked anyone exactly how much they earned on a monthly basis which meant the recognized definition of living in relative poverty as <60% of the national median income could not be utilized. However, I interpreted that most visitors I talked to would place themselves somewhere around that margin. The median gross income in Sweden 2018 was 30 900 SEK (SCB, 2019) which generates a relatively comfortable income. Working full time as an assistant nurse, which is one of the lowest paying sectors, generates a median income of 20 400 SEK. This means most full-time employees do not fall under the category of living in relative poverty which was one additional reason the fieldwork took place during lunchtime, that led me to meet more unemployed, part-time, signed off and retired people which generally lie closer to the limit of relative poverty. The scarce economic means of my interlocutors was manifested in multiple ways; in the interviews, a majority of the interlocutors said they had economic issues, they always noticed each other when free snacks was offered and many said that the cheap lunch had brought them to Stadsmissionen and S:t Johanneskyrkan in the first place. It was apparent that most of the visitors had a very low disposable income to speak of.

### *Reflexivity*

After every day at S:t Johanneskyrkan I had just over an hour of travelling time back home which encouraged me to process all the impressions I had taken in over the day. It was also a superb occasion for me to reflect over my own role as a researcher and who I became when I was interacting with the people at the church. I wrote all these thoughts down during the bus ride back to Borås and the most distinguished characteristics in those notes was how mentally fatigued I felt after every visit. Having a clear task (discussing loneliness with the visitors) was the most difficult for me socially since I constantly had in mind that I must sooner or

later lead the conversation in that direction. Once I had managed to overcome the issue of initiating a conversation with a stranger I felt more comfortable discussing news, film or music with the informants and remain a mainly passive observer and listener, now I instead, at some point, had to take the command over the conversations in order to lead them into my predetermined themes which had me fatigued after only a few hours at the church.

To remain somewhat neutral during conversations was one of the more challenging tasks and it was constantly being tested. Due to the fact that I had chosen an active approach as method and tried to be part as much as I could of the community at the church I could never insist on 'being a mere researcher' when people asked for my opinion, but simultaneously I could not sit and talk down on other visitors or glorify alcohol when talking to a former alcoholic for example. I felt it would be morally wrong to just accept condescending comments about other visitors if the interlocutor sought my affirmation or join in on these conversations where the person on the other side of the table glorified drugs or alcohol as happened on a few occasions. To remain neutral while also participating in the conversations was a constant act of balance which was mostly reduced to me asking more questions and tried to avoid opinions on sensitive matters.

Another feature of this research that I was not used to was the many questions I received about the research process itself which was a result of the fact that a large share of the visitors were former academics such as psychologists, teachers and doctors, or they happened to have a general interest in social sciences. Receiving questions of such kind was beneficial for the research process itself since I constantly had to rethink my decisions and it also allowed the interlocutors to learn more about me and not only the other way around. I was faced with questions such as 'How are you going to compile the results?', 'Are you only interviewing men or have you managed to talk to some women?' and 'So what differs between what you do and a newspaper coverage?'. A large share of the people I interviewed were even interested in my life in general due to my, in the context of S:t Johanneskyrkan, young age and they expressed their genuine interest in knowing how young people lived their lives nowadays and our thoughts on different matters. Being from an otherwise non-represented generation was a tremendous asset among the elder clientele at the church.

### *My Relation to Christianity*

In line with the reflexive tradition in anthropology, reflections upon advantages and disadvantages of how my particular perspective has affected the research have been essential. My own relation to Christianity has been one such reflection since Stadsmissionen and S:t Johanneskyrkan, even though it is first and foremost a field site for reaching a particular group of people, is an organization resting on a Christian foundation. I was raised with very vague Christian traditions and beliefs where I was baptised and confirmed in the Church of Sweden (Sweden's largest faith community and part of the state up until the turn of the millennium 1999/2000) but I had no expectations from family and friends to participate in any further religious activities. At the age of 20 I decided to leave the Church of Sweden formally, a membership which you held automatically when you were born up until 1995 if any of your parents were members. I thought that the small tax percentage that members automatically pay to the church every year could be used for something I choose myself. Other than that I had no additional arguments to why I decided to leave. Christianity in all its various forms has been met by an immense lack of interest by me and I have not been significantly interested in the social work of different churches either. The purpose of this brief section is to state the mindset I had towards organizations resting on Christian beliefs to clarify that my bias was not leaned towards glorifying the organization I set out to do research within, something I believe could be difficult for an active member of a Christian congregation.

### *Ethical Considerations*

Ethical considerations have been guided by the American Anthropological Association's (AAA) Code of Ethics (2009). I have aimed at causing no harm during the fieldwork by using fictitious names for anonymity, making all research available for the participants by promising the staff and interlocutors to hang a copy of the final result on the bulletin-board by the church's entrance, and in general trying to develop a working relationship that could be beneficial to all parties involved which is critical according to AAA (2009: 2). More specifically, I have contemplated the ethical issue of asking questions about poverty. Even if S:t Johanneskyrkan was an open and inclusive environment there can be a stigma around

poverty which made me approach possible participants by asking if they themselves experienced that their financial situation impaired on their social life and not assume that one variable equals the other. Even if it is statistically likely that people living with scarce financial means are experiencing a higher level of involuntary loneliness, I cannot assume it is the case with everyone I talked to which could have stirred up emotions of insult. Furthermore, I was strict with always stating the purpose of the research and asking if the person wanted to be part of it, it was the initial inquiry throughout the fieldwork.

After the planned collecting of material had been carried out, various themes emerged which I found interesting to investigate further. It is common that qualitative research generates different themes that were not present in the earlier stages of the research process which is why follow-up interviews can yield interesting results. Unfortunately, the Covid-19 virus and its following travel regulations prevented me from returning to S:t Johanneskyrkan. Even without the advice against trips that were not absolutely necessary the ethical reasons were obvious to not physically return since many risk groups visit the church. I had to settle with the material I had even if the church on their webpage declared that they still operated as normal.

The disposition of the research from this point have been divided into three main parts, all consisting of a number of chapters which discuss different matters of the material, some are largely based on empirical results while others are more theoretical in nature. Following the third part is a brief chapter on recommended further research and conclusions.

## *Chapter 5 - The People at S:t Johanneskyrkan*

In this part the results of the empirical work is described first. It is largely based on the fieldwork from S:t Johanneskyrkan and to give a picture of how things worked in the church. The initial section is a description of the field, both a short historical retrospection of how Stadsmissionen and S:t Johanneskyrkan came about as well as personal reflections of being at the church. Afterwards reflections and an analysis on the interlocutors' family situation and how they engaged in other communities besides that of S:t Johanneskyrkan follow. To summarize, it is about the people visiting the church.

### *The Field*

Before Stadsmissionen opened up in Gothenburg, many larger European cities already had city missions which could be traced back to the beginning of the 19th century in Glasgow where the first city mission was founded (Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d.; Göteborgs Kyrkliga Stadsmission, n.d.). The idea to open up a local branch in Gothenburg came from an appeal in the local newspaper by incumbent Isaac Béen in 1952 (Göteborgs Kyrkliga Stadsmission, n.d.). He had seen enough of the spreading alcoholism in the city and wanted to do something about it. The City Mission have traditionally been a Christian religious communion founded to assist those in needs and they have kept a focus on providing the urban poor with food, houseroom, employment, medical care and naturally - spiritual support in the form of Christian beliefs (Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d.). Some parts of the organization consist of them offering their services to the public sector and receiving an allowance in return such as providing short time accommodation for people in need. However, most parts are fully dependent on donations, for example the operation of S:t Johanneskyrkan (Göteborgs Kyrkliga Stadsmission, n.d.). Stadsmissionen in Gothenburg operates in various fields, close to the church they have their main building, a residence for sobering alcoholics and a second-hand store right by the tram line. In this research though, I have focused solely on the church and their visitors.

Between three to four days a week for a month (10th of February to the 10th of March) I rode my bike down to the bus station to travel to Gothenburg. It departs quite frequently, but it takes at least one hour from Borås where I live to Gothenburg Central. From there it was a 15-minute ride with the tram before I stood beneath S:t Johanneskyrkan. The walk up to the church is ridiculously steep but fortunately it is asphalt instead of the usual gravel path, I am not sure if there is another road leading up because I rarely saw anyone walking upwards, only down, at the same time I also arrived later than most others to S:t Johanneskyrkan. The church building was bought a couple of years ago by Stadsmissionen and lay on one of the most coveted plots in the city with an overview of the water meandering into the city. 'In today's currency rate this plot is of absolutely inestimable value, just imagine if you would tear this down, you could build 500 apartments up here.' as a man named Stig told me on my first day at the church. When you enter the building through the heavy wooden doors, which reminds more of a gate, there is not much that brings the thoughts to a church. Before reaching the characteristic church benches there were multiple dinner tables set up in the main hall and on the left side from the entrance there is a kitchen of simple standard and a cash register behind which most of the volunteers served food. The sterile colours I associate with churches were here instead warm and pleasant. On the sides of the main room gigantic curtains hang from the roof to separate the hall from other spaces in the church. After a while I found out that alcoholics anonymous and narcotics anonymous had their meetings behind those curtains. I did not have the opportunity to do any fieldwork on evenings or weekends so everything that I observed at the church took place in daytime on weekdays and around noon they started serving lunch for 25 SEK per portion which I always enjoyed together with other visitors, it was a nice element of the day where I could naturally sit down with strangers and have a chat. Already a quarter before serving time the queue stretched at least 20 metres.

My initial thought was that the first couple of days at the church would be calm and rather eventless. I wanted to look around and talk to some of the volunteers to get an idea of what kind of people strolled around in the church and what they actually did there. As I should have learned by now, after a handful of field studies, it is usually the other way around. More or less everyone saw how unnaturally I approached the café-like environment of the church. The man mentioned above - Stig, had a trained eye and came up to me and asked if I was there to do some kind of school assignment. We ended up that very first day, just like I did

with many others the following days, talking about anthropology and the current social development in the country. This time it was me, Stig and two of his friends who had also been eating lunch at the church that day. When the bell rang to signal that the church was closing for the day Stig told me that he and his friends usually go to the small library down by the tram line and he asked me if I wanted to come along. I was overjoyed and accepted the invitation, I could not have imagined that people would be this friendly and talkative which had me feeling hopeful that I might have found a perfect site to conduct my fieldwork if everyone would be this eager talking to me.

The second day conducting fieldwork would not be eventless either, which was one of my major concerns. It was always a nervous moment to walk in through the gateway because I knew I had three to five hours of intense socialization ahead of me. Even though I was far from constantly talking to people my mind was always perceptive to people to initiate conversation with. Every day began with a minute of insecurity just standing by the entrance scouting for company - and potential people to interview. This time I detected a middle-aged man and a woman chatting at one of the long tables and the other side of it was free - I went over and sat down. The man was fond of talking even though he did not seem to have any greater interest in the subject of my research. When he walked away for a moment I had a better opportunity to talk to the woman who was more reserved. It turned out that she was his partner and had moved to the city to live with him. She did not seem to have had the same sort of social issues as him but I never asked specifically (the man told me he had been homeless). She had worked as a nurse since her twenties but had constantly been struggling with her economy. She also told me that loneliness had been one of her greater foes throughout her life and that her avocation of painting had made days more bearable. It was her partner who introduced her to Stadsmissionen and her new life in Gothenburg was now filled with more social activities which she loved and had her newfound partner to thank for.

The man rejoined our company and he asked me if I participated in any sports. It became obvious that football was what he wanted to talk about and I told him I used to play. He put his hand in his pocket and picked up his wallet from which he took out a card that said 'The team of the homeless' and explained that he was part of this team and they practised a few times a week in a local sports auditorium. He proudly gave it to me and I studied it, a cordial

initiative I thought to myself before I handed it back. After that it did not take more than a minute before one of the rehabilitation assistants approached me and told me to follow her into their little office by the entrance. She had a stern look on her face when she told me that one of the volunteers had seen a suspicious transaction between me and the man I sat with. She wanted to know what he had given me and the purpose of my presence at the church but she was very skeptical of my explanations. Had I really been mistaken for a drug dealer? Would they disallow me to return to the church after only two days? After a while the woman accepted my explanation of the situation and thought that I could possibly be a law-abiding student after all. Afterwards I was unsettled by the sudden suspicion towards me while at the same time I understood that street dealers coming to the church to find new clients must be a recurring issue that the workers tried to restrain. I had an unpleasant feeling as I went back to my seat in the church cafeteria. I immediately felt more hostile towards those working there and more aligned with the visitors who at least were friendly towards me. For a brief moment I thought this might be that ‘Clifford Geertz-moment’ in the field where I connect with my informants on a deeper level due to a common antagonist where I appear as ‘one of them’ by acting in the same way towards the authority, just as Geertz and his wife became accepted into the social circle by the Balinese people after running from the police during a raid towards cock fights (Geertz, 1972: 3-5). By the end of the day, after hopping from table to table talking to visitors, the thought had shifted from a vague idea to an absurdity since I realized how much appreciated and respected the staff were among all the visitors. On the bus back home that day I smirked a little at my previous thought and realized that a more ingratiate attitude towards the rehabilitation assistants would probably yield more trust among everyone at the church.

