

Fabulous Friday Leftovers:
Soup Kitchens and the Politics of Charity

By

Courtney Leigh Weber

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Department of Anthropology
University of Michigan—Ann Arbor

Advised by Maureen Devlin, Stuart Kirsch,
Erik Mueggler, and Adriana Chira

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*For all those who share
their food and their stories*

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El gran mantel
'The Great Tablecloth'
Pablo Neruda

...
*Comer solos es muy amargo
pero no comer es profundo,
es hueco, es verde, tiene espinas
como una cadena de anzuelos
que cae desde el corazón
y que te clava por adentro.*

*Tener hambre es como tenazas,
es como muerden los cangrejos,
quema, quema y no tiene fuego:
el hambre es un incendio frío.
Sentémonos pronto a comer
con todos los que no han comido,
pongamos los largos manteles,
la sal en los lagos del mundo,
panaderías planetarias,
mesas con fresas en la nieve,
y un plato como la luna
en donde todos almorcemos.*

*Por ahora no pido más
que la justicia del almuerzo.*

...
*Eating alone is a disappointment,
but not eating matters more,
is hollow and green, has thorns
like a child of fish-hooks
trailing from the heart,
clawing at your insides.*

*Hunger feels like pincers,
like the bite of crabs,
it burns and has no fire.
Hunger is a cold fire.
Let us sit down to eat
with all those who haven't eaten;
let us spread great tablecloths,
put salt in the lakes of the world,
set up planetary bakeries,
tables with strawberries in snow,
and a plate like the moon itself
from which we can all eat.*

*For now I ask no more
than the justice of eating.*

INTRODUCTION

Order and an awkward silence permeate the dining room as we wait for the soup kitchen to begin serving the noon meal. Furniture tidily sits in straight, perpendicular rows, tables are numbered with marked plastic cups, and other than those standing around the water cooler, most guests are seated and waiting. For a brief moment, all of our heads turn toward the volunteer as she comes out of the kitchen to post the day's menu. Entitled "Fabulous Friday Leftovers," the menu tells us of the pork stew, pasta, and cole slaw that we will soon be able to eat. We sit in anticipation of this meal, aware that the needle of the clock is already past 12:00PM, the official start time.

"Anytime now..." Michael says, impatiently tapping his fingers on our table. Our gaze shifts to Elyse, the shelter social worker who will tell us when to get in line. Meal tickets in hand, Elyse roves the kitchen making sure everything is as it "should be" before finally stopping near the condiment table. Our attention, as soup kitchen guests, is drawn to her as the protagonist and controller of the performance that is about to start. She signals the beginning of our meal with the familiar words: "Moment of silence."

While some guests toward the back of the dining room continue talking, other conversations are abruptly silenced. Across from me, Michael puts his head down as if to pray. I follow suit, folding my hands and closing my eyes like a child saying grace at my family dinner table. Yet it feels unnatural to say grace in this silent, individual way. Without being able to recite these words aloud with my fellow guests, I'm not sure what to do. Are we to be thanking a higher power for this meal? Or is this a time to acknowledge the volunteers who have given their time and energy to serve us?

Over in the kitchen, the volunteers are oblivious to the combined silence and my internal questions. Pots clamor, feet shuffle, and the large metal windows separating the dining room and kitchen creak open as the volunteers scramble to ready themselves to serve the meal. Despite being one ‘community’ at the Community Cafeteria, the divisiveness is striking. In this moment I, like others, am aware of the different roles of guest, staff, and volunteer. As guests, we sit here silenced by the staff, separated from our fellow diners, and waiting for what comes next.

The Community Cafeteria

In its simplest definition, a soup kitchen is a place where people can eat a meal at no cost. Yet, while many of my college-aged friends zealously seek out free food, they would never consider eating in one of these places. Instead, they have grown up knowing that soup kitchens don’t just serve meals, but rather serve meals to a certain *type* of person in a specific way. According to formal definitions, soup kitchens give food to the “poor” and “needy” (Webster’s Third New International Dictionary). These individuals eat mass-produced meals served by people who are working without compensation. They eat in a large dining room, often on cafeteria-style dining tables, which follows a well-established procedure: arrive, wait in line, eat quickly, deposit dishes, and leave without paying. Although there are many examples of soup kitchens that are changing these traditional procedures, they still include enough of these characteristics to mark them as places reserved for the poor, homeless, or destitute.

While the term *soup kitchen* is never utilized to describe the Community Cafeteria [CC] (a pseudonym), the CC fits this traditional definition. Opened in 2003, the CC offers a free, warm meal to anyone who walks through its doors. The CC is located in the affluent downtown of a Midwest college city, just two blocks from shops and fine restaurants. While it may be less renowned than its neighboring food establishments, the CC feeds more people than any single

restaurant in the vicinity. In one week, the CC will serve meals a total of seventeen times: lunch and dinner Monday through Friday, dinner on Saturdays and Sunday, and breakfast Monday through Friday, with weekly breakfast reserved for the shelter residents who live in the affiliated homeless shelter. (The CC is uniquely tied to the shelter, as both exist in the same building.) In addition to the shelter residents who always eat at the shelter, the kitchen serves anyone who walks in: this amounts to between seventy and one hundred ten guests for any given meal.¹

Like many soup kitchens, the Community Cafeteria relies on a dense network of people to make its mission possible. The CC is one of 150 organizations provided with food from the Great Harvest [GH] (a pseudonym), the county's self-described "food rescue and food bank program" located in the same college town. Because of this relationship, GH employs all of the CC staff members. The kitchen is filled with GH posters and similar marketing materials. Twice a week, the CC receives food from the GH warehouse, either donated by local businesses or purchased by Great Harvest through their multiple grants and partnerships. At the kitchen, staff members, interns, and the occasional paid chef work to transform these donated ingredients into meals for anyone who comes to eat.

Helping them in this eleven-year mission are the roughly 1500 volunteers that cook, clean, and serve in the kitchen each year. The consistent level of dedication and generosity seen in providing free food to the people 'in need' make the soup kitchen a particularly interesting, yet understudied, site of anthropological and historical inquiry.

¹ The number of guests at meals fluctuates in accordance with weather, time of year, and distribution of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. More guests eat at the kitchen at the beginning of the month than at the end, as SNAP benefits usually run out after the third week of the month.

Contextualizing the Soup Kitchen

During the Great Depression, churches and private charities opened sites of communal, free meals known as the first American soup kitchens.² As demand grew, the states and federal governments became involved, allocating both surplus commodities and money to their efforts. Despite the growth of these kitchens, the public, the government, and relief professionals were weary of them. In addition to being thought of as wasteful and inefficient, soup kitchens were also considered demeaning, stigmatizing places. As the country recovered from depression, many kitchens were enthusiastically closed, and for about thirty years hunger disappeared from the national political agenda (Poppendieck 1998).

When hunger became an issue of concern again in the late 1960s and 1970s, government-proposed food aid programs, not charitable soup kitchens, were seen as the solution to the nation's hunger emergency (Poppendieck 1997). It wasn't until the Reagan administration, that the government, under the spell of neoliberal ideologies, promoted volunteerism as an alternative to government social spending. According to President Reagan, "No matter how big and powerful government gets and no matter how many services it provides, it can never take the place of volunteers," (1986) which initiated a wide-ranging urban "soup kitchen movement" (Glasser 1988). This movement, in line with Reagan's earlier call, placed a perhaps disproportionate amount of attention on volunteers themselves and the volunteering 'experience,' rather than on the poor or the structural causes that result in unequal allocation of resources. The call to action was tied to a swift reduction in federal spending on food programs; for instance, nutrition programs were cut by \$12.2 billion dollars from 1982-1985 (Glasser 1988).

² The term "soup kitchen" was first documented in Ireland's Soup Kitchen Act of 1847, as these communal feeding sites fed watery soup to those worst affected during the Great Potato Famine (Poppendieck 1998).

Furthermore, humanitarian projects of the 1980s shifted attention away from the structural causes of inequality. Without a voice in the state's political policies, the main result of such projects was the expansion of bureaucratic mechanisms (Ferguson 1990) and technocratic (i.e., supposedly non-political) solutions modeled on business practices.

The influence of Reagan's ideology of volunteerism permeated the "soup kitchen movement" in more ways than one. The kitchens fit well within an emerging service-based economy, where the distinction between the affect-based social interaction and the profit-motive became especially blurred (Moreton 2009). Charities and businesses started not only to look more alike in their organization practices, but also became interdependent, as the work of charity was economically beneficial to business. Federal and state governments could spend less on public assistance; business owners saved money by donating leftover or surplus goods instead of paying to dispose of them; and businesses received tax deductions on these donated goods. For instance, a local primary donor to Community Cafeteria claimed that he would lose profits if unable to donate; "as a business we would be paying the expense of having that trash hauled away. Instead of throwing it away," he was content "to know it's going to go to a great organization...and they're going to use it for people in need." In addition, charitable contributions functioned as excellent marketing devices that would attract a politically minded, middle class, educated clientele. As this donor commented, "we get a lot of good recognition for all of the various things that we do. It's one of the reasons a lot of customers shop with us."

During this time, customer service and organization models based on for-profit businesses started to be applied to soup kitchens, as a more effective way of solving hunger than the supposedly wasteful government aid distribution. Greg, founder of Great Harvest, had been an anarchist during the 1970s, "a hippie, rebellious, and 'down-with-the-man'" type who started

his food rescue program on the humanistic tenet that all humans have the right to food. However, as Greg's parallel food business grew, he decided that a business model might be more adequate for his philanthropic project, primarily because it would result in more and better food for the needy:

Greg: I wasn't very experienced in the non-profits, but I had business experience. And I wanted to run it like we did our business and focus on our customers and have a high level of customer service, and bring all of those practices to bear.

Greg's language of customer service helped define kitchen guests on egalitarian terms, rather than as marginal 'others,' who could and should content themselves with leftovers. In practice, however, this language of customer service concealed ongoing forms of inequality: the 'customers' are not allowed to pay back what they are 'compelled' to receive in any way. Greg had emphasized that his interest in a soup kitchen emerged out of a desire to "boost volunteerism," as a way of paying back the community from which he "extracted those profits." In this model, the soup kitchen serves another purpose, that of a public space affording new experiences that would generate community formation for middle class, food-secure individuals.

Even though Greg, like other kitchen founders, draws on business principles, he still emphasizes the possibilities for altruism at the core of this particular for-profit model. While both businesses and charities exist in the gray space between the philanthropic and the economic, only businesses are allowed to publically claim this space. In contrast, charities must defend their position as altruistic organizations in order to attract volunteers and donors.

Beside these economic reasons, there were also ideological ones for the fervent "soup kitchen movement." People zealously embraced Reagan's ideology of volunteerism because service work fit into religious traditions and broader ideologies of individual responsibility and social justice. For many Christians, the Biblical principle that "it is more blessed to give than to

receive”³ called many to the service work that the Reagan administration hoped for. Ironically, the growth of charitable organizations “deprecates the desire to give by bringing it under control” (Mead 1969). The growth of soup kitchens and similar sites of charity are today the most socially acceptable places for one to give, while giving money or food to a panhandler is often met with criticism. During the same summer of my fieldwork, the city task force released a new campaign to discourage such behavior with posters that read: “Want to really help? You don’t want your \$\$ to support a drug or alcohol habit! [City name] has services for homeless individuals and people with addictions. Make sure your money works toward a solution!” By giving to the soup kitchen, people can trust that their money is not going to support an immoral habit that is depicted as common among panhandlers. Thus, by channeling one’s desire to give, soup kitchens and other sites of charitable exchange have limited the types of acceptable giving that can take place.

Finally, there were political reasons that led to the growth and sustainment of soup kitchens. Soup kitchens drew support from everyone, not only those of certain political affiliations. Even those involved in large-scale political mobilization for social justice in the 1960s and 1970s were drawn to the work of the soup kitchen. While their goal may have once been to change the social order, volunteering in this form of direct service was less risky. It was also perhaps more emotionally rewarding to volunteer than to actively mobilize, providing one with the feeling of making an immediate difference, as opposed to struggling for a gargantuan structural change.

A purely structural or historical analysis of the recent shifts in welfare and government social spending cannot tell the whole story. My attempt is to capture the stories, hushed and loud, sarcastic or filled with sadness and melancholy, percolating in the dining room, the hallways, the

³ Acts 20:35 (Revised Standard Version)

offices, and the cooking areas of a soup kitchen. These stories can convey the everyday political abrasions that guests, volunteers, and staff contend with. Indeed, the power struggles to reproduce the guest/volunteer hierarchy are relentless and turn into an expansive web that draws in ever more participants, even inanimate ones (napkins, deserts, et cetera).

Throughout five months of fieldwork at the Community Cafeteria, I discovered that in this soup kitchen every gesture, every word, every twitch became politicized, making almost everyone feel as if they were treading on broken glass constantly. My discovery contradicted the view that there has been a depoliticization and bureaucratization of poverty and resource allocation at a more global level; the guests at the soup kitchen where I worked were extremely vocal, using political vocabulary to comment on their status and marginalization. The authority figures, while able to use various ideological cushions to explain away their position of power (e.g., that guests are not responsible individuals), nevertheless, often felt interpellated as oppressors and occasionally reflected on the accidental nature of their privilege. As I listened to the staff, guests, and volunteer stories, I discovered that they contained something that went beyond the acts of creating and reproducing political hierarchies. The question that lingered with me after hearing these stories was: why do people return to the kitchen, given the high tensions permeating their interactions with almost everyone there, guest or volunteer? Did the guests return to the kitchen only because they needed to? And did the volunteers manage to define what they do as “moral selving” or the making of themselves as more virtuous people (Allahyari 2000), in spite of the constant reminders of their privilege, which the kitchen ambience dished out? Did the volunteers return simply because they wanted to tell themselves that they are deserving of their higher status? And could they ignore all signs to the contrary, rubbing elbows with the many guests who were once middle class and had lost everything unexpectedly?

Soup kitchens have a relational geography in which conflict pushes everyone to constantly explain themselves to others through narratives. In trying to capture these narratives, I will convey how conflict does not necessarily result in a break-up of relationality or only in a hierarchy; it can also give rise to creative forms of self-reflexivity. Guests found unexpected and spontaneous forms of expression that questioned their interpellation (Althusser 1969) as food insecure or homeless. Through these expressions, they re-defined the kitchen as something other than a controlled space determined by the guest/volunteer hierarchy. In this process, story-telling played a key part: the individuals whom I interviewed had an insatiable desire to explain their position in the social hierarchy, reminding me and other listeners that they were much more than what we might associate with the homeless, the food insecure, or the middle class volunteer. It is this particular commitment to story telling and to its description of self that transcends immediate economic conditions that this thesis captures.