While moving around at a site much devoted to the most vulnerable in society, I even had to remind myself on a few occasions of the actual purpose of my research. Unlike what most people initially thought, that I was there to study the organization of Stadsmissionen or the life of homeless and drug abusers, I was after all there to learn more about the connection between income and loneliness.

### *Family Situation*



A close and well-conditioned relationship with family members can have a socially integrative role and has been found to be a main factor in alleviating loneliness according to de Jong Gierveld, van Tilburg and Dykstra (2006: 489). When interpreting the family situations among the visitors I constantly had to relate findings to the occasional special circumstances of my informants. Since S:t Johanneskyrkan run many rehabilitation programs they naturally attracted a large share of visitors with current or previous problems such as alcohol, narcotics or gambling misuse which oftentimes affects family relations negatively. In this case it was more than ever important to listen to the informants carefully to see if there were explanations of this sort or what the underlying causes were for family relations to for example have been torn up. Poverty and substance abuse are not always separable but I tried to pay attention to see if it was actually the economic variable that I studied first and foremost. Some informants who were former alcohol or narcotic abusers were very open to me about it and mentioned it as soon as we began talking, some gave hints to previous abuse and some never mentioned anything about it. It was a case by case analysis and negotiation which had to be done to see if explanations were reasonable. The general approach however is to take informants' words for what they are and not assume too much.

When it came to family relations, a majority of the interlocutors had decent relations but at the same time wished they were better. This could be either a family on their own or better relations with parents and siblings. This desire manifested itself most apparently when discussing the celebration of holidays or economic matters. The first one I discussed family life with was Stig. He is a frequently reappearing figure in the analysis and the first one I talked to at length at the church. He visited S:t Johanneskyrkan almost every day during the first two weeks I was there, but after that I only saw him on my final day at the church. Stig had an interest in culture where filmmaking was the most central; politics was his other main interest. He was now in his sixties and always showed up with a beanie and a thin scarf around his neck. Talking to Stig was always joyful because it was obvious that he had a genuine interest in other people and my presence at the church gave him an opportunity to get a first-hand insight into another generation he told me. He was doing as much anthropological work on me as I was on him. He told me he came from a family with very scarce economic means and he could never afford the same things as his friends when he grew up which was a condition that had affected him later on in life as well. He had great

respect for money and avoided squandering, but he also knew he could make ends meet with small means. Stig was also a good friend of Peder who will appear in the next chapter.

When I asked Stig about his way of celebrating holidays we began discussing his family situation and he immediately got a dispirited and resigned expression on his face.

**Simon (me):** ‘Have you ever celebrated any holiday here? Christmas or Easter or something?’

**Stig:** ‘Well, yes, you see there I’m a bit lonely because I don’t have a family or such and my siblings have families and kids and stuff.’

**Simon:** ‘Do they live in Gothenburg?’

**Stig:** ‘Mm, yeah, but it has played out that Christmas... Last Christmas I was actually abroad for a month, but this Christmas I was actually here from time to time and then they are absolutely incredible here at this church I mean. Then they serve on Christmas Eve, Christmas day and Boxing day and they pay for everything and it’s ham and smoked salmon and it’s just everything.’

Stig never mentioned that his relationship with his siblings or parents was strained, it was rather the circumstances that made it difficult for him to spend much time with his family. Having a family on his own on the other hand used to be the major goal in life for him but unfortunately, he never got one and now he feels as if the chance has passed.

**Simon:** ‘Then I wonder, have you ever had a partner or best friend at some point in life?’

**Stig:** ‘I’ve, I’ve had about ten partners and a couple of best friends in my life that have been... [takes a deep breath] I feel a sorrow in that because, partly I feel a sorrow in that I never managed to create a family and kids and all of that, but at the same time it’s partly chosen. On the one hand I’m a lazybone because it costs a lot of time and energy and you have to work and save up a lot of money for example. If you only need to provide for yourself... or I have counted on that and it’s perhaps double of *four* times as much money you have to make unless you’re planning on getting married to someone wealthy.’

In unison with many of the other interlocutors Stig finds his economic situation to impair family life, in his case even to the extent where he questioned if he could ever afford having a

family on his own. Having children brings with it a considerable cost for most people but usually there are ways to work around the problem. However, living on a low income can amplify the magnitude of the problem and it becomes a major obstacle. Stig was not alone with his concerns, Josef was another visitor who also was in his sixties and articulated similar issues. He had immigrated to Sweden in the 80's from a middle eastern country and had managed to create a family here. His other relatives lived in other countries, the majority in the US, which had greatly decreased his safety net of social contacts. Josef was a former businessman in his country of origin but has now retired from all work, he said he was used to a completely different economic standard than he had experienced when he moved to Sweden. Immigrating to another country can be tough on one's relations to family and close of kin. It can also result, as in Josef's case, in losing financial assets. Josef ran a family owned car business when he was younger but that was nothing he could yield anything out of when he came to Sweden. Besides the financial issues he had been struggling with mental health issues ever since he emigrated.

Josef's initiation to S:t Johanneskyrkan started when he first divorced his wife and all of a sudden stood without a home. Fortunately, he received a room from the city administration at a hostel so he would not have to live on the street. Despite having some issues with his mental well-being he had no other social issues he told me, it was rather his innocence and naivety that made him never sign up for any housing queue which led him close to homelessness. At the hostel where he lived after the divorce for three years there was a man from the staff who introduced him to S:t Johanneskyrkan and told him they served food there. For five years, Josef had now come to the church to eat lunch and collect bread which he shared with his neighbours. Similar to Stig and Thomas (the interlocutor I spent most time talking to), Josef had politics as a main interest and he now translated global political news to his mother tongue online for people to read. He also published his own opinions and analyses in different internet fora.

Similar to Stig, Josef forthrightly articulated the disadvantages of not having enough money to uphold a healthy relationship with his adult children or in the search of a partner.

**Simon (me):** 'What would you do differently if you had unlimited money?'

**Josef:** ‘I would have travelled, I would’ve visited my children every week, or every day if I could choose [they lived in another part of the country]. Maybe I could’ve had an apartment in every city where they live [laughs].’

Josef talks extensively about his, now adult, children throughout the interview and it is apparent that he misses them since he and his wife divorced and they moved away for career reasons soon after. Even though divorced men generally have a lower quantity and quality of contact with their children than divorced mothers (e.g. Kaufman and Uhlenberg, 1998: 926), Josef only mentioned economic explanations to why he could not spend more time with his children and he said they had a great relationship as for the rest. As can be read about in section *Definitions: Loneliness*, involuntary loneliness can be divided into emotional and social loneliness. When discussing loneliness Josef comes back to emotional loneliness as being the worst part for him personally. When I ask what loneliness is for him he states that it is the lack of a partner period, it does not have so much to do with friends, he says. His social network is smaller than he would like to, he says, but its implications are not immediate, it is the negative consequences of not having a partner that is most apparent and that makes him experience intense feelings of loneliness. It is most difficult in the evenings, when the sun sets, ‘It attracts a lot of emotions, I prefer not to see it, in any country.’ Josef says. Further into the interview we returned to discussing the economic limits of engaging more in social life.

**Simon:** ‘Have you ever felt that money has affected how you socialize with colleagues and friends and such?’

**Josef:** ‘Still, still.’

**Simon:** ‘That money affects what you can do...’

**Josef:** ‘Yes!’

**Simon:** ‘Are there other things you would like to do if you had more money? Like what?’

**Josef:** ‘Finding a partner.’

**Simon:** ‘Does it cost money?’

**Josef:** ‘No to have money, it helps to explore other scenes and have a bigger circle of people where you can meet a partner. I can then expand the places where I meet people like the theater, cinema, those things you can afford. One reason I’m here is because I can’t afford.’

**Simon:** ‘Mm it’s cheap food...’

**Josef:** ‘No! Not only food. The money doesn’t last to go anywhere else.’

For Josef it is not the social network that is lacking, it is a close and permanent partner. Stadsmissionen offers a wide range of cost free activities which he is aware of, but he does not see any potential in meeting a partner there. In order to do so he would need more money to expand his circle of friends where he can potentially meet a new partner. However, having lunch at Stadsmissionen is an easy choice for Josef due to both practical, economic and after all - social reasons. He claims to be somewhat of a lazybone and does not have the energy to cook and do the dishes every day. It generates a lot of waste as well to cook food when you live alone in his opinion. Packages for food and necessities are too large and are more designed for a family, he explains to me. Josef makes it obvious that he desires to find a partner and also share the household with this partner. Josef describes part of the reoccurring catch 22 issue: that he cannot afford to be in environments where he can meet someone and by not living together with anyone his economy becomes only worse. Every year the Swedish consumer agency - Konsumentverket, releases a report on how to keep your private economy in balance and how to budget it. In 2020 the estimated expenditure for living four adults in one household was 10 210 SEK/person each month while living alone the expenditures rose to 15 050 SEK/person. By being unable to split expenditures such as food, hygiene, internet and housing costs, the monthly budget is 4840 SEK higher for single households (Konsumentverket, 2020: 23). An approximate calculation would be that it is 2420 SEK cheaper/person every month by living in a two-person household. Living alone does not only weaken the economic safety net for unexpected expenditures a partner otherwise can provide in dual earner societies (Alm, Nelson and Nieuwenhuis, 2019: 7), but also drains the budget with a substantial amount every month. The calculations are based on multi-person households consisting of exclusively adults while it is important to remember that multi-person households can consist of one adult and two children for example, where only one person brings an income. Josef’s economic experience from living alone is thus not only a feeling, it has consistently been backed up by research which highlights the difficulties of living alone.

The very last day for me at the church, I interviewed Pia, the woman whose story about how loneliness has followed her throughout her life resembles that of Josef's. Pia had worked with economy and administrative tasks before she, at the age of 40, decided to study at the University of Gothenburg. All her engagements in different communities then had to be paused due to her studies taking up much of her time during that period. Pia was now, as some of my other interlocutors, recently retired. Besides eating lunch at S:t Johanneskyrkan every weekday before going to a nearby second-hand store with her husband and their friend, she was engaged in a wide range of other group activities such as meditation, folk music, drama and art, she even said she had become active in her housing cooperative by accident. Pia was a sociable person to the core, someone who almost could not avoid a high engagement in community activity. Her look brought the thoughts indubitably to a woman of culture, she had somewhat of an alternative haircut and round glasses with thick frames to accompany. When describing herself she said that she had always been independent and went her own way, even though she had a partner nowadays. Pia had had friends most of her life, however a few major changes in life made her lose her social network a number of times and she had to start all over. During the time she worked within the economy sector in her early adulthood she moved abroad for four years which was a difficult experience when she finally came home and many of her friends had moved to other cities. Also, when she began her academic life she had no choice but to resign from many of her interests which put a strain on most of her relationships. During our interview Pia described tremendous loneliness in these different periods of her life. To relieve the feeling she could go for walks which could last for up to three hours and when she came home she fell asleep immediately from exhaustion. During other periods of loneliness she spent all of her spare time on garden work to avoid dealing with the feeling. Since Pia was a 'loner' as she described herself she quickly felt lonely when she lacked a social belonging. She never mentioned that a partner would relieve that feeling so emotional loneliness was never her major issue. When I talked to her she had recently met her partner and what resembled her story to Josef's was how partnership had an impact on her private economy. She described her own financial situation as having always been catastrophic in her words, but that it had stabilized since her current partner came into the picture. Now she was much calmer by the end of the month because they had a buffer which was a large difference from when she lived alone.

None of the visitors I talked to had particularly close relationships with their families. Some occasionally visited parents, siblings or children and some had settled down with their partners, while some interlocutors described their family relations as slowly deteriorating due to aging parents or geographical obstacles to visiting family members. A few also mentioned economic reasons as exemplified by Stig and Josef above and unfortunately S:t Johanneskyrkan were no place for them to relieve emotional loneliness from lacking a partner or family on their own. It was more useful in providing a social belonging in their opinion which will be described further in *Part II*.