CHAPTER ONE

FIGHTING HUNGER: The Elite's Vision of the Community Cafeteria

“There is a role for *everyone* in the fight against hunger,” says an informational packet found at the Great Harvest warehouse.⁴ While waiting for my volunteer shift to start, I wander around the lobby area, perusing the pamphlet and admiring the fun posters and comical display of unique donated goods (the weirdest being canned gizzards, dried goats milk, and pickled eggs). Despite the entertaining nature of this volunteer waiting area, my attention is captured by this simple pamphlet. I notice the aesthetic “cuteness” seen in the simple fonts, bold colors, and cartoonish depictions of vegetables that give Great Harvest a warm, comfortable, and accessible feel. It strikes me that although *everyone* supposedly has a role to play in the fight against hunger, only volunteers will read pamphlets like this one. Placed in the volunteer waiting area of the Great Harvest warehouse, these pamphlets are completely inaccessible to GH’s food recipients. Upon closer inspection, I see that the volunteer is indeed the intended audience. Above this quote regarding the role everyone has to play, there is a photo taken at the Community Cafeteria: a gloved hand gives over a full plate of food to a man with a straggly beard, denim jacket, and baseball hat. He is the stereotypical face of the hungry. In contrast, the faceless volunteer could be anyone, including, Great Harvest hopes, the potential volunteer reading this pamphlet for the first time. As this simple pamphlet shows, there is a clear differentiation between those who work for Great Harvest and the Community Cafeteria and those who eat there. Instead of an inclusive community where *everyone* has a role, there are two

⁴ All citations for Great Harvest marketing materials and annual reports are not included to protect anonymity of the organization.

distinct groups: those who are leading the fight against hunger, and those for whom everyone else is fighting.



Figure 1: A Great Harvest promotional brochure. The name of the organization has been deleted for anonymity.

In this chapter, I outline the prominence of this theme at the Community Cafeteria by describing the model of Great Harvest and the soup kitchen they support. In order to do so, I analyze both how the CC markets itself and how the CC functions. While at times different, both represent the ideal the elites have in mind for the organization's function. First, it is clear that

Great Harvest (as an organization), the CC staff, and the volunteers view the food they are serving as a gift to the guests. This concept, ‘food-as-gift,’ works to create two distinct communities: givers and recipients. This division between the people involved at the Community Cafeteria is further emphasized not only in how the kitchen markets itself but in more practical ways, such as how the space is divided. Thirdly, I describe the goal of the CC as being to “change lives” of the people they serve. While everyone here embraces this, the model adopted by the soup kitchen is actually one of changing the volunteers’ lives by giving them a space to make themselves better people. Finally, I describe the one place where the marketing and the reality seem to diverge: food. The model that the kitchen desires, one of healthy food for all, isn’t the ideal that the staff and volunteers embrace. In each of these cases, the ideal of a non-political kitchen based on equality and shared community comes undone.

The Unreciprocated Gift

On Wednesday, February 12, 2014, I woke up to an email from Great Harvest in my inbox. With the intriguing personalized subject line, “A video message for Courtney from Great Harvest”, I followed the links to find a video message sung by the GH staff:

*To our dearest gatherers,
This Valentine’s Day and every day, we’d be in a “pickle” without you
You “pepper” our days with your helping hands and friendly smiles
We even think of how very blue fighting hunger would be without you
Every day, you’re “raisin” our expectations with your gifts of service, food and money
We’re a great “pear,” filling up the plates of our hungry neighbors
On behalf of all those who receive the gift of food, “lettuce” give thanks for all you do
Happy Valentine’s Day, and thank you for fighting hunger where we live.*

As a thank you poem, Great Harvest wanted to express their gratitude for what I had given to the Community Cafeteria. There are many gifts given here, like the service given each time the people volunteer to cook, clean, and serve in the kitchen. The gift of food comes from

individuals who buy extra groceries and businesses who donate their unsold items. The gift of money comes from organizations, fundraisers, individuals, and the government. This gifting language is prominent in all of GH's marketing materials: the annual report describes volunteers as giving "gifts" of "healthy meals to hungry people" and the "gift of time" to food recipients. As a gift, volunteers are to receive no more than a 'thank you' like this one from the organization, as recipients are not to pay or give anything for the gift they consume.

While this may be the image of the gift promoted at this soup kitchen, anthropological studies have shown the many nuances, rules, and perhaps surprising facets of gift giving. In *The Gift*, Marcel Mauss describes gifts as never free and always interested (1967[1923]). Even those gifts that appear to be altruistically given require that the recipient repay the giver, perhaps in an undisclosed way or time. The classic example is that of a parent giving their child food, shelter, and care with the expectation that the child reciprocate when the parent is no longer able to take care of themselves. Other anthropologists emphasize how gift exchange is an important negotiation of social relationships since it is rarely a direct form of exchange. Giving both reinforces the prestige, influence, and economic power of the giver (Bourdieu 1977) and serves important economic functions (Sahlins 1974). Given this notion of the gift, recent scholarship gives special attention to forms of gift giving that seem to require no form of reciprocation (Bornstein 2012) to explain what outside factors may allow this type of gift giving to break the Maussian rules.

The soup kitchen is an important place to study the conditions of the unreciprocated gift. In this space, the notion that guests should pay for these meals defeats the purpose of serving those who couldn't otherwise afford food. To ask that guests reciprocate for their food by working in the kitchen or cleaning would undermine Great Harvest's premise that food should be freely given as opposed to earned. This non-reciprocal gift giving exists when there is a

hierarchical relationship between giver and recipient (Graeber 2011). Unlike Graeber's other forms of giving where two parties give on relatively equal terms (direct exchange), and when people share without accruing debt or credit for their actions (baseline communism), hierarchical exchange makes one party the giver and one the recipient. Low social position, perhaps based on socioeconomic status, gives the recipient the supposed privilege to take without owing anything to the recipient.

While this hierarchical relationship seems to free guests from the obligation to repay, the rest of this thesis will show the often unseen effects of nonreciprocal giving. First, it is clear that this position of power as a "giver" of food allows volunteers and staff certain authorities over guests that they might not otherwise have. As superior to the guests, they control all aspects of the guests' experience in this soup kitchen and homeless shelter. Secondly, it is clear that this hierarchical model further marginalizes the people who eat here. Guests are uncomfortable with accepting this gift without reciprocating. In their ideal soup kitchen, they would reduce the rigid hierarchy in place by repaying the volunteers and staff for this food, thereby transforming the mode of hierarchical giving into one of direct exchange between people of equal status.

Community

At first glance, Great Harvest appears to market itself as an organization where all are treated as equals of one shared community. This concept of community is an important theme in GH's self-descriptions. The mission statement reads, "Great Harvest exists to alleviate hunger and eliminate its causes in our community." The pronoun "our" includes all those reading. It is irrelevant whether one is food secure or food insecure, as all are included in this description. The term *community*, which is used frequently in CC marketing, further emphasizes this sense of an

inclusive group. As a community, the soup kitchen staff, donors, volunteers, and guests are a “people of a district or country considered collectively, especially in the context of social values and responsibilities” (Oxford Dictionary). Their collective social value, according to Great Harvest, is a commitment to end hunger, a value that everyone can support.

Who belongs to this community? The leaders in what the CC describes as the “fight against hunger” are the paid Great Harvest staff. Between Alice, the Community Cafeteria coordinator, and Luke, the secondary coordinator, there is always a full-time staff member at the kitchen. Off-site, Alice and Luke are part of a twenty-four member Great Harvest staff who run GH’s food rescue and delivery program. Bryn, the volunteer coordinator, works at the GH warehouse but also coordinates the volunteer sign-up and marketing strategies. In addition to these staff members, the kitchen employs two to three interns, usually graduates from the kitchen’s job training program for ‘at-risk’ youth, and one or two cooks to oversee the food preparation in the kitchen. Out in the dining room, the guests are under the jurisdiction of the homeless shelter attached to the kitchen, meaning they follow the direction of the homeless shelter staff. During the lunch service, the social workers roam the kitchen to direct the meal process and deal with any problems that might arise.

The donors are also an important part of the Great Harvest community. Combined with government funding, donors provide the kitchen with all of the money and goods needed to serve food. This includes those who give monthly monetary donations; churches, schools, and fraternities that hold canned good drives; farmers that give surplus crop to the food pantry; and local businesses. Donors are a highly respected part of the GH community. They are important enough that GH put out a Donor Bill of Rights to clearly explain donor’s entitlements. GH is

primarily concerned with protecting their donors, saying that they are never to be “pressured or unduly persuaded” regarding their “gifts.”

Volunteers make up the largest part of the Great Harvest community. They are essential, making up more than 70% of the hours worked at Great Harvest.⁵ Volunteers “fight hunger” through a myriad of more concrete, mundane activities such as sorting food, preparing meals at the kitchen, serving food, washing dishes, and cleaning. The people who volunteer are as diverse as the tasks they complete. Their ages range from children as young as eight (accompanied by an adult) to retirees. More than half are women. These are housewives, students, lawyers, nurses, doctors, accountants, and professors. They are easily identifiable by their dress: closed-toed shoes, baseball caps or hairnets, white aprons, nametags, and clear plastic gloves. While this uniform is dictated by a myriad of health and safety regulations, the effect is a visual barrier marking the haves from the have-nots.

Great Harvest frequently invests in emphasizing the volunteer’s place in the GH community. Volunteers are kept updated with monthly volunteer newsletters. The most recent newsletter reminded volunteers of their role in this community of hunger fighters with a greeting that read, “Hello fellow harvesters!” The email was a call to “Spring into action this April by helping us fight hunger where we live.” These volunteers are part of the “us” of Great Harvest employees as “we” live and fight for collective goals. The staff similarly speaks of the volunteers as part of the Great Harvest community. During my interview with Alice, one of two Community Cafeteria coordinators, she frequently referred to the volunteers along with herself, describing how things are when “we’re on the serving line.” As part of the GH community, Alice wants

⁵ As described on the Great Harvest website.

“them to feel like they’re part of GH. That’s why I really want to be in their face all the time and be out there and feel like we’re working together as a team.”

By treating them as part of the Great Harvest community, volunteers share this sense of community with one another and the organization for which they work. At the kitchen, it isn’t uncommon to see volunteers wearing GH t-shirts and hats. On a personal level, they feel connected to people like Alice and Luke. In particular, volunteers will often share with the staff their stories about their children, where they’re going on vacation, or even what they had for dinner the night before. Volunteers create their own community, as they bond over their experiences cooking, shelling hard-boiled eggs, or packaging desserts. They even talked about having “volunteer parties” or driving to their shifts together to save gas. This is the community that Great Harvest talks about when they speak of the “we” of their organization.

In contrast, the guests are not seen as part of this Great Harvest community. They are not the “fellow harvesters” that Great Harvest describes, but rather a distinctly different community that GH and CC must work to help. Regarding whom they serve, Great Harvest knows little about their recipients as they rarely survey their guests and, apart from the national Hunger Study, never ask for information about the recipients’ financial status.⁶ The only statistical information comes from a nutritional study from 2005. Out of the 65 voluntary surveys filled out by guests, 57% respondents were 45 years or older. Seventy-four percent came to meals three times a week or more; and sixty-six percent ate both lunch and dinner at the CC.⁷ From my own observations, it appears that most guests are older, single men. As Bryn, the volunteer coordinator, told me, there’s a relatively high incidence of mental illness among the guests, and there is a higher percentage of African Americans and Latinos at the kitchen than in the general

⁶ The Hunger Study is an annual survey conducted by Feeding America.

⁷ This study was performed by public health graduate students from a local university.

population of the town. Many are working, yet they may work minimum wage jobs or be underemployed.

From the perspective of the Great Harvest community of staff, donors, and volunteers, these guests do not belong to their community. Alice, the kitchen coordinator, often used the term *they* in reference to everyone seated out in the dining room. In an effort to protect the volunteers from the rude or sexual comments that “they” might make, Alice stations herself behind them during almost every meal shift. Alice may not like categorizing the guests in this way, but she must prioritize the needs of the volunteers in order to ensure that they return. While community building activities, like eating with the guests or having them volunteer might reduce the divisions between these two groups, this would take considerable time and resources. Thus, Alice must run interference between these two distinct communities, and in doing so, she inadvertently widens the gap.

Upon closer inspection of the marketing materials, it appears that this sense of a divided community is more apparent than one might first think. While this is a community where “everyone” has a role to play, the roles are different based on one’s position at the kitchen. Like the brochure picture, there are two actors present: the givers and the recipients. Givers are asked to give their time and money to help the food insecure, their neighbors. In leading the “fight” against the hungry, they are “fighting” *for* the food insecure, as opposed to *with* the food insecure. For instance, Great Harvest’s annual fundraiser “Rockin’ for the Hungry” allows those with extra time or money to raise funds for the ‘other’; clearly, those who are “rockin’” are not hungry themselves. With this clear differentiation of gift giver and gift recipient in place, the supposedly inclusive, egalitarian model suggested by GH marketing and staff comes undone.

Volunteers/staff and guests are further differentiated by their separate spaces. Although in the same building, the kitchen and dining room are two distinct rooms. The kitchen is filled with colorful signs decorated with orange carrots, feedback cards, and pictures of the staff. This is a place of productivity and busyness, as volunteers simultaneously prepare the next day's breakfast, cook the lunch or dinner, clean dishes, and stock food. Besides Alice's office, there are no chairs in sight, as there is never a moment to sit down. The jazz music playing over the intercom is just loud enough to be heard without covering the volunteers' conversations.

In the dining room, the scene is drastically different. Decorations are sparse, and in direct contrast with the kitchen, there is only one sign with the Great Harvest logo and mission statement. Aside from a door with a sign telling guests "Do Not Enter," the dining room is connected to the kitchen by open windows: two where volunteers can serve the guests and one where volunteers accept the guests' dirty dishes. At the end of the meal, large metal screens cover these windows, effectively cutting all connection between these two spaces. Guests can peer into these windows when they're open but they rarely have a reason to go into this space. There are even separate bathrooms, one on the guest side, and one connected to the kitchen for the volunteers.

At the kitchen, it isn't difficult to feel this sense of a divided community. My experience during the 'moment of silence' first revealed to me the divisiveness of these two groups. It's obvious that even the most frequent volunteers and returning guests do not engage with one another aside from a few moments in the meal line. Yet, this isn't to say that this divisiveness is desired by the staff and volunteers who work here. Alice, the kitchen director, described this lack of engagement with the guests as one of the worst aspects of her job. Things weren't always this

way, she said, as volunteers use to eat with guests back before the growing population of food insecure individuals led to an expansion in soup kitchen size.

Alice: The previous systems...there was a lot more interfacing with our population. We just can't do that here. We would like to do that here but we can't. And we knew when we got into here that it would be completely different. And we lost a lot of people when we did the old kitchens to the new ones, the volunteers, they couldn't stand this.

So while Alice can serve more people in this new system, she also knows less of the people that she serves. She, like many of her volunteers, hates the fact that she no longer knows the guests.

Alice: After all these many years I just feel terrible I don't know many of these people's names. I'm just so busy back here, I am so busy back here. I was telling a volunteer that this afternoon, some of these guys have been with me for years and I don't know their names and I feel terrible, I feel absolutely terrible.

Undoubtedly, the divided community is not only uncomfortable for guests, but for those who work here. As the face of the organization, Alice is perhaps in the most difficult position. All of the guests know her name and frequently seek her out to give a heartfelt 'thanks' for the meal. While it feels good to be appreciated, even these experiences are uncomfortable for her, as she avoids referring to anyone directly by name. Each interaction is a constant reminder of the impersonal nature of this form of giving.