### *Other Communities*

Before taking a grasp on the various other communities that the people at Stadsmissionen engaged in and why, it is important for the reader to keep in mind that just as in any other community the personalities that occurred varied greatly. Some were shy to the extent where it became a social problem for them and some definitely placed themselves on the other side of the spectrum with a sizable social network and seemed to be unable to touch anything without turning it into a community or some form of union. Naturally a large part of the interlocutors was somewhere in between. Nevertheless, the fieldwork could reveal a striking similarity with previous research on the matter of socioeconomic status and social network.

Since most visitors had economic difficulties the associations they engaged in were mostly cost-free or had a relatively low member fee. Thomas was one of these people who engaged in relatively cheap activities and did not like to spend money unless absolutely necessary. Thomas would count as my main informant and someone I spoke to every day doing fieldwork. He was in his seventies and had been going to S:t Johanneskyrkan for about five years. He was now retired from his job as a primary school teacher but the teacher's tendencies were still highly visible in the way he could command people at the church not to smoke by the entrance or keep down their volume. Thomas was born and raised in Stockholm and enjoyed making a point of it toward his friends, a back and forth banter about Stockholm versus Gothenburg that never seemed to end. Most of the time Thomas' facial expression was stern and at first I did not think he would be friendly at all, but it turned out he was very

talkative and seemed to know more or less everyone at the church even though I rarely saw him speaking to them.

The first time he found out about Stadsmissionen as an organization was when his daughter found a theater group for all ages, both old and young and decided to join it. Thomas followed her to repetitions and went to the final show where he told me he got absolutely amazed by the quality of the performance. When Thomas, about 15 years later got chronic stomach issues and could no longer keep up with his former activities he went back to Stadsmissionen and found S:t Johanneskyrkan which offered much of the social activities he now lacked. Besides the relationship with his daughter he had a very close relationship with his sister who still lived in Stockholm. The rest of his family had passed away quite early in his life. Thomas's father had pursued a career abroad and had been stationed in China and South America when Thomas grew up so travelling was a constant subject of discussion between me and Thomas. He had been living in South America in periods of his adult life as well. Unfortunately, these years abroad had affected his pension considerably. In order to be able to enjoy a reasonable pension in Sweden with an average salary, one must work almost full time for most of one's career. Thomas had been working a fair share of his life for a foundation in South America which gave him food and lodging but no salary to speak of which is why he had to make sure he did not spend any of his disposable income on unnecessaries.

Thomas was one of the sociable characters that used to eat at S:t Johanneskyrkan, those who never backed away from becoming involved in community activity. Culture, sports and political societies, Thomas had been engaged in all of them. Pia, the woman mentioned in the previous chapter had a similar personality and had been engaged in societies in over five different fields of interest, everything from folk music to yoga. S:t Johanneskyrkan was a melting pot in this regard, from timid personalities to the most extroverted, the whole spectrum was represented.

For Thomas, engaging in the social life of different associations had been extremely important for his well-being. Earlier in his life it was mainly volunteer organizations, but nowadays when he had retired he was active in a running community and a political



organization in order to quell loneliness and be part of a community, something he talked very straightforwardly about. Being a member of a running community in Sweden costs approximately 250 SEK annually in contrast to a gym membership which lands somewhere around 5000 SEK annually. One day when I sit down with Thomas his happiness and excitement is unmistakable. He tells me that he had just had his first running session with the club in a couple of months due to a foot injury along with his chronic stomach issues. He is coming of age now and his performance is no longer of much importance, instead he speaks extensively on the friendly community they have down at the club which he has been a member of for years now. Another organization that has previously been important in increasing Thomas's social network was a political party which usually does not cost more than 300 SEK annually to be a member of. Unfortunately for Thomas, he lost all phone numbers to people he met through the party when his old phone broke and he had to exchange it for a new one. Some of those people no longer frequented the party meetings which made Thomas realize he might never hear from some of them ever again. He sometimes went to the meetings nowadays but it was not as social and fun anymore he thought.

One day by the end of the fieldwork period Thomas and I sat and discussed the latest happenings in his life as we usually did. One chair away from Thomas sat another man, clearly younger, I would say about 45 years old and quietly ate his lunch with a remarkable pace. He looked around in the church as if he was seeking contact and I tried to initiate him into our conversation which he responded to very well. The reason he had eaten so rapidly was because he was stressed and needed to leave the church in 20 minutes. I quickly summarized my research for him and took the decision to ask if he wanted to do a short interview which he gladly accepted. He introduced himself as Peo and said that he used to visit Stadsmissionen at least once a week since he lost his job. He was now seeking a new employment and actually had an offer as a taxi driver which he considered accepting. The time I spoke with him was one week before the Covid-19 virus hit Sweden with full strength and the government decided, just like governments all over the world, to drastically curb the physical activity of the citizens which resulted in unemployment figures skyrocketing; my guess is that Peo never landed the job as a taxi driver. However dejecting his situation was he was very talkative and larky in our interview. He said he had 'a bit of depression syndrome'

and spent his days trying to keep a healthy routine to break the vicious circle, coming to S:t Johanneskyrkan to eat lunch at least once a week was a part of that routine. Otherwise he had a tendency to sleep through the days and become socially isolated he told me. Concerning the theme of social networks through other communities, Peo told me he had been a reliable visitor of yoga classes at a centre in Gothenburg from which he had many close friends. Unfortunately, he no longer had the possibility of going there since he lost his job.

**Peo:** ‘and then I’m involved in some of these... what’s it called... yoga and meditation circles and there I meet a lot of good people, which I call my friends.’

**Simon (me):** ‘Is it once a week you go there then?’

**Peo:** ‘No now I haven't gone there in like, fuck, ages because I haven't had the money [laughs].’

**Simon:** ‘Yeah it costs a bit, right?’

**Peo:** ‘Yes if you’re going to a yoga class you got to pay, but the ultimate goal is that you’re supposed to exercise by yourself of course. So you don’t have to pay for it, but it’s still good for inspiration and such to do it with other people. One or two times every week is good.’

**Simon:** ‘Yeah.’

**Peo:** ‘And that I used to do during... shit, three years I went, but then it ebbed out you could say, and now I haven’t had any money in like a year so, yes those kinds of things, but it’s something I feel I will take up again.’

**Simon:** ‘Ok.’

**Peo:** ‘When I can afford.’

Hawkey, Hughes, Waite, Masi, Thisted and Cacioppo (2008: 376) have identified this particular occurrence in the relation between economic status and loneliness that Peo speaks of, that a low level of financial resources impair on the opportunities to get involved in more expensive leisure activities such as becoming a member of a gym, take a swim class or join evening language classes. In Peo’s case it was the yoga sessions that he had to spare which was not only an opportunity for him to activate himself more in social life, but something which already constituted a substantial part of his social network which he due to his poor financial situation had no opportunity to attend anymore.

There were a few visitors at Stadsmissionen that stood out in terms of financial status, Eric was one of them who I also had the possibility of interviewing. He had been working as a middle manager at Volvo, one of the largest companies in the city for his entire career. He had a timid appearance, a slender body with medium long hair combed backwards. He always wore earplugs when I saw him and he explained to me that he thought it was loud inside the church due to its architecture amplifying and echoing every sound. His hearing was also damaged from his lifelong interest in live music. He told me that the only reason he did not go to a normal restaurant to eat lunch was that it is never the same people who go there, something he on the other hand found at S:t Johanneskyrkan. There were at least a handful of people he conversed with at the church. Eric had also reached retirement and he filled his days having lunch at the church, gym classes and Spanish lessons in the evenings besides informal get-togethers with his friends.

When I asked Eric by the end of our interview if he would have still come to Stadsmissionen even if he had unlimited money he took some time before answering that he was not poor and that he had his fair share of savings in his bank account, but he probably would have come here anyway since there are people he can talk to. He mainly visited S:t Johanneskyrkan for its social aspects and he said he had a few friends here which he enjoyed talking to during lunch now when he had recently retired. 'It happens that I go to other places [restaurants] too, I'm not economically dependent to go here so it's because of the social aspects.' Prior to our interview during our more informal conversation he also said 'If I go to another restaurant it's never the same people there you know, but here it's mostly the same people every day.' In the interview it became more and more clear that what differentiated him from the 'typical' visitor was his independence of S:t Johanneskyrkan as a provider of a social network.

**Simon:** 'How does a typical week look like for you?'

**Eric:** 'I wake up early, usually watch TV, then I go here [S:t Johanneskyrkan] and eat and meet some friends. Afterwards I go out for a walk and I also take a course, a language course on Mondays which I plan my day around. Then I have a gym course in the evenings where I go to exercise.'

**Simon:** 'Do you go here Monday to Friday then?'

**Eric:** ‘It usually turns out that way but I’m thinking of cutting back on it, it can sometimes be a bit too much.’

As can be seen from the conversation with Eric he enjoys being at Stadsmissionen at times but has also had the opportunity to go to another restaurant or spend more time in other communities. His income never seems to impair his social life. He was initiated to this church when he one day followed a friend to the church and happened to meet some like-minded people by chance he said, time after time he emphasizes that he does not *need* to go there. He says that he can feel a bit lonely at the weekends sometimes if everyone is busy, but ‘There’s always someone I can call’. When I asked him about if he ever feels lonely his immediate response was that the problem is more that his friends must accept when he wants to be by himself, ‘Sometimes it gets too much’ he said. Eric has both very close friends and a large social network. He also has siblings in the city but he never mentions them as a part of his social circle. His presence at Stadsmissionen is more for him to fill his days up during lunch time than it was for the other visitors.

Stig, the man mentioned in the previous chapter, also engaged in multiple activities outside S:t Johanneskyrkan’s lunch serving and café. He organized many of the activities himself and they were always adapted to his economic situation. He has managed to start up no less than three different types of intellectual evenings with his friends, some of them from the church and some acquaintances from elsewhere. They usually consisted of them discussing different topics that they had recently read or heard about. Stig also used to be politically active, from where he has a part of his social network. Besides Thomas, Peo and Stig, more visitors at S:t Johanneskyrkan aligned with the theme of engaging in non-profitable activities. Lisbeth was an active member of a historical society, Mette used to volunteer and Pia was engaged in her housing cooperative. In common was that they found alternative forms to socialize when their disposable income did not allow them to engage in more typical leisure activities.

Lisbeth tried to visit S:t Johanneskyrkan’s lunch serving whenever she was in town but it was a local historical society that she was mostly active within. Lisbeth was the oldest interlocutor I ever spoke to and thus in her eighties. She had grown up in and around Gothenburg and had moved no less than 19 times in her life she told me, something I assume had affected her

relations negatively. Her father had been a constructor and always got his hands on different apartments he did work on. Lisbeth's life followed the same theme as some of the other visitors in regard that a personal crisis had made her a more frequent visitor. A horse-riding accident had given her permanent brain damage and her speech was slightly slurred even though the rehabilitation had shown better progress than the doctors had thought and she was now almost fully recovered. She always visited the church with her at least fifteen years younger friend who sometimes assisted her when she lost her words and Lisbeth in return helped the friend carry cat food which the church occasionally donated when they in turn received larger donations from the local grocery stores. Lisbeth and her friend were former colleagues and had known each other for a very long time, attending S:t Johanneskyrkan was something they did together. Lisbeth along with Peder, Thomas, Y-K and a few others that were not part of my main interlocutors had all suffered from a personal crisis which had brought them to the community at S:t Johanneskyrkan.

## *Chapter 6 - Support and Social Relations*

In this part I go into detail about the kind of support many interlocutors expressed that they received at the church, both from the organization itself and from other visitors.

Unemployment was not unusual to come across at S:t Johanneskyrkan and their way back to work generated valuable insights in the function of S:t Johanneskyrkan. What is considered to be normal relationships and how one is supposed to be social will also be examined where a distinction is made both between inside S:t Johanneskyrkan and the outside landscape of Gothenburg as well as between social and emotional relationships in accordance to Robert Weiss' (1973 see de Jong Gierveld, van Tilburg and Dykstra, 2006: 486-487) findings.