Like Alice, the guests desire a model of inclusion. The stakes for them, however, are higher. If the guests and volunteers had a stronger relationship, the model of giving would more closely resemble friends helping one another than superiors giving charity to needy recipients. This relationship is so important that some guests imagine that these relationships to be stronger than they actually are. Stephanie envisions Alice not as giving her charity, but taking care of her as a friend would. When she was late to lunch one day, Stephanie described, in admiration, the time when "Miss Alice" saved her a turkey and cheese sandwich. She even cooks the "best cookies in the world," like her mother used to. Andrew too envisioned his relationships with the

volunteers to be stronger than they were, to the point of giving them each nicknames based on their nametag.

Andrew: I even give some of the volunteers nicknames. One of them, Marvelous Mae. Caring Claire. The other one- Myron from Myra or Myra of Hermione! I call the other one the “football player,” the “quarterback.”

In doing so, Andrew shows his desire to have relationships with the staff and volunteers. For in diminishing the social distance between themselves and this community, guests can envision themselves as part of this community. As friends of the volunteers and staff members, guests would no longer be diminished “others,” and the hierarchy between the two communities would be less rigid.

Despite what the marketing might at first lead one to believe, it isn't that surprising that there are two distinct groups of people at this kitchen. Charity connects those who are excluded from resources to those who have a willingness to give; it is not a relationship between equals. When someone eats at a soup kitchen and accepts a meal without needing to reciprocate, they admit to being in the inferior financial position. In a culture that values self-sufficiency, those unable to feed themselves are at the bottom of the social hierarchy. No amount of community-focused language in the marketing can erase this.

Changing Lives

The Community Cafeteria exists to change lives, specifically, those of the people who eat here. While the mission statement reads that Great Harvest exists to eliminate hunger, GH also wants to “use food as a tool to engage and nourish our entire community.” The monthly letters from the Great Harvest CEO frequently feature the story of a food recipient whose life has been transformed in some way related to the GH food. Staff members often have stories ready to share

about a guest they met who, after eating a few times at the CC, found self-worth. Chantal, a Community Cafeteria intern, described the transformative power of her whipped cream smiley faces. During one of her shifts, Chantal decided to “dress up” the donated pastries in order to “make them look more inviting.” She nostalgically talked about how fun it was to playfully decorate these otherwise boring desserts. While fun for her, Chantal was more satisfied with how her work transformed the spirits of all the guests she served.

Chantal: And you know just giving them that dessert with the smiley faces on it brightened their day. It made their night. It made them hopeful. It made them be encouraged. It lifted their spirits just to see that, just to see that smile on the dessert. It made them smile, it made them laugh, it made them say “hey thanks, it was really great” and it was nice. It brightened their day, it made them happy. It made them very happy.

Chantal does not underestimate the transformative power of this simple whipped cream decoration. To her, this was part of her job that, as she described, “changed people’s lives...despite what they were going through.” To Chantal, the CC fulfills this mission by bringing joy to the people they serve.

For Alice, changing the lives of her clients goes beyond making them laugh. She sees what she does as a way to give these marginalized individuals some sense of control in a life that is often times chaotic and uncertain. Guests are transformed through what she describes as “empowerment moments:”

Alice: We never assume that anybody wants everything. I just think it’s nice to give people the choice with what they want. People are being told what to do, how to do it when to do it, there’s just something empowering about being able to choose your own food. For folks who are having a difficult time, any chance that they can grab a little empowerment moment...it just kind of makes us feel better around here... because it’s so stressful for folks out there in the dining room. There are folks who are addicts, there is mental illness in this population, and then you’ve got folks who are just having a real difficult time and they’re stuck with all this stuff, and it’s got to be as stressful as hell out there, so it’s just a little empowerment moment.

Both Alice and Chantal are proud of the positive ways that the kitchen impacts the lives of these guests. As Chantal says, “To change people’s lives, that made my day.” As this quote implies, it isn’t just guests that are being transformed but rather the volunteers and staff themselves. As they make positive impacts in the lives of others, they simultaneously develop their own value as human beings.

While not recognized by the marketing materials, it is this positive self-work that draws volunteers to this space. It makes them feel good, they say, to give their time to help people in need. In serving food to the food insecure, volunteers create themselves as the virtuous people they want to be. Described as “moral selving,” this is:

...deeply emotional self-work. It involves a concern for transforming the experience of an underlying moral self, in contrast to a situated identity. Volunteers...expressed a desire to change their moral selves, not their identity as it inhered in social status or structural position within society. Although the moral self may be experienced as care, or in social scientific terms as essential, it is actually malleable and changeable as the individual encounters new resources for fashioning a more virtuous self. [Allahyari 2000: 4-5]

The resources to build one’s moral self at the kitchen are numerous. For instance, volunteers have the opportunity to perform menial tasks, like mopping and cleaning counters, without complaint. They can go above and beyond their role by coming in early or staying after their shift has ended. Perhaps most importantly, volunteers build their moral selves by expressing charitable love towards marginalized people.

Almost always, it is these direct interactions with the marginalized that have the greatest potential to build one’s moral self. At this kitchen, these opportunities are limited to those volunteers who serve food. While their interaction includes no more than a few words exchanged across the serving counter, volunteers still connect with those they are serving, even for the briefest moment. In doing so, their work feels more important because they see whom it benefits.

Meg, a court-ordered community service volunteer, chose to work at the Community Cafeteria because of this opportunity to interact with clients. As she said, “I wanted to see how grateful they are,” because it made her feel like a “good person” to see her impact on the community.

As Meg’s court-ordered service hours exemplify, the notion that volunteering can make one a “better” person is certainly not a radical one. The criminal justice system has long seen community service as a way not only for people to repay a debt to society, but to reform themselves. Increasingly, schools have implemented similar service requirements for their students. Service hours are not only a way for high school students to be competitive college applications, but are now often part of their graduation requirements. In 2011, a local four-year university implemented a forty-hour per year service requirement for all students receiving scholarships thus bringing in a new population of volunteers to the kitchen. Service doesn’t only benefit their community, according to the school’s scholarship website, it fosters a “lasting dedication to social responsibility and citizenship.”

Despite the personal nature of moral selving, the volunteers’ ability to show caring and selflessness is sharply noticed by the guests and staff, making them more moral people in the their eyes. Colette characterized these volunteers as “good people that do it everyday, on their own time, without getting paid.” Andrew elaborated, describing the importance of what these volunteers do.

Andrew: I like what you guys are doing. I think it’s very important. Besides saving lives, it’s community engagement. You engage in the community; you’re not a passive member of the community, you are an active member, and you’re doing your little part, making a difference.

Andrew values the work that these volunteers are doing, for without them he would not eat. Like the guests, the staff are similarly impressed by volunteers who give up so much of their time

without any financial incentive. Thus, in addition to making themselves as more moral people, the guests and staff interpret their actions as a mark of their virtuous moral character.

The Food

According to the 2010-2011 GH Annual Report, the organization seeks to “increase the quantity and quality of nutritious food available for people in need.” While quantity is mentioned, the rest of the report emphasizes the quality of this food, describing the ideal meal as filled with “fresh produce” and “high-protein items.” This food is described as healthy, the informational pamphlets flooded with images and captions of volunteers preparing “a healthy meal at Great Harvest’s Community Cafeteria.”

According to the volunteer coordinator, “sustenance and nutrition side, having plenty of fiber and nutrients and calories” is the most “important facet” of the food at the CC. This marketing is strongly influenced by *healthism*, a term coined in 1980 to refer to the “striking moralization of health among middle-class Americans” (Crawford 2006:410). Healthism describes an ideology in which healthy bodies are a sign of self-sufficiency and control (Guthman 2011). Through this view, soup kitchen guests, with their lack self-sufficiency, cannot be expected to uphold the middle class standard of health. Thus, it becomes the job of Great Harvest and the Community Cafeteria to promote nutrition in a way that undermines the emotional and pleasurable ways of engaging with food.

In contrast, self-sufficient volunteers are not depicted as needing this healthy food. In the same annual report, Great Harvest describes the food at one of their fundraisers attended by volunteers and donors as “great food from area restaurants, grilled chicken, gourmet sausages, vegetables and delicious dessert.” Good taste is a priority for the volunteers in a way that it isn’t

for this separate community of free food recipients. In choosing to feed ‘healthy’ food to the guests, the volunteer and staff community is further emphasized as the one in control, as they decide what types of food the guests should be eating.

However, what constitutes ‘good food’ as described by the marketing materials is different than what makes ‘good food’ for the staff and volunteers who work at the kitchen. Yet, in redefining these qualities, the staff and volunteers still show their power over the food, and thus the meal experience of the guests. For those working at the kitchen, ‘good food’ is based on its quantity, rather than its healthiness. After eleven years of working here, Alice has resigned herself to the fact that “we just throw the food pyramid out the window when we’re here.” She seems slightly annoyed by the recent public health initiatives to change food at the kitchen. She describes the meals as high in sugar and starches, which are “probably all the wrong things you should have,” but, according to her, good food means having enough food. Her mission is not to prepare different or nutritious meals; rather, she hopes to give people food that will accomplish the Great Harvest goal of feeding hungry people.

Alice: If people aren’t eating we’re not getting mission accomplished, so we can’t have all this real exotic food, we just can’t, so our baseline is pretty basic. Not a lot of ‘out there’ kind of food. If we’re not getting ‘mission accomplished’ it’s just not going to happen.

Alice justifies what she serves by saying that this is what the guests need, however, the meals are mostly determined based on what is donated: lots of starch, dairy, and sweets that she has no choice other than to serve. Alice justifies these large portions by saying that it’s important that those who are “hardcore,” or those who are living on the street and walking all day, have enough to eat. For these people and others, taste and health is a lesser priority, a luxury one can think about only after they first have enough calories. Many volunteers agree, despite the fact that they

wouldn't want to eat these large meals themselves. These people are different, however, and as volunteers expressed, "need all they can get."

As we see continually, the healthism promoted in the marketing materials is in direct contrast with the large quantities served at the kitchen. Portions served are large enough that they would not be considered healthy by any standards. Of the ten meals analyzed at the soup kitchen, single meals ranged between 988-2759 calories, not including second helpings.⁸ Calorically, this is more than either a man or woman should eat in one day.⁹ One meal, which included fettuccini alfredo and chocolate covered raisins for dessert, had an estimated 136 grams of fat. Meals had an estimated 2324 milligrams of sodium, vastly higher than the 1500 recommended milligrams for people 51 or over. In addition to these factors, similar studies have found soup kitchen meals to be low in fiber and micronutrients (Lyes et al. 2013; Sisson and Lown 2011). Neither report, however, found meals as high in calories as those found at the Community Cafeteria.

Large portions persist at the kitchen not only because they are seen as good for the guests, but, perhaps more importantly, because they allow volunteers, staff, and donors to avoid the unwanted problem of leftovers. Like the businesses that provide food for the Community Cafeteria, no one wants to throw away or take the time to store extra food. By serving large portions, the kitchen leaves the guests with the moral issue of whether or not to throw away extra food. On the serving line, Luke calculates how large the portions need to be in order to get rid of all the food. After mentally dividing the six trays of chicken and black bean casserole among the 130 guests present, he requested each container divided into roughly twenty-one portions, telling

⁸ See Appendix B

⁹ According to the Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2010, moderately active adult females between the ages of 31-50 need an average of 2,000 calories per day; and moderately active males of the same age need between 2400-2600 calories per day. These needs decrease with age and increase with a more sedentary lifestyle (U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2010).

myself and another volunteer “to be really generous today.” Halfway through our shift, he was concerned that we had only gone through a pan and a half. We increased the portion sizes, only holding back when asked by guests. To Luke’s chagrin, the line died down before we could get through most of the food. Doing the math again, he told us: “We’re only gone through 60% of the food. We’re opening it up for seconds, and I’m going to need you both to pound it out.” We followed Luke’s instruction, serving huge section helpings to each person that came into line, and in doing so, were able to leave earlier than if we had needed to cover, label, and store these leftovers. For Luke and the volunteers, large portions meant that this food was not only good for the guests, but for the staff and volunteers serving it.

Conclusion

In order to attract volunteers and donors, soup kitchens must promote themselves as community-based organizations that do the important work of ‘saving lives.’ However, a closer look at the marketing materials and time spent with those who work here show the complicated nature of this seemingly simple vision. In this charitable organization model, the staff and volunteers determine everything, including what constitutes good food and good portioning. While the staff members may differ on their opinions of such things, the fact that they have the power to make these decisions without the influence of the guests is the most striking facet of their control. Much of this is perhaps unsurprising to anyone who has ever volunteered in a soup kitchen or other charitable organization. In the next chapter, I show how this model is interpreted from the often-overlooked lens of the guests. By showing how authority is both enacted and recognized, one sees the complicated nature of gift giving that the vision of the soup kitchen often veils.

CHAPTER TWO

‘MORE BLESSED TO GIVE THAN TO RECEIVE’: Power Dynamics at the Soup Kitchen

As a soup kitchen guest, you will spend roughly sixty minutes in the dining room; more if you get here a little early, less if you’re running late. Of these limited minutes, most are spent waiting: to see the menu, for your table to be called, in line for food. On this particular day, your table (number three) has randomly been chosen as the fifth to get in line after what feels like a long fifteen minutes. After the go-ahead from the social worker, you join the end of the line, waiting as it slowly inches along the wall, past the bathrooms, near the water dispensers, and finally to the serving station. The volunteer grabs an empty plate, says hello, and begins asking:

Volunteer 1: Salad?

You: Yes please.

Volunteer 1: Croutons?

You: Sure.

Volunteer 1: Dressing?

You: Just a little please.

Volunteer 2: Bread? And butter?

You: With butter. Can I have two packets?

Volunteer 2: No, sorry, only one.

Volunteer 3: Chicken and rice casserole or spaghetti?

You: The spaghetti.

Volunteer 4: And you can have one treat and one fruit.

You: Ok, thanks.

The whole interaction takes less than forty-five seconds. You struggle to make appropriate choices, as much of this food is obscured from your view. Craning your neck, you’re able to see under the large metal counter just long enough to decide between the chicken or spaghetti. You glance up to answer the volunteer’s question and notice the busyness behind her. There are volunteers plating desserts, washing dishes, and cleaning the floor. Everyone has a purpose, just

as this volunteer's purpose is to serve you. She gives you a large helping of spaghetti; much more than you might have plated had you been able to use the serving spoon. You wish that you could have more butter, but resign yourself to the fact that this is the healthier option anyway. Remembering the rule regarding napkins, you take just one in your left hand. With your right, you prepare to accept the plate of food. Your plate is passed from volunteer to volunteer, handled by four people until you are finally able to take hold of it.

Soup kitchen guests have a perspective of the soup kitchen that most volunteers, staff, and donors have never experienced. Through their lens, we see the many ways in which volunteers and staff control the dining room at multiple levels, extending from interactions with the staff and with one another, to the guests' relation to food. It is here, cut off from the larger society and under the surveillance of staff that this group is controlled in ways not unlike those of the total institution (Goffman 1961).

Akin to Goffman's first categorization of institutions, this is a place to care for those with some incapability, in this case, of feeding and housing themselves. For many, this is more than a soup kitchen, as they live in the attached homeless shelter, socialize in the common areas on floor two, meet with their social workers, and even see the doctor. It is here that they are constantly measured, via drugs tests and breathalyzers, and regimentally scheduled, with strict feeding times and curfews. Like in total institutions, the guests and those who work and volunteer here form two distinct social worlds where the passage of information between the two is severely limited. While soup kitchen guests are not completely cut off from the outside world like prison inmates or patients of mental institutions, the total institution frame is helpful for thinking about the many ways that guests are controlled in this institution. Through this control, guests are demoralized social 'others' inferior to the volunteers and staff who serve them.

Because the guests are demeaned in this way, the hierarchical giving characteristic of the soup kitchen can flourish (Graeber 2011).

Rules

As a food establishment, the Community Cafeteria is under many mandates issued by the health department. Most rules regarding food preparation apply only the volunteers and staff doing these tasks. These are posted for all to see through the kitchen. Other rules, none of which are posted, are also applicable to guests as they enter the serving line. One afternoon, Jane and Luke were both fulfilling their kitchen positions as they enforced the following unwritten rule: *Once a guest touches something, they must either take it or it is to be thrown away.* As the volunteer monitoring the self-serve dessert and napkin station, Jane was especially aware of this regulation. Throughout her shift, five or six guests touched a bag of cookies only to decide that they preferred cantaloupe. “You have to take it!” Jane would repeat to each guest as they put the bag of cookies back on the serving line. After seeing one incident too many, Luke, one of the kitchen coordinators, intervened, saying, “The health code mandates that you take what you touch. You have to take it.” The guest tilted her head and lifted her eyebrows, clearly miffed by his words. “But there’s a plastic wrapping on it,” she said. Luke explained that it didn’t matter. “You can give it to someone else” he told her. Dissatisfied with this answer, the guest put the bag on her tray as she noticeably restrained herself from saying anything else to Luke. While this guest had yet to internalize the rules, the close observation and control of Luke and Jane marked the first part in this disciplining process.

It was not uncommon for volunteers like Jane to take it upon themselves to both enforce rules and create their own; for, like in the total institution, any member of the staff can regulate

any member of the inmate class (Goffman 1961). Luke's intervention may have given Jane the confidence to do both of these things. Midway through the lunch, an older gentleman stopped at the dessert station. Due to his poor motor function, the man had difficulty taking only one napkin from the stack. As he struggled, Jane said "Only one napkin!" repeating a rule that I was unaware of. The man looked at her and attempted to put all but one napkin back on the pile. "You have to take it now!" Jane told him in reference to the rule about taking what one touches. Confused, the man started to pick up the napkins he had just placed down. After fumbling for a few moments, he walked away with at least three or four napkins in hand. Jane looked at him in disapproval, rolled her eyes, and told me that she just didn't have patience for some people. Her negative, hostile view of the guests is not uncommon in institutions similar to the soup kitchen (Goffman 1961).

While enforcing rules aggravates volunteers like Jane, it also empowers them. Guests are embarrassed and trivialized by these regulations, meaning they have less confidence to challenge rules that they find unfair. Many have to deal with the number of items a guest can take: *only one napkin, only one dessert, only one pat of butter, only one cream cheese packet*. Vivian, a relatively new Community Cafeteria guest, remembers a time when a volunteer enforced the latter. As a vegetarian, Vivian tries to get as much protein as possible from non-meat sources; however, the CC can't make exceptions for her or anyone else. She told me:

I was refused a second cream cheese. It's just weird, like you can have two pies or two cookies but I can't have a second cream cheese to have more protein with my apple. So I didn't like how that made me feel...but I'm sure it's just a supply thing.

While Vivian didn't explicitly say how she felt, her body language was clear: she lowered her head and broke eye contact with me as her speech trailed off. I read her reaction as a mix of

embarrassment and sadness. Despite feeling this way, she understood the volunteers as having a valid reason for this rule making.

Vivian: I'm sure it's not like they were trying to be rude, it's just that they only had so many and they knew how many people they had to serve and they wanted to be able to at least offer everyone one, that would be my guess.

As Vivian acknowledges, the volunteers may have enforced this rule in an attempt to treat everyone fairly. However, this rule managed to do just the opposite for Vivian, as she received less protein than others because of her vegetarianism. Yet, she brushes off the trivializing effects of this rule by saying that the volunteers probably had no other choice. The rule may be justified, she says, and she would never bring it up to the staff.

Perhaps the greatest illustration of authority at the CC comes not when rules are followed, but when they are broken. As a volunteer, I have been given the authority to enforce rules like the one to which Vivian refers. Whenever guests ask for extra napkins, another pad of butter for their potato, or two mayonnaise packets instead of the usual one, the answer is a simple "no." This doesn't mean, however, that these rules are always followed, or even known, by the volunteers. During a Thursday lunch service, a man who was sitting in the dining room with a black cup of coffee came to the kitchen door. "Can I get some sugar for this?" he asked. After retrieving the sugar, I handed it to him from across the entryway between the kitchen and dining room. Within seconds, Luke appeared to quickly take the sugar out of the guest's hand. "I can't give you sugar at lunch. If I do it for you, I'll have to do it for everyone." While this man may have asked for sugar, I couldn't help but notice that in giving it to him, I was the one who had broken the rule and should have been corrected. When I tried to apologize to Luke for my mistake, he didn't explain the policy or tell me what I did wrong. Instead he ignored my error,

choosing instead to correct the guest. As a volunteer, I both had the authority to enforce rules and the ability to break them without ridicule.

In these specific instances, the control exercised by the volunteers and staff is direct and forceful. More commonly, moments of volunteer/staff control are subtle, quick interactions that can often get lost in the busyness of the kitchen. For instance, I wouldn't have noticed Jane's new rules if I hadn't been standing directly beside her during the meal. I would have missed the kitchen's policy regarding sugar if this guest hadn't asked. However, these rules are powerfully controlling because they are sporadic, and oftentimes, discreet. Volunteers and staff can surprise guests by enforcing obscure rules or making up new ones. Guests are kept "on their toes," living in chronic anxiety about breaking rules and chronic worry about the consequences (Goffman 1961). The suspense is further heightened because of the variability of people working at the kitchen. Different rules are enforced and ignored depending on who is working. This is most clearly seen in the rule regarding the meal tickets — a rule that the guests, and not the volunteers, taught me.

During the lunch service on July 19, 2013, I was in line in front of Klaus, a middle-aged man and frequent Community Cafeteria patron. When we got up to the counter, I immediately put my meal ticket in the ticket basket. Klaus corrected me saying, "You have to wait until the volunteer asks." He was right—there was a sign on the bucket directing guests to wait. As a volunteer myself, I had never done this. After asking Alice about it, I learned that this rule was made so that the Community Cafeteria could count their patrons. Perhaps more importantly, the ticket system also ensures that guests follow the correct procedure of waiting at a table and receiving a ticket from the social worker. While this rule seems important, the volunteer who was serving never questioned me, despite not seeing me put a ticket in the basket. Instead, it was

Klaus, a guest, who wanted to make sure that I was following this rule. By referring to it, Klaus showed me that the rule applied to me while I was under the guests' surveillance. This interaction also illustrated how Klaus had internalized the rules to the point of policing himself and others.

Finally, guests are highly critical of these rules, not because they always find them irrelevant, but because the rules do not apply to the staff and volunteers. While guests may justify some rules, such as those regarding how much of a given item one can have, they cannot excuse the preferential treatment of the workers. For instance, Shirley remembers a time when the shelter received a donation of gourmet sandwiches. Since they were not individually wrapped, health code barred the staff from distributing them to the guests. In contrast, there was no restriction against the staff eating them. In retelling this story, Shirley was most upset that she wasn't allowed to eat when the staff ate. Vivian was similarly vocal regarding these inconsistent rules, especially as they relate to food consumption. During this part of our interview, Vivian refers to the rule that bars shelter residents from eating on the second floor. While this rule is in place for the residents, the same isn't true for the staff.

Vivian: Food is such a big quality of life issue, and there needs to be a reason that makes sense. Like for example, the staff up on the second floor is eating frickin' orange chicken from the Chinese restaurant and I'm starving and I don't want her orange chicken...and I understand she was eating it there because there was no one to cover her break, so of course she deserves to eat, she's here for eight plus hours I agree she deserves to eat, but so do I. And if it's not okay...how come it's okay for her? Because I got mashed corn at dinner? No! You know, No. That's really the deal that there needs to be some equality or some explanation with regard to that matter, that particular matter.

Through the application of rules like this one, the staff and volunteers not only control what the guests can and cannot do, but they also express their superior position. Yet, as Vivian and Shirley demonstrate, guests are aware and highly critical of their actions. As will be shown in

Chapter Three, it is this resistance that allows guests to assert their worth, especially when rules like this attempt to undermine it.

Inexplicit Control

Unlike these strict rules, there are many ironies, contradictions, misunderstandings, and subtle conflicts in how the shelter staff enforces their control of the dining room. Nevertheless, their goal remains to control how guests interact with one another, with staff, and even with the food itself. The staff can control how guests relate to one another through their direction of the moment of silence. This moment, placed before the meal, is a time for guests to reflect silently together. While there is no instruction, the moment is reflective of a prayer of thanksgiving. Guests could easily have personal moments of silence, however, the staff has decided that there is something to be gained about experiencing this together.

One June afternoon, Robin, the social worker in charge of the dining room, decided to change the normal order of things. This caused some dismay amongst my table companions. I was sitting next to Klaus, a man who had recently arrived back in Ann Arbor after a few years in Europe. As we waited for Robin to begin the meal service, we chatted about some of his experiences in Germany and the difficulties he had faced upon his arrival in the U.S. Before we knew it, the social worker was dismissing people to get into line. Klaus stopped our conversation to ask the social worker why she had skipped the moment of silence. She responded, “Oh the moment of silence? I always skip that.” Klaus did not hesitate to show his discontent through his facial expression as the social worker continued to walk around the dining room. Disappointed by the lack of a communal silent moment, Klaus made sure to have his own emphatic moment before eating his meal, which other guests, and perhaps the social worker, noticed. In denying

the guests this moment, the social worker asserted her authority to control relations in the dining room.

This situation suggests some of the ambiguities at work in the organization of power relations within the dining room, ambiguities that still favor the social workers. On the one hand, guests like Klaus do not hesitate to hold the social workers accountable to the set of rules that they have set up. Guests often take pride and pleasure in knowledge of the rules and in their ability to reveal the workers' ignorance or slippages. They might have also learned to identify with the routine that the rules have set out for them, and therefore feel a sense of loss when this routine is disrupted. At the same time, however, the social workers can easily brush off criticisms and bend the rules as they see fit and without any explanation. Furthermore, even when the guests disapprove of a certain arrangement, they must refer back to the established set of rules and frame their complaints within the language of these rules. The guests' ability to reverse power relations lasts for a fleeting moment, and cannot amount to much more than a brief display of the volunteer and staff's failings.

Ironically, the rules enacted to promote fairness between guests highlight the power differences between the shelter staff and guests. For instance, the method used to decide the order in which tables are called is supposed to limit the shelter staff's control over the guest. However, the guests interpret it differently. After the moment of silence, the "disabled" are called up to eat. As soon as their line begins to die down, the social worker pulls a slip of paper from a white envelope, announces the number on the paper, and watches the guests seated at that table join the line. The randomness is supposed to reduce the social worker's power to determine who eats when. Yet, very often, guests still view the social worker to be in control of the events in the dining room. During a lunch in June, I happened to sit down at the table that was called

last. After the majority of tables had been dismissed, Klaus looked at the social worker and asked something to the effect of, “Our turn yet?” While she initially ignored him, she eventually said, “I swear, it’s random!” For Klaus and others sitting at my table, the randomness of the table selection didn’t take away from the social worker’s control of this space. They still looked to her because she had the power to decide when guests would get in line.

Humor in the dining room is another situation that reveals how the staff regulates social interactions and reproduces hierarchy in unexpected ways. For instance, one of the social workers used the word “cripples” to announce that all of the disabled individuals could now get in line. While a few guests laughed, others saw this as a clear violation of the posted CC rule to “be respectful.” One of my tablemates said that someone was bound to report slander and have the place shut down for the repeated use of this term. Another woman said that she had spoken with the shelter staff about the use of this term, but was dismayed that nothing had come of this conversation. While the social worker may have seen her comment as a joke, many guests refused to participate in this supposedly humorous moment because of her position of authority. Humor here was not a way of creating solidarity by highlighting the failings and vulnerabilities of a powerful figure; rather, it was an attack on a group that was already vulnerable. The guests might have also disliked the fact that the joker was trying to create solidarity among the “abled” by spoofing the “disabled,” thereby pretending that the guest/social worker hierarchy could be obliterated through humor.

The power of humor often resides in its ambiguities. However, in a politically charged territory, such as the soup kitchen, the guest/staff dichotomy often inflects the guests’ interpretations of the social workers’ jokes. Reflective of the social workers’ privilege is the fact that they are often (and are allowed to be) oblivious to how important this particular power

relation is to the guests' perception of their interactions at the shelter. The social workers have the ability to simply not be self-conscious about their position of authority. While their jokes are not always interpreted negatively, they still reflect the power they hold in this space. For instance, one of the social workers was able to assert her authority while teasing Jo, a shelter resident and frequent meal guest, in a playful manner. An Ohio State fan, Jo was often covered from head to toe in Buckeye gear. After announcing that everyone had to leave the dining room in six minutes, the social worker looked at Jo's outfit, saying "But for you, five." The social worker might have felt that she was erasing the power differentials between herself and Jo by engaging with Jo's passion for the Ohio State team, but the joke still reflected her position of power.

The dining room staff also exercises their power over the guests by controlling their relationship with the food itself. While these social workers have no influence on how the food is prepared or served, they still control what guests do with this food once in their hands. For instance, guests are explicitly told that they cannot take prepared dishes, like casseroles and salads, out of the dining room. For people like Shirley who worked through lunch, this was a great inconvenience, as she would like to be able to save food in Tupperware. In contrast, the rules regarding packaged food were certainly less clear. Nobody seemed to know what guests were supposed to do with bagged crackers, desserts, or fruit in cellophane wrappers. Not wanting to ask and be denied, most took these goods anyway. They sit with this ambiguity, never knowing whether or not a social worker will enforce an unknown rule regarding which packaged goods they can take. Thus, social workers enforce their power by telling guests exactly what they can do with some foods and by keeping other food rules uncertain.

While the shelter staff has authority to dictate such things as when guests can get into line or how long they can stay in the dining room, the Community Cafeteria staff and volunteers have authority over the CC menu. Since the menu is limited to the ingredients either donated or purchased, it is rather predictable. For instance, grocery stores always donate chicken and baked goods while the food bank purchases milk, a variety of vegetables, and grapes. Knowing this in advance, Alice is able to plan rough menus for the upcoming weeks that she keeps prominently displayed in the kitchen for all the volunteers to see. From this rough menu, Alice, Luke, and a few regular volunteers create the daily menu early in the morning.