### *Out of Work: Support in a Difficult Situation*

Since the fieldwork was conducted during weekdays around noon, I met many visitors at S:t Johanneskyrkan for whom a lack of occupation was nothing new. The reasons varied, some had lost their jobs and some had been periodically signed off for different reasons. The common feature was that it placed them all in a difficult economic situation and that the socialization at S:t Johanneskyrkan supported them in a future return to work. The social support was mostly indirect in that the social environment gave energy and a routine which helped individuals dealing with the difficult situation of being away from work. A woman I decided to name Y-K was currently unemployed due to difficulties in her domesticity. She used to wear a pink fleece sweatshirt which suited her blithesome spirit which she kept despite her current difficulties. She was in her forties and had worked in the same profession for most of her life. The situation was clearly cumbering to her but she had found relief in the activities at Stadsmissionen. Together with Peder and Peo, Y-K was one of the younger visitors I talked to. The day we spoke she was there with her friend to have lunch. Both of them were very open and talkative for not knowing me before so when I asked how they had ended up here Y-K explained to me that her husband was a narcotic and she went to S:t Johanneskyrkan multiple times per week to attend codependency sessions with a Deacon. She had been going to S:t Johanneskyrkan for 15 years but the frequency had varied. She used to work as an assistant nurse but in times of unemployment or when her husband's issues got

worse she frequented the church more often. Y-K was one of rather few I talked with that engaged in some of the church's other activities, for her it was the yoga classes that she had now frequented a few times and that she felt gave her a meaningful activity. The newfound friend she was there to have lunch with was someone she had met at one of these yoga classes. Y-K used to visit S:t Johanneskyrkan quite sparsely before, but in times of unemployment she goes there every day, the practicality of such a cheap lunch makes it even more reasonable, she says.

**Simon:** 'So how long are you going to be here today?'

**YK:** 'We're leaving soon, we should've left a hour ago [laughs].'

**Simon:** 'You just happened to linger?'

**YK:** 'It often turns out like that, just when you've decided to leave someone shows up like I was about to leave an hour ago but then you came and I thought 'well now I can't leave, that would be strange.'"

For Y-K it is important to be able to go to places like S:t Johanneskyrkan in times of unemployment and she states that it is first and foremost the social factor and secondly it is the economic aspect of eating there.

A visitor who had truly found his social belonging at S:t Johanneskyrkan recently and someone I spent a vast amount of time with during the fieldwork was Peder, a friend of Stig. He will therefore be thoroughly introduced before discussing his current life situation and how he ended up spending more or less all of his days at S:t Johanneskyrkan. The first time we spoke was in a group of four and I immediately knew I wanted to conduct an interview with him since he was both slightly younger than most others at the church and besides that he was one of the most frequent visitors. The difficulty was that he was usually busy talking to others or playing chess but one day I walked up to him when he left his company to get some milk to drink and I asked him if he had time on his hands to do an interview with me, first he hesitated and asked what the interview would be about but after we discussed the matter he agreed. Peder was 45 years old and just like his friend Stig a film enthusiast, something he spent much of his days consuming since he got signed off from work. Besides

films and chess Peder was much interested in the stock market and fitness, the latter visible from an impressive physique glimpsing underneath his very casual clothing.

It was about a year ago that he got signed off from his work as an assistant nurse due to mental health issues. He soon after got caught in a vicious circle of negative habits where he spent too much time within the four walls of his apartment, something which according to him made things worse. Altogether we talked to each other on a few occasions, mostly about films. During our more extensive interview it took some time before the conversation took off, but after a while we found some common ground and we discussed a wide range of different subjects. Particularly interesting was the *Mutiny on the Bounty*, a 1960's film with anthropological elements that we both had seen. Peder found anthropology as an academic field to be interesting since he previously had been interested in psychology and anthropology was all new to him. Later on we came to discuss Peder's job situation which now was in such a state that he was signed off from work due to mental health issues that he had had for a while. When he first was signed off he spent his days almost entirely at home in his apartment. It led to a depression and feelings of loneliness, all of his energy completely vanished, he told me. He said he felt himself that he needed a change and when his friend Stig one day said that he should come along to S:t Johanneskyrkan for Easter he accepted the invitation even though he wondered what he would do there, 'Am I going there, to some church? I mean what's that?' Peder thought when he got the invitation. Nonetheless he knew he had to do something about his current situation and he found after the first visit that many of the people at the church were quite sociable and he started coming back to the church even after the Easter buffet. Before he knew it he was there every single day of the week, 'It's almost a bit addictive. I mean the human being is a creature of habits, so in the beginning I was only here sparsely but then it became more and more.' Peder says.

When I talked to him he was just about to slowly become accustomed to working again and he said that the social environment at S:t Johanneskyrkan had helped him enormously in his rehabilitation. It was 14 months since he was signed off to be on sick leave. He told me it was the basic social support he received at S:t Johanneskyrkan, a sense of belonging and a healthy routine that had helped his rehabilitation process.



**Simon:** ‘If you ever felt lonely, could you tell me about the last time you felt that way?’

**Peder:** ‘I’ve always enjoyed being alone. Mostly it’s that I like it, but sometimes when you feel that you don’t want to be alone but are alone... I don’t know, nowadays I don’t feel that I’m lonely very often because I always go here, but before I was home alone *a lot* and then it became too much. It made me sick.’

**Simon:** ‘Did you get sick because you were lonely or were you lonely because you got sick? If you know what I mean?’

**Peder:** ‘Well that’s the chicken or the egg. It’s a tricky question [laughs]. That’s a philosophical question.’

**Simon:** ‘[Laughs] Yes it is.’

**Peder:** ‘I got problems first and then I got depressed, and then you get lonelier too. People can’t stand you which makes you even more lonely so it becomes a vicious circle, but now thanks to this church it became easier for me to come back into social life - like a good medication [laughs].’

**Simon:** ‘I see. When you worked did you feel like you had a lot of colleagues that you could hang out with, or did you feel like they lived on another planet sort of? [laughs].’

**Peder:** ‘[Laughs] We were probably on the same planet but I never hung out privately with those that I worked with so I have separated those things you could say. I remember that many wanted to be with their colleagues privately at home and there is supposed to be ‘after work’ [a Swedish term for going out with colleagues after a shift to a restaurant or pub which usually involves alcohol (Heldmark, 2005: 9-10)]. I think it’s a bit scary. Like, there was someone who asked me ‘shouldn’t you start working here’ and that made me happy of course, like I’m stable enough to work now. But then I felt like I want to have this place for my private life, I don’t want to mix those things. It’s valuable for me to come here as a private person and be Peder who doesn’t work here.’

Peder says that becoming part of the sociality at S:t Johanneskyrkan has been beneficial in his rehabilitation to once again be fit for work. For him it was very important to have a private social sphere that supported him since his former colleagues did not have the opportunity to help him in the private sphere. Without a social routine it can be an extremely lonely existence if you lose your ability to work and it can be difficult to find an affiliation to be part of since most people are busy in the daytime. In Peder’s case it became harmful since he

spent too much time alone in his apartment after he got signed off. He also mentioned the practicality of having cheap lunch at the church every day now when he did not work, 'I don't like when things cost a lot, it makes me stressed, like an uneasy feeling. That's probably because I'm on sick leave right now, then you don't know if you will receive a salary at the end of the month, then you don't want to spend any money either.'. Not only did Peder receive support for his mental health from his newfound peers at the church, they also helped him coming back to a more financially secure situation as an employee. Stig, the friend of Peder and the film enthusiast mentioned in the first chapter was the one who invited him and he had also seen his personal development since he started coming down to the church for lunch, 'It was actually me who initiated him to the church here, he sat at home and stared at the wall for different reasons and felt lonely and isolated, and when he finally came he found his social belonging here and that resulted in him being here more or less every day.' said Stig. He had been seeing much of what Peder had told me and it was apparent how much the 'living room feeling' of the church (as the priest Rebecka described it) had meant in Peder's progress of returning to a more mentally healthy state.

S:t Johanneskyrkan not only had a social or economic function for people currently out of employment, it could potentially have a practical function as well. In the main hall right after the entrance there was a large noticeboard where visitors occasionally sought employment by hanging up notes promoting themselves. I saw one note that declared which specific driver licenses a person had and his experience within the transport sector in hope that someone would see it and hire him as a truck driver. If anyone actually found a job that way I am not sure of, but S:t Johanneskyrkan had the ambition to support people that were out of employment in a more direct manner as well by assisting them in finding a job.

### *Normative Socialization and Important Others*

A month of fieldwork at S:t Johanneskyrkan generated a couple of comparisons about normative socialization, in other words how visitors thought others socialized in comparison to themselves. In this chapter I will discuss this matter and also expand upon what is considered 'important others' and how the emotional value, or 'closeness' of a relationship can be a poor instrument of measurement to determine the importance of the relationship.

Normative socialization and loneliness will be discussed in this section in relation to Karin Dahlberg's (2007) phenomenological analysis of loneliness and some of anthropologist Lissa Nordin's findings from her ethnographic fieldwork about single men in the north midlands of Västerbotten, Sweden will be used to discuss normativity in social life and also there what is considered an important other or a 'close one'. This part of the thesis will be of a more theoretical nature than the previous.

Stig, the first one I conducted any interview with, reflected upon loneliness in general and the time he felt the loneliest in particular. His conclusion was:

**Stig:** 'Many people can feel lonely by being given the label that they are lonely. Then there is also the fact that we are very urban in today's society so as soon as you leave the house, if you live in a city like me, you will see how everyone else is out drinking coffee together and are having such a good time and then you think that you are the only lonely person in the whole world. That's what's so amazing with these holidays you are talking about, that's amazing with this church - they are not closed one single day, from now on they serve lunch every day, breakfast every day, and that means if you're suicidal, if you have a personal crisis or if you're so depressed that you don't know where to go, if you can manage to go to the church the church will be here for you.'

One important note that needs to be made here is that Stig, just as Peder, did always refer to S:t Johanneskyrkan's operation considering food, shelter and company in a literal sense when discussing 'the church'. Neither Stig nor Peder wished to describe themselves as religious when I asked them, they were content with saying they had a slightly spiritual belief but they did not want to call themselves Christians. When Stig said 'the church will be here for you.' he did not mean in a religious way that *Jesus* or *god* will be there to accept you but instead he referred to the fact that S:t Johanneskyrkan will physically be open for you.

Even though Stig has a network of friends, especially at the church which he usually has lunch with, he can feel lonely outside the church, he says in the quote above. Everywhere he sees people consort in fun but expensive activities and if he or someone else who happens to be lonely walks around in the same environment the feeling can be overwhelming for the

individual, especially in the urban environment where it is difficult to avoid these comparisons. Stig is thankful, both for his own sake and others in worse positions than him, that the church is open every day.

During the fieldwork S:t Johanneskyrkan came to appear as a sphere within which these social comparisons could be avoided to a large extent, but as will be discussed in the two last chapters, it could also provide an alternative environment where one could do similar activities as the ones visible in the city environment of Gothenburg.

Pia, the sociable woman who often came to the church with her new husband and their friend touched upon the subject of normality as well and said that she used to feel different from her peers outside the church because she had such low disposable income and constantly had to save her money for later. It affected the way in which she could participate in social activities with her friends but usually she found her own methods in working around the problem so that she could still participate. For example, when her friends were out having a coffee break she would often bring her own cake so that buying a small coffee would be enough and in that way she could save some money while still being part of the activity. To feel different in this way had been difficult for Pia throughout her life.

A few days prior to my interview with Pia I had sat down with her, her husband and their mutual friend. While talking about a popular second-hand store in Gothenburg where they used to go and had just come from, Pia's husband brought out a bag from underneath the table and explained to me that he had just bought a very functional jacket for no more than 200 SEK. He stood up, put it on and swirled with a content smile on his face. 'That's unbelievably cheap, isn't it?' He said to me. The situation struck me as a man in his sixties proudly showing up a bargain for his close ones and a stranger without any concern of being perceived as stingy and I argue that that scene was significant in that being open about one's economic situation was not in any way shameful within the sphere of S:t Johanneskyrkan, in this way different norms seemed to apply inside the church than outside. Thomas was also a frequent visitor of second-hand stores. One day he was a bit upset because he had left his pair of warm gloves and a scarf at his table to go outside the church for ten minutes and when he got back they were not to be seen anywhere. 'That's so shitty! I know someone here must

have taken it because no one in the staff had it, and it's frustrating because I put out at least 200 kronor for that' Thomas said. I remember I was surprised that he had not paid more than 200 SEK for both his warm winter gloves and a scarf and also the fact that he so gladly and willingly discussed bargains with me. He told me that he used to buy clothes at a second-hand store in the city and two days later he sat down beside me and informed me that he had found a new scarf at the same store. This time he would be more careful not to leave it by the table.