While the menu is well known in the kitchen, the same cannot be said for the dining room. Just as inmates are excluded from knowledge regarding their fate in a total institution (Goffman 1961), guests are often denied the knowledge of what they will be eating until moments before being served. About ten minutes before the meal service begins, volunteers put a vague menu with the meal options in the dining room. During one Friday in July, volunteers were particularly late in doing this. While everyone knew that the kitchen would serve the “Fabulous Friday Leftovers” of reheated, combined, and slightly altered dishes from the week, this didn’t satisfy the guests’ curiosity. Anxious, guests turned to me, asking, “Do they let you know what we’re eating?” While I may have been a soup kitchen guest, others still recognized me as an insider-anthropologist occupying a liminal space between their community and that of the volunteers. Although I didn’t have an answer, however, guests suggested that I should be the one to find out. Sara directed her comment only at me, saying, “We should let them know that we want to see the menu.” Sara wants the volunteers to put the menu out sooner, however she and others don’t want to “bite the hand that feeds them” or be “kicked out of the shelter for complaining too much.” In her desire to see the menu, Stephanie uses mild language even to me,

saying “It’d be nice if they could possibly plan out a menu for the week and kind of let us know what we’ll be having,” in an effort to not come across as too forceful. Thus, instead of pointing out their concern to their superiors, guests would rather wait for the menu and deal with the discomfort it produces.

While access to the menu may seem like a trivial concern, guests view their inability to see the menu as reflective of their lack of control over their lives. “It’s really sad when our whole lives are controlled by someone else,” Stephanie said. Putting the menu out earlier, she says, would empower her to make decisions about whether or not she wanted to eat here, as even the menu’s vague descriptions would be beneficial to see. Yet, in not knowing what the menu will be and feeling as if they can’t say anything to the volunteers, the guests are made to feel even more inferior to the volunteers and staff.

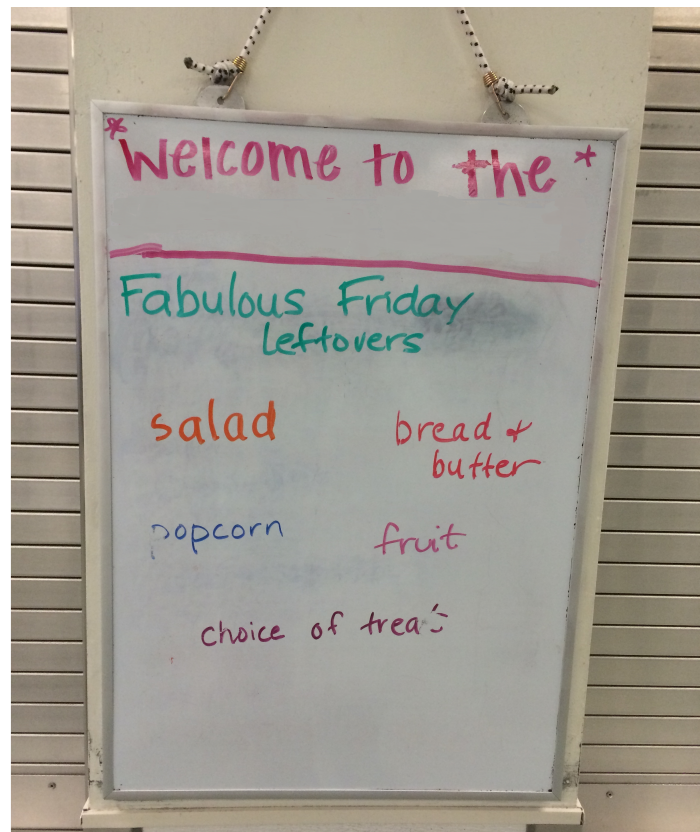


Figure 2: The Community Cafeteria lunch menu from January 10th, 2014. The metal screens behind the menu are opened during mealtime. The name of the soup kitchen has been deleted for anonymity.

In addition to controlling who sees the menu, the kitchen staff and volunteers control the portion sizes of all the dishes. On one summer day, Raven came back to our table but failed to sit down as quickly as the rest of us, clearly agitated. She held her plate of food in one hand, dangerously angling it toward the table. Her meal looked nothing like mine. Instead of the coleslaw, pulled beef, noodles and bread sufficiently covering my plate, there was a pile of meat filling each inch of her ceramic dish. She was in disbelief that someone would serve her a plate of meat large enough for five people, especially since she didn't ask for it. It was true that she didn't want the other options, but that didn't mean she wanted multiple cups of meat. "They just kept putting on more and more." She mimicked the heavy-handedness of the volunteers as she used an imaginary serving spoon to glob more meat onto her plate. "*Here, I feel sorry for you,*" she voiced. After a minute of mimicry, she switched back to her own persona, and asked of the volunteer who wasn't there, "What, is something wrong with your arm?" Raven was in disgust of the meat on her plate and the actions of the volunteer who served her. She didn't want to be treated as someone who was poor and hungry, yet the large portion size was seen as a reference to both. Like Raven, many guests interpret the serving of large portions as a sign of the volunteers' pity, control, and both unintentional and perhaps intentional endangerment.

Volunteers and staff exercise control over guests by serving them large portions even when they ask for less. Unable to touch their plate throughout the serving process, guests can only describe 'how much' of a given item they would like and hope that the volunteer correctly interprets their request. As Sara said,

I made myself too full again. It always happens, I ask for one hot dog and they give me two. I ask for a little bit of coleslaw they give me a whole big thing. Same thing with the salads. They're just going to give me what they want to give me. And then they get mad when I throw it in the garbage.

Sara describes the volunteers as authoritarian, serving how ever much they want despite her wishes. In contrast, Alice believes that guests can control the portion sizes simply by asking for less food. Most don't, she said, because they lack the self-control to say "no" to what they see in front of them. "Folks really have to be disciplined enough, which is tough, to say that they only want a little bit," Alice said. Ironically, Alice puts the responsibility for smaller portions on the guests despite their lack of power or influence in this space. Yet even those who are "disciplined enough" to ask for smaller portions are often denied this request by those who serve them. This isn't to say that volunteers vindictively go against their wishes. To the volunteers, large portions are a way of showing generosity, care, and attentiveness to the needs of the "hardcore." Yet, in ignoring the guests' requests for less food than they desire, volunteers act on the position of power granted to them by this charitable model.

Guests are not only insulted when their requests are ignored, but also fear the physical consequences of the large amount of food they are repeatedly served. As studies have shown, large portions lead people to consume more food than they would have otherwise, even if this food is disliked (Wansink 2005). While Sara "made herself too full," she knows that this wouldn't have happened had the volunteers listened to her request for less food. Sara blames these large portions as contributing to a twenty pound weight gain in the last three months. Others found it difficult to limit their intake of saturated fat when the volunteers slathered high calorie dressings over what would be a healthy salad. In addition to weight gain, guests feared the physical consequences of "getting use to" these large portions. As Colette said, she would never be able to eat this much once she was buying her own groceries on a modest budget. She was worried that she would struggle to feel full on what she could afford, as she saw this soup kitchen food as "making [her] stomach increase."

While Colette admitted that the volunteers might not realize this harmful effect, others were more critical, as some described the volunteers as purposefully endangering the bodies of the guests they served. After receiving two pieces of processed American cheese on each of his pork sandwiches, Ronald said, “what are they trying to do, kill me? And stuff my arteries?” Likewise, Stephanie suggested that the large muffins and acidic orange juice reflected the volunteers’ desire to “to fatten us up and burn holes in our stomachs.” While their accusations are delivered with a purposeful air of drama, Ronald and Stephanie suggest that the volunteers not only control how much food is served, but through this food, control the bodies of the guests, much like the bodily control exerted in the total institution (Goffman 1961).

From the kitchen perspective, large portions seem to give guests more options. Bryn, the volunteer coordinator, said that she would rather the volunteers “give more [food] than [the guests] need and allow [the guests] to make that choice rather than making it for them.” In serving large portions, the volunteers see themselves as giving guests three different choices: eat all the food, take it for later, or throw it away. As already discussed, the first option worries guests, as most are concerned about their weight, cholesterol, and blood sugar. Secondly, rules against taking prepared foods like casseroles and meat out of the dining room limit what guests can take with them. While guests can always throw away what they don’t eat, this often makes people uncomfortable as many described excessive food waste as one of the CC’s biggest problems. Thus, while the volunteers may think that they’re giving guests more options by serving large portions, guests are not satisfied with them. Instead, guests want the volunteers and staff to limit the portion size, especially when they ask.

Importantly, guests view the volunteers and staff as attempting to control not only how the food is prepared, but how it is received by those who consume it. According to the guests, the

volunteers want them to enjoy this food, despite never having tasted it themselves. Shirley and Mike would sometimes mimic the volunteers as they made their way back to the cafeteria table. Putting his tray down, Mike would say, “And you will like it!” in regards to the food he was about to eat. Shirley would then make a comment about the old meat in the spaghetti or the stale bread, only to follow it by repeating Mike’s phrase. As Shirley and Mike show, the volunteer’s influence extends beyond the meal line and to the cafeteria tables where this food is consumed. Guests see the volunteers as not only telling them what and how much they can eat, but also what they should think about this food.

Not all volunteers express their authority in the same way. While there are some like Jane who directly dictate what guests are allowed to do, others showcase their authority by granting guests the power to make minute decisions. Like a parent who lets their child eat ice cream, volunteers and staff are still in control as they decide when and under what circumstances the guests’ input matters. For instance, some volunteers ask guests where they would like certain foods on their plate. Regarding the salad, a volunteer may ask a guest whether they want eggs, dressing, almonds, or croutons either on their salad greens or on the side. At the dessert station, Alice asks guests whether they want their ice cream now or would rather return later to prevent melting. Similarly, the kitchen coordinators provide options for those with special diets; they give Ensure drinks to diabetics, separate salad ingredients for those with allergies, and provide vegetarian meals like peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. By providing these options, volunteers make guests feel like ‘customers’ in this space.

Sean: I don’t feel like a beggar here...They feed you very well here and they make you feel like you’re someone...the volunteers, staff, everyone, they make you feel like a paying customer. Poverty is a thing, you can’t afford to take care of yourself. In Houston, you don’t feel like a person, here you’re like a paying customer.

By relinquishing some of their strict control over this food, volunteers make guests feel like ‘normal’ people engaging in the service based economy (Moreton 2009). However, it is still up to the volunteers and staff to decide when they are going to listen to the guests and when they are going to ignore their wishes. In deciding when and where to do this, they show they authority to control all aspects of the guests’ meal experience.

At the same time, the volunteers and staff are under the authority of the health department. There are certain regulations, therefore, that they cannot change even if they desired to do so. For instance, if a health inspector were to see a guest touch food and then place it back on the serving station, the soup kitchen would face serious consequences. This fear of inspection is constantly on Alice’s mind, as she will often mention rules in reference to “what the health code says.” The guests, however, do not see this distant authority figure. Instead, they interpret the strict rules of the kitchen staff and volunteers as a result of their desire to control every aspect of their meal experience.

In addition, the volunteers and staff face many limitations within this charitable model that make it difficult to allow guests to choose what they would like to eat. As a severe celiac patient, homeless shelter resident, and daily soup kitchen guest, Edith has many needs that the staff tries, and often fails, to meet. In her attempts to prepare appropriate dishes for Edith, Alice uses only ingredients from the special ‘Edith List’ prominently displayed in her office. Alice cares deeply about Edith’s needs and feels bad that she can’t do more.

Alice: And it just hurts my heart, it’s just like oh my God, trying to find something for Edith to eat. That’s her list right there- no meat or chicken, she can’t have fish. I mean look at that list that’s all the stuff she can eat, it’s like we don’t have that or that.

Alice goes beyond her role of kitchen coordinator by using this list of approved ingredients to make Edith a special breakfast, lunch, and dinner. She wants to help Edith in the best way she

knows how, however, she is frustrated and overwhelmed with the task of feeding someone with such specific needs.

Alice: I gave her cauliflower, and its on her list, and I asked her this morning, 'how'd you like the cauliflower', and she's like 'I don't know it really hurt my stomach'...And then you give her something she can eat and she goes 'Oh I can't eat the peel and it makes me this way and that way,' and I'm like 'ahh I don't know what to do!'

In these repeated failings, Alice has reached a breaking point. She says, exasperatedly:

So I told her counselor, I don't know if this is the place for her to be, we are not equipped, that is so special...She is really at the opposite end of the spectrum. I think vegetarian people make it with the salad and the vegetables and bread. We're just not equipped to do a lot of that specialty diet stuff.

As Alice points out, the staff is willing to go above and beyond to care for their clients; however, there are limits in the ingredients they can purchase and the time they can spend to accommodate someone like Edith. It's easy to make peanut butter and jelly sandwiches to satisfy vegetarians; it's a lot harder to cook for a celiac guest. Up until now, Alice has allowed Edith to dictate her menu; however, Alice has neither the resources nor the energy to continue to comply with Edith's needs. Consequently, Alice decides to stop serving Edith not because she doesn't want Edith to eat, but because of the limitations inherent in this charitable model. These limitations that control the staff and volunteers influence the control they have over the guests.

Prioritizing Volunteers

Until now, I have referred to volunteers and staff as one somewhat homogenous group that exercises control in various ways. However, the distinct roles of these different people create interesting hierarchies on the kitchen side of the Community Cafeteria. While the staff holds an obvious authority as paid employees of Great Harvest, their priority is to submit to the needs of the volunteers. Without a financial incentive to work here, the volunteers must have fun, busy,

and meaningful experiences in order for them to return. In this way, the volunteers are treated as superior to the staff; they are constantly praised for their good work and never corrected for their mistakes. While the volunteer and staff positions complicate power relations in the kitchen, they still make sure that control resides in those who give food as opposed to those who receive it.

As the kitchen coordinators, one might assume that Alice and Luke hold superior positions over the one paid CC intern and the roughly five to eight volunteers working each meal shift. However, these coordinators are required by this charitable model to treat the volunteers as if their voluntary work is more valued than their own paid labor. Alice does this by constantly thanking her volunteers or telling them that they're "just amazing people" as they prepare to leave. Alice always emphasizes this 'thank you,' especially when volunteers like myself offer to help in unexpected or spontaneous ways. One day, I had been expecting to eat at the shelter and interview guests. My plans changed, however, as soon as I saw the shortage of volunteers. After helping out with the serving shift, Alice expressed her gratitude by clapping for me. Already embarrassed by the attention, my face turned an even deeper red as the other volunteers joined in. While I felt uncomfortable accepting praise from others who had done similar tasks, I also recognized how this expression of gratitude was an important part of Alice's job.

This need to thank the volunteers and reinforce their position of moral worth extends to the roles of the Great Harvest staff. Outreach coordinators make it their job to thank volunteers via phone call, email, and thank you cards. As the previously mentioned Valentine's Day card illustrates, volunteers are often told thanks "on behalf of our hungry neighbors." Volunteers respond well to this appreciation. As Jim told me, this makes the kitchen feel "personable" and his work valued, both of which encourage him to return.

In addition to repeatedly thanking volunteers, the staff must take great care to never offend them. For instance, as a volunteer hastily shelled hard boiled eggs, Alice told him, “We’re going to have to be a little bit more careful,” instead of blatantly pointing out that he was doing this job incorrectly. The Community Cafeteria interns are told to mimic this approach and subtly correct volunteers when they load the dishwasher incorrectly or use the wrong cutting boards. While Jayden, one of two interns, has many ideas about ways to improve the food, he doesn’t want to insult the volunteers’ cooking with his suggestions. By limiting what the staff and interns can say to them, the volunteers subvert standard hierarchies.

Providing enjoyable experiences is another way that the kitchen staff strives to please the volunteers and thus prioritizes their needs over those of the staff or even the guests. Bryn, the volunteer coordinator, knows that if volunteers don’t have fun, they won’t come back. In order to make the often-difficult job of cooking, serving, and cleaning more enjoyable, the kitchen always has music playing while the volunteers work. Volunteers are often assigned positions where they can work together, or at least in close proximity to one another so as to have someone to talk to. As Bryn told me, it’s important to have fun moments at the end of the volunteer shift so that the volunteers leave satisfied. “For volunteering, it’s not about the first impression, it’s about the last impression,” she told me, as positive last impressions encourage volunteers to sign up for more shifts.

In contrast, boredom or feelings of uselessness can taint the entire volunteer experience. Thus, both the kitchen and volunteer coordinators make volunteer busyness a priority. As Terri, a frequent volunteer commented,

Terri: It’s fun volunteering for a place that has something for you to do, so that you’re not sitting around for a half hour figuring out what someone might want you to do, but you come in, you do something, and on you go, and that’s very satisfying.

The volunteer coordinator was aware of this sentiment. Bryn said, “In the same way that we show respect for the people we serve, we always want our volunteers to be busy, we don’t want them to commit a minute that isn’t utilized effectively.” At the Community Cafeteria, this is rarely difficult, as feeding 100 plus people is a hectic task. However, on the occasions when volunteers are plentiful, recipes are easy, or dishes take a less than expected amount of time to cook, the kitchen coordinators give their volunteers back-up tasks to keep them occupied. This was often the case during the Friday lunch shift, as the “Fabulous Friday leftovers” took little time to reheat. During the down time, Alice would often have volunteers plate pastries for Saturday’s breakfast or sweep hard to reach places on the kitchen floor. By asking volunteers to do these little tasks, the staff keeps them busy, and as Terri shows, more satisfied with the overall volunteer experience.

While waiting in the dining room is acceptable for guests, the same cannot be said for the volunteers. If a volunteer stands idle for even one minute, Alice and Luke will quickly find something for them to do. If everyone is waiting for the meal to start, Luke makes sure to always engage with the new volunteers before they have time to become bored. When Amanda, a new volunteer, finished her task, she didn’t wait for more than thirty seconds before Luke approached her saying, “Tell me about yourself. What do you do for fun?” He continued asking her questions to fill the time before the meal service started. This hypersensitivity to appeasing the volunteers is exhausting, and as Bryn says, emotional for everyone on staff. However, despite the difficulties of keeping volunteers occupied, the staff must prioritize the volunteer experience in order to staff the kitchen. The same is not true for the guests, as they do nothing but wait: for their meal, while in line, or to give volunteers their dirty dishes. Their waiting is not a concern of the staff, however, as their financial situation ensures that many will return to the kitchen.

The incessant need to occupy the volunteers comes at a price. As Bryn told me, “More volunteers means more work, as funny as that sounds,” and more work means more stress. As the overseer of the food bank volunteer shifts, Bryn often has trouble finding enough work for large groups of volunteers to do. When asked to describe these situations, she said:

It’s very stressful. And it’s stressful on the rest of the staff too because [the staff’s] saying ‘what needs work, what needs work?’ And that usually only happens when we’re short on food, and so it’s stressful on us because not only do we need food to meet our agency needs, but now we’re being pressured to have food for the volunteers that are signed up...so emotions run high here.

The emotions that Bryn describes include anxiety over finding enough work for volunteers as well as guilt when they can’t meet volunteer expectations of having a productive, busy volunteer shift. As Bryn said, “It is the worst feeling to have people here and not have work for them.”

As I continued to volunteer at the Community Cafeteria, my desire to keep volunteers happy and occupied mirrored that of Bryn. I found myself worrying about Trisha, the teenage volunteer who was here for the first time. Would she think that this was a waste of time? Would she perceive the CC as unorganized or useless? I tried to engage her as we waited, asking her about her high school and extracurricular involvement. I even told her how unusual it was for us to have downtime here. For the first time I could empathize with the Great Harvest staff in their efforts to please volunteers. They, like me, want to protect the image of an organization that they care so much about. Since the mission of this organization relies on volunteers, this image is particularly important for its success. They feel tremendous pressure to keep the volunteers busy and happy to ensure that they will return.

While the volunteer experience is a priority for the staff, the volunteers don’t need to show this same level of care for the staff. Volunteers will frequently reschedule their shift or

show up late without recognizing the consequences for those who work here. The volunteer coordinator described this problem:

Bryn: It's part of our culture, people who sign up I don't think understand they're making a commitment we're depending on. And it's that factor of realization that that commitment is something we thrive upon. And so if they make the action of signing up and then don't attend, that's when it hurts, when we think they're coming and they don't. When we're waiting on someone, that's when it's damaging.

With no lost pay for missing a shift, it's easy to skip one's commitment at the last minute.

Knowing that this is a possibility, the volunteer coordinator always schedules more volunteers than needed. When worst comes to worst, the staff resorts to paper plates and plastic cups to eliminate the need for two volunteer dishwashers. As Bryn describes, these unreliable volunteers make her job particularly difficult. However, the charitable model relies on this voluntary labor, which means that volunteers can often get away with their unreliability.

Like Bryn, Alice expressed the damage that unreliable volunteers can do. According to her, large groups of undedicated young people are the most problematic. While she would never express her qualms to a group of these volunteers, she told me of her apprehensions before this issue arose. It had been my friend Katie's first time volunteering, and at the end of the shift she enthusiastically told Alice about her plans to volunteer with a group of our housemates. To our surprise, Alice responded by saying, "I'm going to tell you something. You have to watch out, because I get screwed over when that happens." Instead of being excited to welcome new people, Alice was fearful that she would be let down by a group of college students, a common problem facing charities like this one.

As I soon discovered, Alice's fears were justified. When unreliable volunteers do sign up for a meal shift, they create unnecessary stress on the kitchen coordinators and other volunteers. During a Sunday meal shift in June, the kitchen coordinator, Luke, appeared slightly nervous as I

walked through the doors. As he said, we would be serving that day with a group of people from a local church. They were notoriously late and today was no exception. “Two more minutes, and then I can start panicking,” he said. After his self-imposed timer was up, Luke began explaining the situation: “I need eight to make it happen, but I’d like nine,” he said to our small group of five. I offered to call a friend to come and help out, but Luke seemed to feign confidence, saying he “had a feeling” that we would be okay. Sure enough, within a few minutes three people walked through the kitchen doors. Luke was visibly relieved but made no comment to the newcomers about the stress they had caused. Instead, he warmly welcomed them to the kitchen. As was often the case, Luke had to deal with unreliable workers while still maintaining an outward respect and gratefulness for all that they did.

In light of these experiences, it follows that the ‘regulars’ or ‘repeaters’ are those volunteers most respected by the staff at the Community Cafeteria. These volunteers serve in the kitchen multiple times per month, sometimes on the same day and time each week. They are familiar with the kitchen and can cook independently and even teach other volunteers. Alice can count on them as if they were paid employees. While she might have 300-600 volunteers a month, there are only a handful whom she calls her “rocks.”

These “rocks” have different roles at the kitchen than do new volunteers. As a regular volunteer myself, Alice would frequently have me wash dishes. The job was dirty, wet, and stressful toward the end, making it one of the least coveted positions. At the end of the shift, my clothes would be covered in food residue and sweat from the steam of the dishwasher mixed with the fast pace of the job. Yet, Alice would give me this role because I had proven myself as a dedicated volunteer. New volunteers might be turned off from this work, and then never come back, if this was their first experience. Thus, the value of the regular volunteer is not just that

they can be counted on to show up week after week, but rather that they can be given these less desirable positions. For Alice, these are the most valued people in her kitchen. However, she must ironically put the needs of the new volunteers first in the hopes that they will one day become one of her “rocks.” Thus, even among the volunteers, there is a hierarchy of whose needs are most important.

While this is a soup kitchen for the food insecure, the staff must take into account the volunteer needs often at the guests’ expense. For in keeping the volunteers occupied, the staff has no time to dedicate to talking with guests. Additionally, the schedule of the meals is determined by the volunteer availability as opposed to guest needs. For instance, the CC serves one meal at 3PM on Saturdays and Sundays because, as Bryn described, there wouldn’t be enough volunteers to cook, serve, and clean for two full meals. Similarly, guests are served only one meal on holidays, as people are less likely to volunteer when they would rather spend time with friends and family. The volunteers’ control of the kitchen hours is one of the many, often subtle ways in which the volunteers’ needs are taken into account over those of the guests.

Conclusion

The soup kitchen is a politically charged territory. As described in Chapter One, the staff and volunteers are given a position of superiority by giving to guests without requiring reciprocation. Their position is further strengthened by their use of control to strip guests of their usual affirmations, satisfactions, and defenses (Goffman 1961). Some of their authority is so inexplicit that it may go unrecognized by the volunteers and staff themselves. The staff, however, is perhaps more aware of the political nature of the kitchen, for they too must submit to the needs of the volunteers. In doing so, it is clear that the political nature of the kitchen is far

more complicated than one might at first believe. Yet, guests notice even the small details, such as a serving size that's too large, that communicate the volunteers' and staffs' control and their marginalized position. Guests are vocal about this discomfort, and as will be shown in the next chapter, strive to dissolve the hierarchy that this charitable model creates.

CHAPTER THREE

NOT FIT FOR LEFTOVERS: Challenging Their Position

Delia, a shelter resident and frequent Community Cafeteria diner, sits alone in the dining room. Relieved to see so many open seats, I make my way over to her. From her energetic greeting, I immediately know that something positive has happened in her life. Without prompting, she tells me that she has finally saved enough money to begin the search for an apartment near her job at a local university. While she was excited to have her own room, garden, and kitchen, the best part of moving out of the shelter was the prospect of having her daughter over for dinner and babysitting her grandchildren in the summers. Finally, she would get to see them again. Although all of her family lives in the same town as the soup kitchen, she hasn't told them where she has been living and eating for the past few months. When she would see her daughter, Delia would ask her to meet multiple blocks away from the shelter to hide where she had been. If they knew, they would insist that she move in with them. But, as Delia said, "I'm a grown woman." One day, things will be different, she tells me. She'll even bring her grandchildren to the soup kitchen and explain how she became homeless, what it was like eating and living here, and how she got out of this situation. She'll tell them that the stereotypes about the homeless are not true; even someone who eats at a soup kitchen can be a moral, determined, and hardworking person. While this time will come, Delia needs to wait. As she says, "I'll tell them when I have a happy ending."

In Chapter Two, I described how the hierarchy inherent in charitable giving controls and demeans the guests it is supposed to help. In this chapter, I show how guests are highly vocal and

use political language to comment on their status and marginalization. Aware of their position, guests challenge the hierarchy present by degrading others and attempting to volunteer themselves. Secondly, guests want to volunteer in order to change their position as someone who simply takes from the soup kitchen. Yet the staff and volunteers resist the guests' attempts to alter this hierarchical model by restricting them from serving at the kitchen in any way. In the face of this resistance, guests find unexpected and spontaneous forms of expression that question their interpellation (Althusser 1969) as food insecure or homeless. Through these expressions, they redefine the Community Cafeteria as something other than a controlled space determined by the guest/volunteer hierarchy.

Awareness

“So, are you eating with the peasants today?” Roy asked as I entered the dining room. Roy, like so many others, was aware of his status as ‘peasant,’ ‘poor person,’ and ‘homeless’ for eating at the Community Cafeteria. Some of these labels were even more descriptive, as guests knew that they were seen as ‘dirty,’ ‘lazy,’ and ‘sucking off the system’ by many food-secure individuals. In addition to being deeply discrediting, the stigma soup kitchen guests face leads to discrimination, an ideology of inferiority, and rationalization for these differences (Goffman 1963). Ronald describes how passersby on the street discriminate and view him as inferior:

Ronald: I’ve seen people look at me when I come out of here, ‘Oh that’s a nice young man he’s probably about to get drunk.’ That’s the way they look at you. And it’s never that. I look at them and laugh. Because until you get to know people, you will never understand what a person goes through until you’ve been there yourself.

Like Delia, Ronald is a “discredited person facing an unaccepting world” (Goffman 1963) discriminated against because of his soup kitchen guest status. When I asked him how he knows that people are unaccepting, he said:

You can pretty much tell because they kind of cut their eyes. And if you're walking and you get a little too close, they skip on over a little bit, like you stink or something. No, I take a bath every night. I'm just as normal as you are. I'm not a bum because I want to be. I chose to be here to get my life straight, not to satisfy you. So what you think about me really doesn't matter to me.

While Ronald may deny it, he seems both aware and bothered by the opinions of people in his community. He notices the small details as they shift their eyes or avoid walking by too closely. He's upset that others see him as abnormal according to middle class standards of cleanliness, and that they would rationalize his position by saying that he chose this life. In order to disprove this stereotype, Ronald discusses not only his bathing habits but also his choice to eat at the CC and live at the shelter, thereby showing his unwillingness to accept this degraded position.

Guests also feel stigmatized for their status as a soup kitchen guest by the volunteers who serve them. For instance, volunteers have communicated that Vivian doesn't have the right or perhaps the ability to make appropriate choices about her diet.

Vivian: One day I was kind of frowned up, [the volunteer] was kind of looking at me. Actually, after I said I was a vegetarian that one particular person rolled her eyes. But whatever, she doesn't know me, she doesn't know how important that is to some people. It's like rolling your eyes if you say you're Jewish or Catholic. It's just not something you do to someone. You just keep it to yourself if you think it's unimportant or whatever.

Vivian not only recognizes that this volunteer judged her (both before and after knowing about her vegetarianism) but also vocalizes her disapproval. While she may be eating at a soup kitchen, Vivian asserts her own right to believe and eat whatever it is that she wants. She is critical of volunteers and staff members who would think otherwise just because of the situation she is in.

Guests seem most aware of their stigmatized situation when they are served by someone they know. This point of "mixed contact" (Goffman 1963) between the normal and stigmatized was most uncomfortable when I took on the volunteer role myself. While friendly and welcoming when we ate together, guests became quiet and disengaged as soon as I put on my

apron, hat, and Great Harvest nametag. Instead of an enthusiastic greeting and hug followed by stories of their children or updates on their job situation, guests offered a quick “hi” before cutting off all eye contact. At first, I didn’t recognize their discomfort and was taken aback by their cold reactions. It was even more surprising, for I had seen how guests desired to be in relationship with the volunteers and reduce hierarchical divisions between their two communities. However, with me things were different. Guests seemed particularly fearful of my judgment, for I knew their stories and reasons for utilizing the soup kitchen. My negative impressions would hurt much more than those of an unknown volunteer. Aware of their marginalized status, guests would rather ignore all interaction with me for fear of how I might view them from this new position of power.