The constant need to avoid unnecessary expenses applied to more or less everyone. Thomas openly saved four or more slices of bread from the buffet to eat when he got home, reminding his friends which days the bread was worth taking and not. Lindh, a man in his fifties, once had a glass of orange juice left over from breakfast and gave it to Alf and told him to drink it or give it to someone who needed it and the way people told each other as soon as something was given away for free like a Danish pastry as well as Pia's rapid answer 'It's always been disastrous' when I said I had a few questions concerning her economic situation. All these small signs and scenes surprised me initially until I realized that inside S:t Johanneskyrkan people were not particularly ashamed of having a low income or even appearing as lonely. Many of the visitors had trouble navigating in the leisure activities taking place outside the church due to their financial situation. Inside S:t Johanneskyrkan there was a very different environment visually in relation to what could be seen in the rest of the city which formed a more inclusive atmosphere. Every day at the church I saw at least three people sitting scattered in the main hall all by themselves without giving any sign that they wanted to engage in the social life around them. The presence of families was none and not many couples were present either which as Stig expressed it could otherwise trigger feelings as 'then you think that you are the only lonely person in the whole world.'. Even if S:t Johanneskyrkan had a sobriety policy and took a small charge for their food, severe social issues and misery was constantly visible in the church. Homeless people who spent the night strolling around in the city slept in the church benches during the days instead and those who slept outside could enter in the morning or around noon with their hands blue and swollen from the cold night. One man who frequented the church every day spent most of his time being drunk and shouted quite arbitrarily at people who he thought were irritating. With these people being a constant element in the environment, many of my informants, who belonged

to another social group, distanced themselves from it in order to point out that their lives were relatively stable in comparison. Stig for example described himself as a 'loose figure' (in Swedish *löst folk*, i.e. people from a low class who are difficult to classify further, e.g. riff-raff) and who happened to live nearby and enjoyed the price and company offered at S:t Johanneskyrkan, but he also mentioned that he was actually not in direct need of a charity organization as others were.

**Stig:** 'Now it's like this, earlier there have been a lot of people from foreign countries and homeless people and alcoholics and former drug addicts, and there are still homeless people, former drug addicts and alcoholics who come here. AA [alcoholics anonymous] has a large operation here among others and they have a lot of other things as well like narcotics anonymous and they have their meetings here. So there are many people here who have a relation to a rather heavy use of both alcohol and narcotics. But! At the same time there are lots of retirees and some loose figures here like me. It becomes a beautiful melting-pot. Everyone isn't homeless here, everyone isn't an alcoholic or former drug addict, instead it's a mix.'

Even though Stig had no obvious social issues but instead a prominent social life in- and outside the church, numerous small projects in progress and was eloquent, he hinted that he had had some drinking problems in the past. When I once asked him what he used to do after S:t Johanneskyrkan closes he said he usually goes to the library and then home. Some of his friends from the church go to the pub but he is not interested in that, he says. 'I've been there not 1000, but 10 000 times and I know that nothing special will happen'. By labeling himself as a 'loose figure' who just happened to dwell around he is distancing himself from those with more acute social issues and he was far from the only one I interviewed who made a point of not being one of those. Eric was also quick to emphasize that in his opinion some people at S:t Johanneskyrkan lacked manners and could benefit from shaping up:

**Eric:** 'I mean people could have some style [in Swedish *stil*: *style, class, manners*, own translation), take their hat off when inside and a little bit, what's the word... courtesy, towards the church, but some people never learn you know, they don't understand that.'

**Simon:** 'Perhaps they go in and out a lot.'

**Eric:** 'But people tolerate each other, there's an acceptance.'

**Simon:** 'Mmh I agree.'

**Eric:** 'To bring back your own dishes as a form of gratitude, but some lack that common sense.'

Thomas was also he quick during our more formal interview to make a point of not being one of the drug abusers at the church:

**Simon:** 'Is there anything you think needs to be improved here at Stadsmissionen?'

**Thomas:** 'It's common that people stand right by the church's entrance and smoke and drink and take all kinds of substances which I have told them that they can't do here, but they just respond that I should mind my own business. I brought this up with the staff but they also tell me that it's their job to deal with that so I don't have to do it.'

A man in his seventies that I talked to on two different occasions was Holger. I had difficulties placing him into any of the categories of people at the church. On many occasions I saw him sit all by himself and have lunch but otherwise his company varied greatly and he seemed to know visitors from many different groups. The first time I sat down beside him and initiated a conversation I was surprised about his great overview of the organization of Stadsmissionen and the homeless' situation in Gothenburg, he talked just as if he was someone from the staff by mentioning statistics and historical solutions to the problem as shelters being built on abandoned ships for example. He also talked about some aspects of the relationship between the staff and the addicts who frequented the church.

**Holger:** 'You really notice when people's medication doesn't work, gosh! Then they start climbing the walls, and then they'll be back in a few weeks and everything is great. Then they have adjusted the dose of their medication. The staff here has hawk-eyes for those things so it doesn't take long before there's a doctor here... if they have one in the building or something I don't know.'

The manner in which Holger talked about S:t Johanneskyrkan as a place where many homeless people and addicts usually come he also distanced himself from them - a

boundary-making that was very common to do by the people I interviewed. I wondered what reason Holger had for attending the lunch serving at the church so I asked him, forthrightly, why he had started to come here. He answered that a lot of the people at S:t Johanneskyrkan suffer from mental illness and all kinds of various diagnoses. He himself had been diagnosed with ADHD which had given him some important insights.

**Holger:** ‘Then I was diagnosed with ADHD, ‘Severe ADHD, easy to diagnose’ [laughs] No shit! And when I look back to how I was as a kid I ran on the tables and all this, of course I was an ADHD type of kid! But back then there was no term for it.’

**Simon:** ‘Back then you were just ‘unruly’.

**Holger:** ‘I was 70 years old when I got that diagnose [laughs] and of course they [the professionals] tried to explain to me how it worked and not worked and then I thought up here [S:t Johanneskyrkan] there are a lot of people who have this, how do they work? And how have they managed to live with this? Is there anything they can describe that I recognise in myself. That was when I realized that... Well! I’m one of the lunatics [laughs].’

By the end of our conversation Holger jokingly says that he is one among the other lunatics at the church and thereby plays with the image sometimes held by the public - that people who attend these kinds of charity organizations are considered crazy. Even if Holger commits to the community of S:t Johanneskyrkan he makes a point of not being one of the addicts or homeless people. In our conversation he at the same time confirms that even if the staff at first glance can be perceived as regular service employees, they have an incredibly high awareness of which visitors have serious issues and need a close eye and quick responsiveness from the staff should anything happen.

Normativity is a central aspect in all the examples above because even if many of the visitors I interviewed would be considered outcasts or at least eccentrics by the majority society due to their often alternative style, occasional history of addiction or mental health issues, low disposable income and overall way of life, these people could appear as very neat and orderly in relation to those with more serious and visible social issues visiting S:t Johanneskyrkan on a daily basis. A popular subject of discussion among my informants was to talk about homeless people and people with current alcohol problems as ‘them’ even if it was done with



compassion and they supported the idea that everyone was tolerated and accepted at the place. In his book *Rötter och Fötter: Identitet i en Föränderlig Tid* (2004) (*Roots and Feet: Identity in a Changeable Time*, own translation), Norwegian anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen makes use of the metaphor of group cohesiveness as a reverse fridge (first initiated by author Peter Normann Waage). The point of the metaphor is that every community creates warmth inwards in the form of belonging and a sense of identification with the group, but in order to do so it must also generate cold outwards. No group which is forming an identity is such that everyone can be included in the group. This is also why one should be careful to judge groups based on how they define their frames of identity and who they choose to include, because every group defines their frames in one way or the other (Hylland Eriksen, 2004: 9-10). When I interacted with many of the low income earners who had found a community to be part of at S:t Johanneskyrkan, I also realized that people with ‘real issues’, i.e. serious social issues such as homelessness or current addictions were talked about as ‘them’ and was not seen as potential friends for many of the low income earners that I talked to. These people with more serious social issues were accepted as a normal element in the church, everyone was on terms with that they needed the charity the most, but they tended to be drawn towards each other and form their own clusters. Many of my interlocutors emphasized this boundary-making that they inevitably engaged in.

This social profile of visitors with various social issues that was present at S:t Johanneskyrkan explained why people living with economically scarce means found a sense of social belonging if loneliness as a phenomenon is understood as a ‘figure’ against a ‘background’ of what ought to be as Dahlberg (2007: 197) describes loneliness. The urban environment outside could cause feelings of loneliness as some of the interlocutors described and the inside demography of the church was more forgiving towards these ‘loose figures’ as Stig categorized himself. Inside the church there was not a background of families, large groups of friends and couples visible which unwittingly brought to it feelings of loneliness and abnormality, instead it was a background of troubled people and poverty.

Dahlberg’s phenomenological analysis helps us understand why the world outside of S:t Johanneskyrkan is described as lonelier than the world inside of it. As described in the theory section of this thesis, Dahlberg means that to be in some kind of togetherness with other

people is fundamental to existence. Thus, involuntary loneliness, to not belong to anyone or anything is to lack participation in the world (2007: 197), but loneliness is also a relative concept. The togetherness is a background towards which the figure of loneliness is measured. So to live in a lively urban landscape such as Gothenburg creates a background of life together with important others. As Stig said ‘as soon as you leave the house, if you live in a city, you will see how everyone else is out drinking coffee together and are having such a good time’. Inside S:t Johanneskyrkan most visitors not only find a social belonging, they also have a completely different background where loneliness and poverty are common elements in the environment. If everyone takes bread when it is handed out, the shame of doing so yourself disappears and if you see people sitting in solitary by the tables it signals that it is accepted to attend the lunch by yourself as well, an element rarely visible at the outdoor servings in the city.

Dahlberg’s analysis gives us tools to further understand the phenomenon that is involuntary loneliness. She argues that the experience of loneliness can be described as a lack of ‘important others’. She describes it as:

One can “be together with” other people, without them being particularly important in one’s life, but one only feels a sense of belonging with people who are close, i.e. those that are important in one’s life. The absence of these particularly important people signifies the phenomenon of loneliness. One is lonely when these “important others” are not there. (Dahlberg, 2007: 197).

My findings from S:t Johanneskyrkan also suggest that a healthy relationship with ‘important others’ is crucial to avoid loneliness and there is always an idea of a person or group that should be present which causes the intense feelings of loneliness such as a partner or broader social network, but opposed to Dahlberg’s conclusion these important others did not necessarily have to be ‘people who are *close*’ (own italics). My findings from these low income earners in the urban environment of Gothenburg suggest that what counted as important others varied distinctively between the interlocutors, findings which go hand in hand with Robert S. Weiss’ division of *emotional* and *social* loneliness (Weiss, 1973 see de Jong Gierveld, van Tilburg and Dykstra, 2006: 486-487). Stig and Josef were my only

interviewees who experienced that the absence of a *partner* was the, or one of the, important others they lacked while others rarely mentioned partnership and instead emphasized the more quantitative social network as an important factor in relieving loneliness which meant that important others did not necessarily have to be close ones. When I asked Peder for example how his social life looked like at the moment considering friends and family he begun by discussing the social life at the church:

**Peder:** ‘I mean I enjoy hanging out in that way that you can see people and talk to different persons and that it’s not as intense as when you are with someone [friend] at your place. Instead I can come *here* and meet people and then you’re not bound to just talk to *one* person so it becomes nice and easygoing, like fun. I’ve never been someone who enjoys hanging out with other guys like ‘Now I’m going to his place or he is coming over to me’.’

For Peder, so called qualitative relationships or emotional relationships are not particularly important, not even when it comes to his friends. Instead he emphasizes quantitative relations as important others in his life and even says that he particularly enjoys the part where he does not have to be with the same company for an entire day, at S:t Johanneskyrkan he can be in multiple groups during a day and it does not matter as much which group of people. Peder emphasizes that he does not have to be with people who are close in order to avoid feeling lonely. Eric had a similar view on loneliness. He tries to come to S:t Johanneskyrkan every day to find people to talk to. He feels as if he shares the same interests as many at the church and can discuss plans, global occurrences, politics and music with them. He is not interested in the activities or board games, those things he can do at home he believes. Simply talking to people to avoid loneliness is to Eric as important as having more close relationships with his siblings and best friends who also live in Gothenburg. Eric keeps coming back to his need for people to talk to and his way of using the term ‘talking to’ does not refer to someone who he can tell his most inner feelings but on the other hand a social network of people he can discuss everyday matters with on a daily basis. This loose social network of acquaintances was an issue Eric talked extensively about in contrast to his siblings or best friend whom he barely mentioned when we discussed loneliness and how to avoid it. Dahlberg’s (2007: 205) analogy of loneliness and Sartre’s experience at the café with Pierre’s absence could in this this new way be interpreted as Sartre could experience it equally lonely if he was not

expecting his close friend Pierre to show up but instead had hoped for the café to be full of kind strangers that he could converse with and he would have found it completely empty. It can be reduced to what is expected, which background one is used to. What I argue is that it does not necessarily have to be people who are *close* to embody that background.