Additionally, volunteers and staff communicate the inferiority of the guests by serving them what guests see as sub-par ‘soup kitchen food.’ According to the guests, they knew they were eating “seconds,” “ready to be expired,” “bad stuff” that was “unwanted” by the rest of the community. They find the “fabulous Friday leftovers” served at the end of the week an ironic title for food that is less than adequate, let alone “fabulous.” While the Friday meal is made from “leftovers” of the week, all of the donated food at the kitchen could be seen as the leftovers from grocery stores, businesses, and individuals who for some reason didn’t want it. As such, this food reinforces the guests’ inferior social standing as it suggests that they’re not good enough to eat what the food-secure population eats. However, guests also say that this food is not up to their standards, meaning they do not accept the inferior status that the soup kitchen helps maintain.

Some of this food was of such low quality, guests said, that they didn’t recognize it as food at all. They were offended to be served such things as if this is what they wanted or deserved as ‘poor’ people. By refusing to eat these items, guests resist the notion that they have

lower standards for eating in a soup kitchen. In particular, guests often describe the American cheese not as dairy but “plastic.” As such, this cheese shouldn’t be mistaken for something edible, despite the fact that it is the primary cheese served on pulled pork sandwiches, grilled cheese, or hamburgers. Vivian had similar thoughts regarding the cheaper butter alternatives that were often served with bread at lunch. “It isn’t even food. If you read the ingredients it’s fake fillers that make it look and taste yellow and spreadable—but it’s not even food,” she said. By giving these items non-food status, guests refute the notion that this is what they deserve.

Guests are aware of their inferiority because as Ronald says, this food isn’t good enough for the volunteers’ families. It isn’t just the quality of ingredients, he says, but rather the lack of care that the volunteers and staff put into the preparation of this food.

Ronald: The food isn’t bad, but they should, how should I say this, they should stop trying to use things that they wouldn’t use at home in the food. To tell the truth, you can’t put sugar in hamburger meat and call it a Mexican meal.

According to the guests, it’s not just the physical limitations—such as a lack of proper equipment or specialty ingredients—that constrain the volunteers, but rather the volunteers’ indifference toward the quality of the food. It takes no less effort to add cumin and garlic (proper ‘Mexican’ flavorings) to hamburger meat than sugar, but Ronald implies that volunteers aren’t willing to make this change. Ronald even doubts that volunteers taste this food before serving it, as they supposedly don’t care about the food that soup kitchen guests are eating. Ronald’s criticisms refute his status as a soup kitchen guest who doesn’t deserve good tasting food. He may eat here, but that doesn’t mean his food standards are lower than those of a volunteer or volunteer’s family member.

Volunteers, on the other hand, seem unaware of how this soup kitchen food may degrade the people they desire to help. Part of this is surely pride: when volunteers cook, they want to

believe that they did a good job. It is not common practice for volunteers to taste the food; however, based on its appearance, many describe the food as delicious. Almost every time I was in the serving line, volunteers would encourage me to try the day's offerings, saying, "the hot dogs are really good" or the "mashed potatoes are especially cheesy!" To these volunteers, these leftovers truly are "fabulous."

Like the volunteers I interacted with, I was once impressed by the food at the Community Cafeteria. The salads, chicken casseroles, bread, fruit, and chocolate desserts would be a delicious meal not just in a soup kitchen, but in a variety of other contexts. My positive perspective was maintained even after my first few meals here. It was around meal five, however, that I began to understand the complaints of the guests. The once tasty thyme that permeated every dish quickly took on an all-too-familiar and bitter aftertaste. Everything tasted stale, as if it had been reheated and re-seasoned in an attempt to make something new and different. While the cooked vegetables looked appetizing, the oil/herb concoction that covered the green beans, broccoli, and asparagus overtook the vegetables' natural flavor. Even the pasta, a dish difficult to ruin, was made distasteful by the mushy, bland noodles. Like the guests, I quickly learned what made this 'soup kitchen food.' Even now, the smell of thyme and canola oil reminds me of the distinct flavor of these meals, often leading me to lose my appetite.

As I continued eating and talking, I discovered what factors made this 'soup kitchen food' according to the guests. Dishes were either over-seasoned or under-seasoned, as volunteers are not used to seasoning such large quantities of food. The meals are repetitive, as the kitchen receives the same donations from grocery stores each week. The flavor combinations are often unfamiliar, as there is pressure to cook with whatever is available, especially items that soon need to be thrown away. These ingredients lead to odd meals of grilled cheese with pizza dipping

sauce or orzo with corn kernels. Unsold packaged items like the ‘chicken ‘n waffle’ flavored potato chips are as unappetizing to the guests as they are to the grocery store customers who failed to buy them.

In addition, much of the distaste was likely due to the stressful context under which this meal was eaten. Guests are under a time limit to eat, sometimes with less than twenty minutes from the time they receive their food to when the dining room closes. The embarrassing experience of walking here, being controlled by the social workers, and having volunteers make their plates heightens the stress under which they eat. Undoubtedly, this stress negatively impacts the enjoyment of the food.

After experiencing these odd combinations of ingredients, distasteful dishes, and stressful environment, I understood why guests would criticize this food. Despite what the volunteers and staff communicated with each serving, guests saw themselves as deserving of higher quality foods. Even those who had positive things to say about these meals always said that it was good “for a place like this.” In reference to soup kitchens in Chicago, L.A., and Detroit, Andrew said that there is simply no comparison. “It’s the Cadillac of soup kitchens.” This food is only good in comparison to other places that serve free food to marginalized populations. Even in their praise, guests assert that it isn’t the food that they’ll eat once they’re out of this situation. They’re grateful for it now, however, most dream of one day eating high quality meat, hearty breakfasts, and fresh vegetables. Despite what the volunteers believe, guests neither desire nor feel as if they deserve the food that the soup kitchen serves.

Challenging their Position

One of the most common phrases gathered throughout my fieldwork was a variation of “I’m not like everybody else.” Even Delia, the woman who wants to teach her granddaughter about the false perceptions of those who eat here, describes herself as different from her fellow diners. When asked who she eats with in the dining room, the list was short. She sits with a few of the same people, but outside of these relationships, she doesn’t trust others here. “I’m not here to be friends with everybody,” she said, looking around disapprovingly. Delia’s desire to disassociate with a group of which she is part is a common occurrence among stigmatized people. According to Goffman, this “identity ambivalence” is strongest when the stigmatized “obtains a close sight of his own kind behaving in a stereotyped way...the sight may repel him since after all he supports the norms of a wider society” (1963:107). At the soup kitchen, guests come into direct contact with members of the food insecure or homeless community that they may otherwise strive to avoid. Guests are especially uncomfortable when others comply with the stereotypes of the homeless as disruptive, intoxicated, or dirty. They differentiate themselves from these people and reproduce the hierarchy that the volunteers and staff create.

Guests draw on many stereotypes of low-income people when commenting on the poor moral character of their fellow guests. Many inflict judgment on those who they believe to be alcoholics. As Stephanie said, the “only thing I don’t like is that I to have to try and eat with drunks; that’s not always an appetizing thing.” While Stephanie loses her appetite when around intoxicated individuals, Andrew is most bothered by what he describes as their violent behavior.

Andrew: Some people come here drunk, and there’s no requirement that they have to go through the breathalyzer to come here before they eat lunch or dinner. So some of them come here drunk and have to be restrained, from fighting, from anger, from pushing, shoving...the police come here a lot. Then they get some people who may not leave other people alone, who just want to bother other people. Like the table where you were before,

there are a couple people there that bother other people too. But where you were today, the caseworkers say that their mental illness is too deep, but that's not an excuse.

In these descriptions, both Andrew and Stephanie stress that they are not like the alcoholics at the Community Cafeteria. As Andrew says, there's no "excuse" for this behavior, including mental illness. He disapproves of the alcohol use at the kitchen and, like Stephanie, isn't afraid to vocalize his opinion.

If a guest brings their children around these morally questionable people, they are ridiculed for being bad parents. To Sara's criticism, Destiny would sometimes bring her three-year-old son to the soup kitchen for lunch. Although Sara's children had been forcibly taken out of her custody and put into the foster system, Sara said that she "knows better" than to bring them around this community of addicts and abusers. Soup kitchen guests, she said, could have a negative influence on impressionable children. After making this comment, she began to point out who these people were. There was a pregnant woman near the front of the dining room with bruises on her face and large blotches on her arms. Sara said that she must have been beaten up by someone, most likely the man with whom she was dining. She then pointed to another woman wearing a purposefully tattered shirt that revealed most of her back and bra. Sara would never expose her children to these morally questionable people and looks down on any mother who would.

As Sara pointed out, guests differentiate themselves from the typical homeless individual not only based on their behaviors, but on how they dress. As Delia said, "I carry myself, I don't look homeless." For Delia, dirty clothing, disheveled hair, and potent body odor are stigma symbols that draw attention to one's homeless status and reduce the individual's value (Goffman 1963). The lack of attention to personal hygiene is a commonly referred to stigma symbol. In

order to avoid being seen as a homeless person, Stephanie takes regular showers at the shelter. According to Stephanie, however, people don't need access to a shower to stay clean.

Stephanie: My philosophy is, you might be homeless but you don't have to smell. It's rained enough in the last few weeks you could have a bar of soap and do your laundry and shower at the same time outside. So sometimes the fact that some people have some extensive B.O. takes away your appetite.

Just as Andrew doesn't see mental illness as an excuse for disruptive behavior, Stephanie doesn't view homelessness as an excuse for body odor. She is critical of those who smell both because it makes her meal experience less enjoyable and because she sees them as not trying hard enough to reduce this stigma symbol. By criticizing these individuals, she simultaneously praises herself for avoiding this stereotypical facet of being a homeless individual.

While it's bad to be an addict, dirty, or a poor parent, nothing is worse than being chronically homeless. According to the guests, the lowest rung on the social ladder is reserved for those who have been homeless multiple times throughout their life. Even those described as addicts or disruptive differentiate themselves from these individuals. As Daryl said, "I'm not one of those people who's making a life out of homelessness." Ronald says that there are two types of people at this soup kitchen: those who are going to be "successful" and those who are "going to be right back in the same spot." The ultimate failure, therefore, is returning to this place as a homeless person for the second, third, or even fourth time. Klaus may have made mistakes, but at least he wasn't one of these people:

I made some bad decisions, yeah, but does that mean I'm done for life? If someone's a chronic mooch that should come out over time, but if you're trying to make your life better, that's different.

The "chronic mooch" relies on this soup kitchen for more than short-term assistance during a difficult financial time. The volunteers and staff should be wary of making people too comfortable, Ronald said, because "then they'll want to stay here too long." Instead of trying to

be self-sufficient, they'll "use the food as a form of entertainment," according to Rob. These are the people who fulfill the stereotype of those who are "sucking off the system" according to Vivian. Since this stereotype is often applied to everyone eating in the soup kitchen, guests are quick to differentiate themselves from those whom this stereotype is accurately applied. For while they may be eating at the soup kitchen now, this is their first time, and as many assured me, it would be their last.

Whether it be because they are not chronically homeless, dirty, bad parents, or alcoholics, the theme of not being "like everybody else" or not being "raised to be here" was one of the first things that came up in conversations with guests. As a non-homeless person, guests may have assumed that I believed the many stereotypes about people in their situation. Guests needed to defend themselves from these negative stereotypes, not by denying that they existed, but rather by saying that the stereotypes didn't apply to them. In doing so, they reproduce both the stigma of homelessness while ignoring the political structures that keep people in this situation. They create a hierarchical community reflective of the hierarchy imposed by the social workers, staff, and volunteers in this charitable model. Perhaps most disconcertingly, this recreation of hierarchy inhibits guests from forming solidarity with one another. Instead of pooling resources and exchanging helpful information, guests are isolated in their own quest for social superiority. This unintentional cost of this hierarchical giving is perhaps one of the most detrimental for those struggling to get out of this situation.

Despite these many sources of stigma, the greatest applies to each guest, as all receive food without paying for it. In this hierarchical relationship, guests are not expected to repay the volunteers and staff for their meal, which reinforces their low social position in comparison to those who give. Guests desire to change the hierarchical relationship of the soup kitchen by

paying back the volunteers and staff for these meals. In this way, guests hope to transform the soup kitchen into a place of active exchange between equals. As Graeber (2011) describes, exchange is an interaction that leans toward equivalence. Yet, it is not only the goods that are seen as equivalent, but also the givers and recipients. In their ideal model, guests would give back to the CC by volunteering, and the role of volunteer and guest would not be mutually exclusive, but rather interchangeable, positions.

For many guests, becoming a volunteer was just as important as getting a job, owning a home, or being reunited with their family. Delia describes her dream of one day walking into the Community Cafeteria, not as a meal guest, but as a volunteer. She plans on talking with Alice and Luke, the two kitchen directors, as soon as she can about how to volunteer here. Ronald told me that he would love to volunteer in the kitchen, especially since he could help cook things that the kitchen doesn't serve on a regular basis. Stephanie wants to volunteer in accordance with her religious beliefs, as service has the potential to strengthen her relationship with God.

Yet, guests always discussed volunteering in the kitchen as a dream they would fulfill only after they either moved out of the shelter or no longer needed to eat at the soup kitchen. Throughout these conversations, I was confused as to why they couldn't begin volunteering now if they so desired. As the volunteer coordinator told me, "we try to make sure that everyone who wants to participate in the fight against hunger has the opportunity." By this token, anyone who wanted to volunteer in this mission should be able to do so. At first, I assumed that they felt like Gary, who said that he would have time to volunteer only after he "got his life back together." Yet, as my conversation with Andrew showed, this may not be the reason why people like Delia, Colette, and others were waiting. Recalling a conversation he had with one of the shelter social workers, Andrew said:

I told her that I would like to help with the food kitchen. And she told me yes, that will be possible, but as long as I'm affiliated with the program here it won't be possible. But, when I get my own place, I'll be able to come back and help. So that means that there's a hope, that sometime in the future I may volunteer right over there in the Community Cafeteria.

Andrew is inspired by the social worker's words, as they give him hope that he will one day be able to repay the soup kitchen for this gift of a meal. Yet, as the social worker explicitly tells him, he cannot volunteer here while he is a shelter resident. Andrew is a food recipient and homeless man, and these identities cannot be shared with that of a volunteer.

According to the soup kitchen volunteer coordinator and kitchen director, this policy was heavily influenced by the wishes of the shelter staff. Just as the shelter staff had strong opinions regarding how guests should be called up to get their food, they similarly wanted to influence whether or not guests could work in the kitchen. As Alice told me, this was a difficult decision between herself and the shelter staff.

Alice: We grappled with that in the beginning when we first opened up. We talked with the counselors here, and the thought was that they don't want folks interrupting some of the work that they're trying to accomplish. They wouldn't want someone saying "I can't go look for a job because I've got a shift at the kitchen" or "I can't go do this meeting because I've got a shift at the kitchen." I think they really want folks focusing on what led them here and what path they need to be on to get them out of here. The counseling staff unanimously felt that way. But if folks exit the system they're more than welcome to come back, and some folks do. And if they do come back, they'd rather have people on the cooking shift than the serving shift because of any interactions or confrontations there could be with somebody out in the dining room.