Lindh was another example of someone who highly valued the social circumstances at S:t Johanneskyrkan in equal terms as his qualitative, more emotionally valued relationships. He was a former drinker but had been sober for a number of years now. We never held a formal interview but during our more informal conversation he told me:

**Lindh:** ‘It’s nice to come home and just watch TV by yourself sometimes because there are a lot of people here, the social factor, people come here to eat breakfast for the social part like I do. As you asked me ‘Do you come here often?’ No not really, three times per week maybe, the three of us who sat here usually come by... [his two friends just left when I sat down with Lindh.

**Simon:** ‘So you come here to eat and talk to people and things like that?’

**Lindh:** ‘Yes just chit-chatting you know. There’s no problem for me to eat a bowl of oatmeal at home by myself but it’s much nicer to come here I mean... [his phone beeps, it is a text message from his girlfriend and he reads it out loud]. ‘Did you eat breakfast at the church?’ Yes I did.’

**Simon:** ‘She doesn’t eat breakfast here?’

**Lindh:** ‘It happens, but as I said she’s here much less than I am. Wednesdays and Friday nights she comes here and eats the soup, you know the soup is only ten kronor... today it’s fish soup, but you feel that you get what you pay for. You don’t get a luxurious dinner for ten kronor, it’s just a lighter soup, but that’s good for me.’

Lindh does not live with his current partner so instead of sitting at home and having breakfast by himself he chooses to come to S:t Johanneskyrkan for the social aspect of it. His girlfriend was at home with her children when we had our conversation but to visit her this early in the day was not urgent for Lindh. He valued being at S:t Johanneskyrkan during daytime and his girlfriend would occasionally join him. To her S:t Johanneskyrkan is more a place where one can buy a cheap lunch or dinner and with her young children to take care of it is difficult for

her to find the time to go to the church, but for Lindh it is something more, it is a matter of how he spends his days. Before he was familiar with S:t Johanneskyrkan he felt lonely from time to time and actually searched the web for options like S:t Johanneskyrkan to go to and read the reviews online. Somewhere on the internet he found information that this would be a nice place and convenient if one needs someone to talk to and part with one's loneliness. For Lindh it worked very well and was exactly what he was looking for.

These examples from my conversations with visitors display how an interchangeable group of people to eat lunch with could be as, or even more, important than a partner or best friend which Dahlberg accentuates by mentioning them as 'close ones'. In Lissa Nordin's (2011) doctoral dissertation about single heterosexual men in Norrland, Sweden, she found that a permanent partner was the important other that her informants lacked and other relationships with for example friends or family members were of basically no importance at all in relieving their sense of loneliness and inadequacy as heterosexual men. To, as a man, be without a partner was frowned upon in the rural parts of northern Sweden that Nordin studied, far from the glamorous urban single life often portrayed in TV-shows. As mentioned previously, this was distinguished by Robert S. Weiss as a difference between social and emotional loneliness as described in section *Definitions: Loneliness*, While Nordin (2011) found that in the sparsely populated north of Sweden, emotional loneliness was most noticeable among her group of informants, my interlocutors on the other hand continuously emphasized social loneliness as a deciding factor for their experiences of loneliness. To, as a heterosexual man, lack a partner up in the regions where Lissa Nordin conducted fieldwork was a matter everything else stood in relation to. Who you were and what you did as a man was always secondary to your ability to find a partner, and the right kind of partner in the right way. Two people in my research - Stig and Josef, valued partnership highly and did not feel as if the social network at S:t Johanneskyrkan contributed to any significant difference when it came to their loneliness, but generally, to be of age and single in the city of Gothenburg was highly accepted and something few of my interlocutors reflected upon at any greater extent. To conduct a comparative study on loneliness in urban, juxtaposed to rural landscapes would be interesting and necessary to reach some conclusion, but after reading Lissa Nordin's study and comparing her results to my own I observe differences at an initial stage between loneliness and how social relationships are formed and valued.

## *Chapter 7 - Paying for Dignity*

In this part the main research question will be in focus, viz. ‘How can alternative forms of socialization help urban low income earners engage more in social life and mitigate loneliness?’. A brief overview of the formalist and substantivist schools within economics will be described before these competing ways of thought will be applied on the reasons people choose not only to come, but also to stay at S:t Johanneskyrkan. This will be followed by a chapter analysing the tendency to form communities within the urban landscape of Gothenburg and how this is related to the transaction made in order to receive an affordable lunch at S:t Johanneskyrkan, all of this is described with the concept *sociality*, this latter part will be found under the following headline *The Social Embeddedness of Consumption*. This style or modus of forming social relations did not differ substantially between what can be seen in urban Gothenburg in general juxtaposed to S:t Johanneskyrkan, but the activities which communities are formed through varied in the economic aspect to better suit the means of the visitors. The last chapter adjoins the second by describing how the price setting and general environment of the church enabled visitors to feel generous.

### *Why S:t Johanneskyrkan?*

In order to look at the reasons behind why the clientele of visitors came to S:t Johanneskyrkan specifically and thereby broaden the knowledge of how they made use of this alternative form of socialization, I have adopted theoretical tools from Richard Wilk and Lisa Cliggett’s book *Economies and Cultures* (2007) in which they discuss how decisions and judgements are seldom solely of economic nature, instead they are inseparable from culture and morality. Ever since Marcel Mauss, economic anthropologists have criticized the capitalist system and its school of thought for reducing all forms of economic transactions to pure calculation and self-interest. Instead the economic anthropologists have highlighted the social, moral and cultural function of these, at first glance, egocentric choices. Today we know that no system is purely selfish or purely based on affection (2007: 171-172). Sociality and morality can be found in any economic system even though it manifests in different ways. This is also called the formalist - substantivist debate where the formalists believe a neoclassical economic model can be applied to any group or society while the substantivists

with anthropologist Marshall Sahlins on the front line have emphasized that economy is always embedded in social networks such as the family, the church or the football team (Wilk and Cliggett 2007: 14).

Richard Wilk gave an example of this inseparability of economic, cultural and social explanations when conducting anthropological research on private property energy conservation in Santa Cruz, California. Along with his colleague, they found that it was surprisingly difficult to educate the middle-class suburbanites in efficient measures to lower their energy consumption. It turned out that many households never bothered to calculate the most efficient measures. Some households installed more expensive and ostentatious solutions when simpler ones would have saved them more money on their energy bill (Wilk and Cliggett, 2007: 177). As anthropologists they thought this culture of showing off expensive solutions counted as a strong explanation, but furthermore, they found that there was a social part that also played a role in the decision-making of house maintenance. Couples often argued about indoor temperature and changing something on the house or refrain from doing anything often had more to do with making the relationship work than limiting expenditures. The conclusion by Richard Wilk and his colleague was that no explanation was superior in explaining the behaviours of their sample group but that anthropology had an advantage in being a subject that often adopts a holistic viewpoint that takes more perspectives into consideration (Wilk and Cliggett, 2007: 177ff). Wilk and his colleague could see that no explanation triumphed over the other and that the formalist or substantivist approach was insufficient by themselves, it required a combination of both to see the underlying forces that affected the outcome.

This hybrid of the formalist and substantivist approach that Wilk and Cliggett describes has been applied in a useful manner by social anthropologist Maria Padrón Hernández in her doctoral dissertation in which she have studied how people living with scarce financial means in Havana, Cuba, negotiate morality in everyday decisions and opposite to what one might assume, being stuck in a scarce economic situation did not convert any of her informants into entirely utility maximizing individuals (Padrón Hernández, 2012: 165ff). In her research, which applies to my study as well, she emphasizes the importance of breaking up the binary opposition of morality/economy, affection/calculation to see how most individuals and

groups are both utility maximizing and acting out of morality and cultural norms in similarity to Wilk and Cliggett's reasoning (Padrón Hernández, 2012: 165). Padrón Hernández's conclusion was that the people of Havana who did not have much and who experienced life in general as arduous, still found it utterly important to not only have beans (in this case a symbol for food), but also roses, i.e. something which lit up their day and was essential for the well-being of their souls. The 'roses' could be a gift or providing the family household with freshly cooked food to live up to a standard which was not only basic human needs.

The results of the fieldwork at S:t Johanneskyrkan pointed towards similar results as Wilk's and Padrón Hernández's. When being asked about the reason why they went to this particular church more or less everyone mentioned the price of the food at first which indicated that if the prices were higher, few of the people who were now frequent visitors would have come. 'The lunch is so cheap here, there's nothing to complain about really.', 'It's very practical to come here and have lunch.' and 'The prices here are also very low.'. These were all examples of quotes I encountered early on in the fieldwork. Economic reasons however were only part of the explanation since cooking food at home could potentially reduce the costs further and informants also mentioned that other organizations in the city gave away food for free. Everyone except Stig answered that they would still go to S:t Johanneskyrkan even if they had more money which indicates that they found something more than the affordable food.

A few days into my research the visitors I spoke to more and more started to mention the wholesome company they found at the church and how I must talk to the priest, or the girl behind the register or some man collecting tin cans because they would be welcoming or give me information that I could use about the place. The social network at the site unfolded day by day during the fieldwork and it became apparent that people did not only come because the food was affordable, it was rather the social character of the church. The price of the food had possibly attracted many of the visitors initially but what made them spend three to five hours of their day at S:t Johanneskyrkan was that after a while the visitors had become their friends and even if there were food servings free of charge or the possibility to prepare a cheaper meal at home, the community at S:t Johanneskyrkan had an attractiveness to it which was what many visitors needed. It was the 'roses' of their day. As Lindh's answer to my question 'So you come here to eat and talk to people and things like that?' illustrates: 'Yes



just chit-chatting you know. There's no problem for me to eat a bowl of oatmeal at home by myself but it's much nicer to come here I mean.' Examples of visitors who had found their belonging at S:t Johanneskyrkan were numerous. Thomas for example sat and had lunch and discussed daily matters with two older men who came every Monday and Wednesday before they went off to play bingo. It had become a small ritual for them to first visit S:t Johanneskyrkan to eat lunch and after a while they had become quite good friends with Thomas who they had no previous relation to but whose company they now counted with during Mondays and Wednesdays. Peder's newfound company at the church was probably the most significant example. He already had a close friend among the visitors in Stig, but during my days in the church I never saw them converse with each other one single time. Instead Peder had found multiple new social contacts, especially Magnus who I often saw him sitting next to. Stig was also very pleased to see Peder confidently navigating between different groups in the church and said it was good for him and that he had 'come out of his shell'. The woman Y-K who attended the codependency sessions and was currently out of employment had recently started attending S:t Johanneskyrkan and its activities more frequently and had just, the week prior to our meeting, found a new friend at the church's free yoga sessions. Looking back at the social relations found at the church it can be concluded that many of them were formed at site and had not been there from the beginning. de Jong Gierveld, van Tilburg and Dykstra (2006: 494) emphasize that bringing people together without the explicit purpose of making new friendships can be very beneficial. This way the individual suffering from loneliness can, without pressure, develop personal relationships that are satisfying. This can be fulfilled by improving opportunities for interactions by removing barriers that prevent social life. S:t Johanneskyrkan provided such a place by removing the economic barrier and being open every day of the year.

Besides economic and social explanations there is a cultural factor as well in that Sweden has a strong culture of formal associations where much of social life is formed and where more informal forms of socialization are not as common. For the individual experiencing social loneliness the practical difficulty of finding informal gatherings is obvious and turning towards a more formal setting becomes even more natural. The high level of engagement in non-profit associations is unique to Sweden in an international context. The distinctive feature of the strong Scandinavian welfare state could be based on the combination of a large

public sector and an active culture of formal activities in associations which in their turn receive large subventions from the state. Even though the trend of engaging in various non-profit associations is slightly negative, numbers from 2003 declared that around 90% of the Swedish population was active in one or more such associations (Vogel, Amnå, Munck and Häll, 2003: 55-57. These numbers give us an indication of the proportion of the engagement. That Swedes tend to socialize through formal activities in associations there is a large consensus about, it is a cultural feature that is distinct for the nation and can be another possible motive behind why many lonely people decided to visit S:t Johanneskyrkan. Seeking a formal non-profit association in order to be part of a community is a natural step for an involuntarily lonely person in a Swedish context.

This section has provided an overview of how the formalist - substantivist debate as described in Wilk and Cliggett's *Economies and Cultures* (2007: 14) can give a general explanation in that there were multiple pulling-factors to why people living in financially precarious situations not only came, but also stayed at S:t Johanneskyrkan. In this chapter I have also found similarities with Padrón Hernández's (2012) findings in that her interlocutors, even if living on a meager income, did not devote themselves to pure calculations, but also demanded something extra in their everyday lives. The section below will expand on the inseparability of the economic and the social with the concept of *sociality* - that consumption is a precondition for being social in a western urbanity.

### *The Social Embeddedness of Consumption*

In a capitalist and urban society such as the city of Gothenburg, social life is much characterized by those two components. Gothenburg is an economically prosperous city in an overall wealthy country and when strolling around the city centre its social life is highly visible. You will, whether you like it or not, see numerous groups and couples eating and drinking at the restaurants, especially when the outdoor seatings open up in April. You will see the shopping streets with endless stores, many of them selling high-end brands since they depend on being visible and are physically modest enough to afford rents in the city centre. Shopping as an activity is also carried out in couples or groups to a large extent. Besides a sizable amusement park in the heart of the city, nightclubs, cinemas, art galleries, and

museums define the city's environment, all activities which connotes groups or couples, i.e. things most people do in the company of others. The economic aspect of these activities is also important to take into consideration. Besides one or two public art galleries and museums, none of these activities are de facto adapted to those with scarce economic means. As I have, during my years living in the city, interpreted the city centre's visual profile, the norms of how one is being social in Gothenburg can be seen as highly concentrated around food, fashion, shopping, culture etcetera which are all meant to be *consumed*, and preferably in company with others. How one is being social within a certain society can be described with the concept *sociality* within a sociological tradition (the concept has shifting nuances in other disciplines). That sociality is centered around consumption is not unusual in larger western cities. It is however difficult to navigate within an environment of such kind if one lacks the means to participate. What I argue in the following sections of this chapter is that with a low disposable income, it is not only difficult to consume certain things or services, it also becomes difficult to participate in social life in general.

In S:t Johanneskyrkan during lunch time, consumption appeared every now and then in the conversations. To begin with, people gathered around the cheap lunch which was a constant subject of discussion. For 25 SEK one could have a proper meal with coffee included, many days they served Danish pastry or fruit for free around 2PM when the lunch was about to close. On the other hand, a Danish only cost 5 SEK the rest of the time and the impatient and those slightly more well off did not wait. What I found interesting was that these extra services encouraged visitors to stay even after the lunch had closed to socialize. Many of my interlocutors were among the group that came between 10-11AM and stayed until 3-4PM. Peder, for example, often came early. He was always there when I showed up at around 11AM and his typical day was as follows: He started off by playing some chess with one group, relatively large in terms of members, but somewhat shifting in *which* members. Peder, on the other hand, was a constant and played every day. Most of them did not speak Swedish but the rules of chess were universal and they managed to converse moderately through a mix of Swedish and body language. The subjects did not stretch far from different chess moves however. When the lunch opened, Peder went to stand in line, a line which often stretched 20 meters even before it had opened. He ate his lunch with a couple of other people than he played chess with, maybe because they spoke Swedish and therefore offered another form of

social company. I never saw the people Peder ate lunch with playing any board games so it was probably not of their interest. After lunch Peder sometimes went back to play more chess, or he stayed with his lunch company and had some coffee and continued the casual discussions about everyday matters. Peder could thus spend five hours each day in the café-like environment of S:t Johanneskyrkan with his friends to a total expense of no more than 25 SEK. Peder was not unique in his daily routine, a significant part of the lunch visitors stayed one or two hours after they had finished their meal to socialize or read the newspaper. The large coffee canister had to be refilled by the staff with a 15-minute interval and the atmosphere grew more and more frisky as the clutter from the pottery faded out and the main hall became less crowded with lunch eaters.

The visitors I talked to during my fieldwork could all manage to find 25 SEK to pay for lunch, but some people, those who did not have any disposable money, used to receive food for free even though this was a rather uncommon request. Stig told me 'The thing with the staff at this church is that they know exactly who has money and who doesn't so if you go and ask for free food and they know you have money right now they won't give you any'. The occasional free food allowed people who were at the absolute rock bottom financially to also fill their stomachs. S:t Johanneskyrkan, however, was not the only charity organization in the city which offered food. A few others served lunch every day as well and some of them completely for free. I never visited any of these myself but my informants told me they attracted a very different clientele, mostly people who were currently deep into abusing different substances. Holger, the visitor I spoke to briefly who started coming to S:t Johanneskyrkan after he received an ADHD diagnosis at the age of 60, told me that at the free charity organizations there was not much social life. People mostly came there to eat and then left rather quickly, there was nothing jovial about these places he told me. In his opinion S:t Johanneskyrkan had managed to form quite a unique atmosphere in that sense. The first time I spoke to Peder he sat and had lunch with another visitor that he enjoyed talking to - Magnus. He was very talkative and stated his opinions about a charity organization in the city (it could very well be the same as Holger talked about) and said that they handed out free food as something negative.

**Magnus:** ‘You know this place [another organization serving food] is very disordered. They don’t have the same demands on sobriety there and besides the food is free of charge over there. It’s a bit more like the wild west [laughs].’

To have an opinion on other charity organizations was far from unusual. I had a conversation with Lindh about an organization close to where he lives on Hisingen.

**Simon:** ‘Yes, I think it’s interesting to hear what you visitors think of these places.’

**Lindh:** ‘I mean I enjoy *this* place, that’s why I’m here. Then there’s a Salvation Army in Hisingen [area in Gothenburg]. I live in Hisingen, but I fancy this place more than over there at the Salvation Army. I think there’s a difference in the people, I feel more at home here so to speak.’

**Simon:** ‘Well that’s nice. What kind of people are there at the Salvation Army?’

**Lindh:** ‘I don’t know really, it’s kind of the same people but it’s more nice people here. They don’t seem to be have much fun there and anyhow I feel that when I’m here I can hear someone laughing over there and someone laughing here [points around in the room] and it’s something fun going on by the entrance and at the Salvation Army there is no one who laughs, as I said before they don’t seem to have fun there. That’s how I feel.’

One final occurrence which pointed in a similar direction - that S:t Johanneskyrkan had established itself somewhere in between of a soup kitchen and a profit-making lunch restaurant, I will retail as well as possible since it happened ‘outside the field’ and I was not ready with my phone or notebook at the time. It took place about a week and a half into my fieldwork. It was in the afternoon and I started to run out of energy to stay much longer at the church. I decided to pack my things together and headed out of the church to the tram line down by the road. When the tram opened its back door, I realized it was quite packed with people, not unusual for being around 4PM. There was one free seat at the back but everyone stood up because at the seat next to it there was an obviously drunk man holding a bag full of glass bottles clanging towards each other in one hand and a beer in the other. He looked like he had several rough decades behind him. He persistently sought anyone’s attention and I tried to avoid eye contact with him at first since I thought I might have to deal with him for the entire ride to the station, but then I thought he might be familiar with S:t Johanneskyrkan

and have an opinion about the organization so decided to meet his seeking gaze. He right away asked me what I had been doing that day and I said I just came from S:t Johanneskyrkan. I thought he was going to ask me what I had been doing there, but instead he replied ‘Ah yes, that’s a good place up there.’. I told him that it seemed so, ‘Quite calm and nice, good food as well.’ I said. He responded ‘I’ve been to all the clinics [alcohol rehabs] in town and they’re good up there [at Stadsmissionen] but it’s difficult to get in. They don’t have a lot of rooms, but I’ve been to the church and it’s the only decent place in town, much better than Nordhemskliniken [another alcohol rehab], there are more roughs there. Are there still people sleeping in the church benches?’. Even though the man was clearly under the influence and sometimes talked about the clinic at Stadsmissionen and sometimes about S:t Johanneskyrkan our discussion cemented the picture of S:t Johanneskyrkan as something different from the other places in the city. His description of it as ‘the only decent place in town’ showed that the environment there differed in relation to other places.

Above I have outlined a number of examples which showed that S:t Johanneskyrkan had managed to establish themselves somewhere in between the more disordered or dull soup kitchens and the clean and tidy restaurants. From what the informants articulated, one central aspect of why so is the case is the small price of 25 SEK for food and coffee. According to a number of informants it was appreciated and a better solution than handing it out for free. The reasonable, but still existing, price setting formed a respectful and restaurant-like environment according to the interviewees. Even if, as mentioned previously in this chapter, one could receive food for free if one was in need of it, this was relatively unusual from what I witnessed during my month there. At S:t Johanneskyrkan there was a norm of visitors paying for their food. Highly important to mention in this section though is that those who thought the charge of 25 SEK was too expensive most likely sought other ways of finding food. Thus, the price attracted those who had at least some income. The tidier and more proper environment at S:t Johanneskyrkan only seemed *positive* from the perspective of my informants (low income earners) but I also assume it repelled those who were in worse situations, a group that fell out of the scope of this research’s purpose. Stig described the lunch service as follows:

**Stig:** ‘And it is like this, as a result of them not donating the food, you who come here, you must put up something in return. Partly it makes the business roll, not necessarily that they make a profit but it takes a lot of work to cook the food, serve it, do the dishes and transport it you know. But just that it costs *something* prevents people from taking a plate of food and then throwing it in the garbage. Almost all the food that is taken here is finished, there’s a mutual respect that goes both ways.’

This mutual respect that Stig described was significant for how my interlocutors experienced the lunch at S:t Johanneskyrkan and it was clear to me that Stig talked about it in opposition to other charity organizations he had been to. Here they paid an amount as a sign of respect towards the work of the volunteers and received a proper meal in return - almost as a charity organization disguised as a restaurant/café since the serving was still highly dependent on donations of food.

Anthropologist Marcel Mauss wrote in his eminent work *The Gift: the form and reason for exchange in archaic societies* a comprehensive theory on gift-giving where his main idea was that gifts initiate and maintain social relations, but even more interesting in relation to my own research, he also wrote that gifts are meant to be reciprocated and if this cannot be done by the receiver it causes an imbalance in the relationship since gift-giving provokes a response of some kind, some act of reciprocity. What he found for the societies practicing the potlatch (a ceremonial feast where groups gave away, and even destroyed, valuable objects to establish a high social rank among other groups) was that if a gift could not be reciprocated with a gift of similar value the recipient became inferior. Gifts of this kind thus inevitably establish a hierarchy:

through such gifts a hierarchy is established. To give is to show one’s superiority, to be more, to be higher in rank, magister. To accept without giving in return, or without giving more back, is to become client and servant, to become small, to fall lower (minister). (Mauss, 2002: 95).

As Mauss expressed it no gifts are truly free, only by the response of a gift (or lack thereof) and depending on the culture the recipient lives in he or she can determine how the gift will

affect the relationship between the two parts. In the preface of Mauss' book Mary Douglas takes his theory to elaborate briefly on her own experience of working a few years in a charity foundation. She explains why recipients not always show gratitude towards the giver by claiming that charity organizations oftentimes confuse donations with gifts<sup>3</sup> since no gift ever truly comes for free (Douglas, preface written in Mauss, 2002: 10). She writes:

It is not merely that there are no free gifts in a particular place, Melanesia or Chicago for instance; it is that the whole idea of a free gift is based on a misunderstanding. There should not be any free gifts. What is wrong with the so-called free gift is the donor's intention to be exempt from return gifts coming from the recipient. Refusing requital puts the act of giving outside any mutual ties. (Douglas, preface written in Mauss, 2002: 9)

Refusing a compensating gift puts the act of giving outside any mutual ties according to Douglas and explains why people occasionally feel contempt towards the donor, it causes a feeling of not acting on same terms due to the nature of the gift. Neither should gifts be confused with commerce which is based on exact compensation to distinguish it from a gift. That way focus is removed from the seller since the purpose is not as much to strengthen a relationship. Immediate recompense is to show that no further obligations are necessary.

Seen from a Maussian perspective, the lack of gratitude from receivers of free food can come from a feeling of obligatory reciprocation such as attending other church activities or simply a feeling of inferiority. Mauss' (or in this case Douglas') analysis helps us understand why visitors of S:t Johanneskyrkan chose to pay a symbolic amount for their food instead of going to the free lunch giveaways unless one is in absolute need of free food at the moment. The lunch at S:t Johanneskyrkan places itself somewhere between a gift and a commercial transaction since visitors pay for the lunch even though the food is predominantly donated by companies in and around the area. I argue however, that the interviewees mainly saw the food serving as a very cheap restaurant instead of an 'expensive charity foundation'. Even though the transaction of 25 SEK would not fully cover the costs and required the work of

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<sup>3</sup> Mauss separates donations from gifts in such a way that the giver is not expecting anything in return from a donation while this is the case in a gift, thus no gifts are truly free.



volunteers, the visitors saw a mutual respect in paying an amount and receiving food in return. It not only established a respect for the organization but for the food cooked as well. One does not take food and throw half of it in the trash bin as Stig described it. By transforming the gift of food into a transaction with direct recompense, lunch visitors could avoid the establishing of a distinct hierarchy.

Although the payment, or so-called direct recompense, of the lunch does not generate the same establishing of relationships as gifts do between the receiver and the organization, it has a strong social function among the visitors themselves. Returning to sociality - the form or tendency of how we form social relationships within a certain culture, to call a friend and ask if he or she would like to join for a donated lunch would not fall all too well into the sociality we see in a Swedish urban landscape. *Buying* lunch together, on the other hand, fell into the sociality of *how* one is being social in the city of Gothenburg. Furthermore, as I experienced during a majority of my days doing fieldwork - the quality of the food was a hot topic. Me and Anders, who often both picked the vegetarian option, constantly discussed how we thought they had made it, how they managed the patties to taste a certain way or why they had combined certain ingredients. The people I talked to about the lunch all had an opinion, mostly a positive one, about the food they were served. Charging 25 SEK for lunch I believe allows people to be able to discuss the quality of the food because something was asked in return, while stating an opinion about something received for free is in most contexts considered ill-mannered, which is why it is found in idioms such as 'Never look a gift horse in the mouth' or 'Beggars can't be choosers'. It also becomes an uninteresting topic if one has not paid anything for the food. By not paying for the food there are not many demands one can make and thereby the visitors are deprived of a major topic of discussion. The fact that Lisbeth, YK, Pia and Stig all went to the lunch in direct company of others, either with people they knew before or with friends they met through the church's different activities is a certain indication that buying lunch together had a social function and was a determining factor for many to come to S:t Johanneskyrkan. The rest of the people I interviewed went there knowing that there would be some form of company at site. None of them went to S:t Johanneskyrkan to have lunch on their own.

Besides eating in company of others, the social practice of shopping was part of the visual profile of the city's social life and occasionally prevalent in the discussions of my interlocutors as well. Pia, her husband and their friend went to a nearby second-hand store a few times per week, a practice that was adapted to their financial situation. They used to start off by having a five SEK coffee (the average price at a standard café is around 30 SEK) at the store before taking a lap to see if they could find something interesting to buy. Second-hand exchange (no monetary transaction involved) also appeared amidst friends at S:t Johanneskyrkan. When Josef and I conducted our interview, Thomas sat at the same table and in the midst of our conversation he told Josef he had a bunch of papers published by a political party they both sympathised with lying around at his home that might interest him and asked if he wanted to have them. 'Yes, I can take them, but not all of them, not more than I can carry' Josef replied. Peder also had a friend that he sometimes had lunch with who shared his interest in films. They sometimes exchanged DVD's with each other and when there was nothing new to see Peder went around the city's second-hand stores to look for more, 'You can buy like 30 DVD's for 100 kronor.' he joyfully explained.

By examining the urban landscape outside the church, a distinct sociality is visible. There is a certain form of how one is supposed to be social and how social relationships are being formed and maintained, so called sociality. The term can be applied in similarity with terms such as social customs or norms with a few modifications. Firstly, sociality emphasizes the dynamic process. Sociality is therefore constantly malleable and never static which social norms on the other hand implicates (Long and Moore, 2012: 41). Described in the section of the visual profile of Gothenburg, expensive consumption, particularly in company with others, was a prevalent form of socializing understood through the article by Long and Moore. Consumption as sociality is therefore constantly reproduced every day by the people in the restaurants, in the stores and at the cinemas. Expressed by the above authors, human subjects come to know the world through the sociality where they live and/or act and they will find meaning within it (ibid.). An example of sociality on a national level is the culture of Swedes forming relations through non-profit associations described on page 58 which has an unusually high rate of adherence in comparison with other countries (Vogel, Amnå, Munck and Häll, 2003: 53). Swedes have a tendency to form social relations through organizations just because it is part of our sociality. In a similar way I argue that consumption

is a large part of sociality in the city of Gothenburg. It functions as a precondition through which social relations are formed and maintained to a large extent. This unfortunately results in that it becomes difficult to form new relationships and increase one's participation in social life if one lacks the financial means to attend yoga classes, go to the cinema, eat at restaurants and go shopping, findings that goes hand in hand with those of MacDonald, Nixon and Deacon (2018: 91) and Scharf, Phillipson and Smith (2005), namely that the group of low income earner face difficulties to activate themselves more in social life.

What the fieldwork in its entirety could conclude was that even with small financial means the visitors engaged in alternative forms of socialization that was centered around, for them, affordable consumption. At S:t Johanneskyrkan, and to some extent in the second-hand stores in the area, visitors could participate in a normative form of sociality where they could read the morning paper, eat together, drink coffee, play board games and go shopping without having to put a severe strain on their private economy. If these activities only existed for profit-making purposes, most visitors of S:t Johanneskyrkan could not participate in them and as a consequence found it more difficult to break with involuntary loneliness. Now the visitors could instead participate in a similar sociality as other citizens - namely to do these activities in company of others. Without alternative socialization forms as S:t Johanneskyrkan, Peder, Thomas, Josef and Peo all said they would spend an unhealthy amount of time at home in solitary, especially in difficult times of unemployment or mental health issues as was the case for Peo and Peder at the time. If there would only be soup kitchens donating food and profit-making restaurants, I believe the group of people living with a low and/or precarious income but without any immediate social difficulties would be missed out to a large extent. St: Johanneskyrkan was one such alternative and it was an incredibly important place for these people to be able to attend.

### *Generosity*

For people who live on the margin financially, many relationship building activities become difficult to engage in as discussed above. It can be dining at a restaurant, buying a coffee with friends, attending gym or yoga classes or going shopping. Another relationship-maintaining act which becomes almost impossible is to show generosity. It becomes difficult if it means

taking a share of your budget that you need for yourself and it becomes meaningless in case the gift is free of charge. Acts of generosity were present at S:t Johanneskyrkan between visitors for that very reason, that food was neither expensive nor free. During my fieldwork I encountered a couple examples of such kind. In the middle of my conversation with Lindh that we had during the days I tried to become accustomed to the environment and learn the codes, he sat and had breakfast when he suddenly spotted Alf - an older man who had been attending S:t Johanneskyrkan for many years and had become a bit of a character for always collecting tin cans which he recycled before sending all the money to an orphanage in South America. Lindh immediately dropped our conversation as he saw Alf and shouted 'Öhh! Alf! Come here' to call on his attention. Lindh reached him a glass of orange juice that was left over from his 10 SEK breakfast.

**Lindh:** 'You want it? I don't want it.'

**Alf:** '[mumbles] I'll put it away, I don't like orange juice.'

**Lindh:** 'You're not drinking it? But give it to someone who wants it then.'

**Alf:** 'Yeah yeah [mumbles, takes the glass of juice and walks up to the counter]'

**Lindh:** '[Turns to me] My parents always told me that you should never throw food away.'

**Simon (me):** 'No, same for me actually.'

**Lindh:** '[Looks at Alf who puts the glass down by the dishes] Ah, now he throws it anyway. He did accept it yesterday...'

**Simon:** 'Did he drink it himself then?'

**Lindh:** 'Yes he sat by that table over there [points at a table]. I asked him then 'Alf do you want the juice? I don't want it.' Then he neither answered yes nor no so I just gave it to him and then he drank it. I thought he wanted it now but he didn't.'

**Simon:** 'Mm no... [We are both observing Alf as he suddenly picks up the glass again and hands it over to a woman sitting at one of the round tables]'

**Lindh:** 'That's good, you shouldn't throw food away.'

In this event we can see both Lindh and Alf having the opportunity to show acts of generosity by giving away a glass of juice that Lindh had left over from his breakfast, something that can contribute to relieving feelings of poverty and also be relationship building seen, once

again, from a Maussian perspective where Alf or the woman by the round table might reciprocate the small gift at a later stage.

Josef, who after he had been living at a temporary public residence found a permanent senior housing through the municipality, expressed during our interview that he had managed to form quite good relations with his new neighbours by handing out bread to them a few times per week. Those mornings he goes early to S:t Johanneskyrkan, already at around 9AM, to collect bread loafs which he later hands out to his neighbours. He says that other visitors in the queue sometimes become frustrated and tells him he cannot take that many loaves of bread, but it does not bother him that much. He still likes to take a loaf for himself and two or three additional for his neighbours. Josef says he is a poor baker and cannot afford to buy his neighbours bread every now and then. A generosity he can afford though is to bring some freshly baked bread from the church to hand out. Generosity is only one additional relationship building activity that is facilitated by this form of charity organization/restaurant that is S:t Johanneskyrkan. The fieldwork has brought into light many of the social functions of an organization of this kind and shown the importance of it in relieving loneliness among low income earners.

### *Further Research*

I would like to address to researchers interested in the field of loneliness and charity organizations a possible question to further explore which I had no time to devote research to. This would be to compare the sociality of different charity organizations, preferably one offering food for free to one charging a symbolic amount, particularly interesting would be to follow individuals who attend organizations of both sorts to see if, and in that case how, their social activity and experience differ between the places.

### *Chapter 8 - Conclusions*

After a month of being at S:t Johanneskyrkan, a picture began to emerge of a place that could initially seem as a casual café, but in fact was an utterly important place for many people. S:t

Johanneskyrkan came to appear as a place which removed many barriers for the visitors and encouraged them to become more active in social life which prevented many from falling too deep into an involuntary loneliness. It was to a large extent the financial limitations of the interlocutors that had a negative impact on their social life and prevented them from participating to the extent they wished. Some thought it prevented them from finding a partner while others confirmed that they could no longer engage in their favourite leisure activities due to their financial situation.

The findings suggest that loneliness was closely connected to normativity and became more palpable outside S:t Johanneskyrkan than inside of it for some of the interlocutors. The church provided a refuge as well as an alternative place for low income earners to participate in activities that were considered normal and could thus be carried out without stigmatization.

By first exploring the sub-questions of the research, we can see that S:t Johanneskyrkan's food serving has a restaurant-like setting where the orderly and social environment attracts visitors from mainly two socioeconomic groups. There are those facing rather acute social issues such as homelessness and drug addiction, then there is the largest group, from what I could identify - low income earners oftentimes dealing with personal issues that has pushed them into the direction of finding a social and supportive environment.

The second sub-question of why people claimed to attend S:t Johanneskyrkan could be deduced to the three reemerging reasons: economic, social and to some extent cultural, but in order to see the larger picture of what actually took place at the church's food serving, we must direct our focus towards the main themes - the *experience* of loneliness for the group of low income earners and *how* it could be mitigated. That the scarce financial situation of many visitors was an issue for participating in social life became obvious. It became tiresome for the interlocutors to participate on other terms which made them feel odd and it also became difficult for them to break the vicious circle of loneliness once caught in it. Many contributing factors such as mental or physical health issues, unemployment, previous alcohol abuse or an overall eccentric, and frowned upon, lifestyle obstructed many interlocutors from seeking more traditional social activities. A large share of the visitors

would be considered living a life on the margins of society and I am convinced that the operation at S:t Johanneskyrkan helped at least some visitors to stay on the right side of it.

The practicality of being able to eat a cheap lunch diminished in comparison to what developed in the meetings between people. The friendships and sense of social belonging that evolved brought along something larger. Through minor factors such as charging a symbolic amount for food and keeping the environment clean and orderly, S:t Johanneskyrkan has managed to remove much of the stigma around attending these charity organizations while simultaneously maintaining an equal relationship between the visitor and the organization. This is not at least emphasized by the fact that someone like Eric was a regular visitor. For him it came naturally to attend the church since he had found some like-minded people there to discuss everyday matters with and could thus avoid spending his days alone. Eric was aware that the organization was supported by donations and that people in urgent need visited the church for that very reason. Despite this, it was not stigmatized for someone who had worked in middle management his entire life to nowadays, when retired, expand his social circle at an organization of this kind. For many of my interlocutors, visiting S:t Johanneskyrkan was the highlight of their day and it was with ease and self-respect that people entered the church. Thus, I argue that S:t Johanneskyrkan not only offered a place to make new friends, it became synonymous with living a respectable and dignified life.

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