Throughout this quote, Alice never expresses her personal agreement with the shelter staff. She repeatedly tells me what "they" think about the guests, as if her own opinion hasn't been accounted for. Yet, by going along with these policies, she communicates to the guests that she agrees. Without these limitations on their volunteer work, the staff assumes that the guests wouldn't look for paid employment because they are less self-motivated, disciplined, or moral than the rest of the population. Yet for many, working at the kitchen might provide excellent

work experience for future paid employment. As such, the staff's main argument is flawed; in denying the guests volunteer opportunities, the staff may inhibit some of the guests from finding lucrative employment. Thus, in addition to being based on negative assumptions of this group of people, the restrictions may further inhibit guests from changing their situation.

Despite the discrimination inherent in these rules, the volunteer coordinator interprets them as a policy to promote fairness. Like the rules regarding 'how many' of a given item a guest can take, the restriction on volunteering is framed as a way to promote equality at the CC. As Bryn said, if guests were to volunteer, "some of the recipients may think that they're getting special treatment because they're volunteering, because they're behind the table." Bryn stressed that she didn't want people to think that they had to do anything in order to get an equal share. She was afraid that volunteering would become an expectation in order to receive this service, which would thereby undermine the CC's promise of an unconditional, free meal. Yet, Bryn fails to recognize the indebtedness that many guests feel for consuming this free meal. They want to repay the soup kitchen for this service, yet the restrictions on volunteering make this especially difficult. Ironically, by not allowing guests to volunteer, the staff unintentionally destroys the sense of 'equality' that they strive to uphold, as guests feel further in debt and inferior to volunteers and staff.

While guests are not allowed to volunteer in the kitchen, they are given one opportunity to do so in the dining room. Every day before serving lunch and dinner, the social worker asks for volunteers from among the guests to wipe down the tables and chairs after the meal service. While it may constitute volunteering, this task is seen as dirty, degrading, and pointless. As is common in a total institution, the work offered to inmates is often minor, perhaps of only ceremonial importance (Goffman 1958). This is not an urgent job as most of the guests' time is

spent idly waiting around for others to finish. This job is not important, as the guests described the supposedly dirty water used to clean the tabletops as making them even dirtier. Furthermore, the soup kitchen already assumes responsibility for all of the guests' needs (by cooking, serving food, cleaning, etc), meaning that these jobs are not truly necessary for the soup kitchen to function. As such, these tasks don't have the power to transform guests into the valued volunteers they desperately want to be. Social workers tried to entice guests to take this position by allowing them to be first in the food line. Yet, guests were not motivated by this personal benefit. They wanted to do work that would benefit the Community Cafeteria, a goal that cleaning the tables and chairs didn't seem to do. Finally, this job further differentiates the guests from the 'real' volunteers in the kitchen. Guests work in the dining room and have no contact with the staff or other volunteers, which reinforces the two different social worlds of the soup kitchen.

Like cleaning the tables, other seemingly menial tasks can further isolate guests from the kitchen volunteers and thus reinforce their position as a soup kitchen guest. For instance, during one of my volunteer shifts, Alice asked a few of the remaining guests to take out the garbage. To her surprise, none of the guests took her up on this offer. Alice was upset, as she had worked hard to prepare this meal, serve, clean, and had even come in early to prepare breakfast for those staying at the shelter's temporary warming center. Speaking only to me, she said, "We try to do a lot around here. And now we have to do this too?" At the time, it was easy to sympathize with Alice's perspective. However, in retrospect, I see how these guests may have interpreted her request. They sat in the dining room, not allowed to cook, serve, or even set foot in the kitchen despite the fact that many have aspirations to volunteer. Yet, here was Alice, asking them to take out the trash. While they are clearly unworthy of this highly coveted volunteer role, this dirty job

is supposedly more appropriately suited for them. They can step inside the kitchen, but only if it is on their way to the outside dumpster. While it may be volunteering, this job reinforces their position as a guest. As such, it is not surprising that guests would refuse a role that might further demean them.

As guests often show, is not just volunteering that they desire, but volunteering in the kitchen. In this physical space, they would no longer be a soup kitchen guest, but a soup kitchen volunteer. They would be physically transformed, wearing the nametags, aprons, hats, and gloves of a Community Cafeteria volunteer. They would even sign up in advance and put these volunteers hours in their calendars. Undoubtedly, volunteering to clean tables does not have the same transformative power, as guests remain in the dining room and do not change their appearance. By denying guests the opportunity to volunteer in this way, the staff and volunteers inhibit them from transforming the nature of giving at this soup kitchen. Whereas hierarchical giving is the model of the CC, allowing guests to become volunteers would transform this model into one leaning towards equivalent exchange. Since this is not allowed, guests must seek other ways to transform their social position by disregarding the hierarchical framework of guest and volunteer altogether.

Unable to volunteer, guests devise their own ways to question their interpellation (Althusser 1969) as food insecure or homeless. Through our many conversations, it was clear that guests desired to show aspects of themselves that one wouldn't expect from someone eating here. Similarly, guests showed themselves as more than complacent recipients through their acts of unconventional and unexpected service for the CC. Finally, guests engage in a form of food giving unseen at the CC in the volunteer/guest relationship, and in doing so, become givers of the food themselves.

As previously shown, stereotypes about the “soup kitchen guest” are well known at the Community Cafeteria. In an effort to be anything but this stereotype, guests vocalize the parts of their personhood that wouldn’t be assumed by their “homeless” status. Guests appropriated me as an audience to tell these stories and show who they were outside of their position as soup kitchen guest. They describe themselves as world travelers, teachers, and employees, as stories of their trips to Germany or jobs at the local mall fill the table conversation. They are high school prom queens, knitters, and runners. These are pet owners, as pictures of their dogs and cats fill their cell phones as they’re passed around our table. Clearly, it’s not only what they do, but also the relationships they have that make them anything other than a lonely homeless person. These are parents with stories of their children and pictures of kindergarten graduation. These are husbands and wives who may not be able to see their partners. They told me all of these things in order to show the depth of their personhood beyond the surface of soup kitchen guest.

It isn’t just stories of the past, but relationships of the now that help make these soup kitchen guests to be anything but poor and lonely. While the recreation of hierarchical giving hurts solidarity in the dining room, some guests wanted to befriend the limited number of people who were ‘like them.’ Friends like Sara, Stephanie, and Roy were inseparable. They sat together, went to the library between meals, and even shared time with one another’s children during their weekly visitations. A few weeks before I met them, Roy and Stephanie began dating. Their relationship, as well as the relationship between Stephanie and Sara, appeared extremely intense, in part because they were all that each other had. Stephanie, nicknamed “Ma” by Sara, was the most important person in Sara’s life. Sara was proud to be known as Stephanie’s best friend by others in the dining room, often making grand gestures out of their hellos and goodbyes.

For Sara, the importance of this friendship to her own self-worth made its deterioration particularly painful. Midway through my fieldwork, Stephanie began dating another woman. While Roy was unbothered by Stephanie's new partner, Sara was hurt and upset that Stephanie had found a love interest to replace their friendship. Not wanting to be in second place to this new woman, Sara cut off all ties with Stephanie. She sat on the other end of the dining room, often by herself or surrounded by others with whom she didn't speak. No longer "Stephanie's best friend," Sara was uncomfortable with her new role as the lonely soup kitchen guest. It was during this time that Sara turned to me. As the friend of the anthropologist, Sara found value in her role as my main informant. When asked to formally interview with me, she brushed off the request, as she had "already shared everything" with her new best friend. As my own insertion into these relationships showed, guests found value in being more than a 'soup kitchen guest' to others in this space.

By interacting with children, guests could define themselves as a parent figure instead of an infantilized food recipient. As interactions with Destiny's son Charlie showed, many guests wanted both to play with and discipline the two-year-old. An older woman who seemed to know Charlie well was quick to stop him from playing with the water fountain or running between the tables. Whenever Charlie was around, she called herself "grandma," thereby formally changing how she was defined in this space. By taking on this parenting role, guests showed that they were responsible and caring individuals, two qualities that are often not associated with soup kitchen guests. In addition, by gravitating toward Charlie, guests demonstrated their desire for community, a desire that was often inhibited by the judgment of the guests.

Unconventional Giving

In an effort to be anything but the stereotypical “mooch” or “drain on the system,” guests find unconventional ways to give back to the Community Cafeteria and shelter. Many of these acts go unnoticed by the volunteers and staff. Still, this unrecognized volunteerism on the part of Stephanie allows her to define herself as someone who gives as opposed to someone who takes. Towards the end of our interview at the creative arts group, Stephanie told me that she often thanks the staff. When asked why, Stephanie first recognized their hard work, but then made sure to explain the hard work that she puts in as well.

Stephanie: I live here, it's paid for by the government or the state, but I try to do stuff to help my staff. I don't know how many toilets I've unclogged here without anyone knowing, I just do it. And every Thursday when we get deliveries I help, if we have enough deliveries, and if my staff upstairs on fourth floor needs help, I help her put the deliveries away.

Unable to take part in food preparation, Stephanie's service work is limited to the bathroom and sorting deliveries. While this isn't the highly emotional work of 'feeding the hungry,' her contributions redefine her as someone who gives to this soup kitchen as opposed to someone who takes from it. Thus, this covert volunteerism is worth her efforts even if she isn't recognized for it.

Like Stephanie, David redefines his role in the soup kitchen by offering to do things that are rarely done by the staff and volunteers. During the previous winter, David would often sleep on the dining room floor as a guest of the overnight warming center. While volunteers clean the kitchen frequently in accordance with commercial kitchen health codes, this floor, in contrast, can be neglected for days. David would often wake up to find his sleeping bag and pillow covered in remnants of the previous day's meal. Disgusted by these conditions, David offered to sweep and mop the floor after the dinner service. To his surprise, the staff resisted, citing their fears of possible altercations between David and others while he cleaned. David couldn't

understand their reasoning and after weeks of convincing the staff that he wasn't antagonistic, they finally allowed him to sweep and mop. In retelling his story, it was as if David couldn't believe it himself. It was ridiculous, he said, that the staff would question his character especially when he was trying to do a good thing for everyone here. David could have easily given up when faced with this resistance; instead, he persisted. In cleaning the floor he not only made this a better place to sleep, but he also redefined his role in this space. No longer just a soup kitchen guest, David was an important contributor to the CC whether the staff recognized it or not.

Similar ideas abounded of how guests wanted to give back to the Community Cafeteria. While some guests were unable to carry out these acts themselves, they often told me what they envisioned for the CC. I met Billy on the dish line during one of my volunteer shifts. As I took his dirty plates, I asked him how he liked the food. He responded that it was good, but seemed to have something else on his mind. "I have a suggestion," he began to say. It would be great to give our leftover scraps to the humane society, he told me. "So we don't have to throw all of this away," he said, gesturing to the overflowing garbage can of food waste scraped from the guests' plates. He had clearly thought about this, as he suggested putting the scrap food in separate bags that he would help bring to the humane society. Knowing that his "guest" status wouldn't carry a lot of weight with the staff and volunteers, he asked me to mention this to the appropriate person. While unable to carry out this task himself, his suggestion and offer to help was a way for him to give back to the Community Cafeteria.

In regards to the food, guests recognize their unique insights into how this food could be improved, and, if allowed, they want to offer these insights to the staff. In doing so, they would make an important contribution to the CC that would define them as something other than soup

kitchen guest. Unlike unclogging toilets, Stephanie saw this contribution as particularly beneficial to the givers of her food.

Stephanie: And I would even offer- if Miss Alice and Luke or whoever's in charge of the kitchen would like some of the people from here to sit in on meal planning...I could go around, I know a lot of the people here, and I could help them out with some of the planning so that they could cook things that people are going to eat and not have so many leftovers, not have so many seconds and thirds.

If she were to talk with others, Stephanie would hear many of the insights that guests so willingly shared with me. She would see how guests desire to improve the food by contributing their ideas and recipes. Devon, for instance, suggests that the kitchen cook meatloaf. As she said, it would be easy for the volunteers, healthy (if they used her recipe with carrots and broccoli), and would be a "real crowd-pleaser." Vivian suggests making more vegetarian friendly options, such as stir-fry with tofu and beans as a healthy, high protein option. Gary wants the cooks to recognize the need for softer foods, such as more tender meat, to benefit elderly guests with dental issues. Colette thinks that guests would emotionally benefit from more "comfort foods" like ribs, macaroni and cheese, and grilled chicken because "a good comfort meal is better than an anxiety pill." To see these suggestions taken into account would show guests the value of their input. Instead of needy recipients of food, they would be valuable members of this community, contributing their unique insights and helping the Community Cafeteria fulfill its mission not only to feed people, but also to respect their dignity. Giving in these unconventional ways, whether through cleaning or providing input about the food, redefines guests as contributors in a community where they are so often labeled as nothing more than recipients.

Communitistic Giving

The dining room is loud and filled with more people than usual seeking respite from the summer heat. After waiting in the unusually long line, John, Stephanie, Kat, Jo, and I begin

eating our meal of roasted chicken thighs, orzo, corn, salad, bread, and cupcakes. To everyone's pleasant surprise, the salad bar includes the highly sought after hard-boiled eggs. Full of protein and easy to transport, John has made his love for these eggs known. One by one, each of my tablemates passes him their own. Pretty soon a collection of six eggs rolls around on his plastic red tray. Not wanting to be left out, I give him mine, and bring his count up to seven.

Sharing food is a common event in the dining room. While guests will occasionally trade their foods (such as a cookie for a piece of pie), it is much more common to see guests give foods away without asking for anything in return. Without stocked pantries or full refrigerators at home, guests would be wise to save the packaged goods, eggs, or fruit for a later time. As previously mentioned, the enigmatic rules on what is to be done with these items makes them ideal for putting in one's backpack or purse. While saving and storing food is possible, guests would rather give these goods to their fellow soup kitchen patrons. In doing so, they both redefine their role at the CC and redefine the soup kitchen as something other than a controlled space determined by the guest/volunteer hierarchy.

Guests give in what Graeber (2011) calls a spirit of baseline communism, which he describes as distinctly different from both direct exchange and hierarchical exchange. This giving is different because it neither requires reciprocation (as in direct exchange) nor is it based on a hierarchical relationship between giver and recipient. In contrast, baseline communism is defined as a type of giving done out of a spirit of solidarity. We share in this way because it seems like the 'nice' and 'right' thing to do; life is simply better for it. Guests give as a way to 'look out for one another' as family or close friends might. There is no expectation that recipients *will* return the favor, but rather guests assume that others *would* do the same for them. This helps forge a sense of community among the guests that is unseen in both direct and

hierarchical exchange. Whereas direct exchange ends relationships (as things are supposedly “even” when all is said and done) and hierarchical exchange creates relationships of superior and inferior, communistic giving creates solidarity. For instance, even if a guest didn’t expect to eat a certain side or dessert, they are encouraged by others to take these things in order to share with their table. During one of our meals, Sara encouraged Edith, a woman with severe celiac disease, to take foods that she couldn’t eat but that she could give away. Edith said that she was right, and after some convincing about what to tell the volunteers, went back in line. After receiving these sweets, Edith appeared happy to place them on the table for anyone to take. This form of giving helps create a sense of community among the guests in a way unseen in the hierarchical exchange between volunteer and guest.

This desire to give in this spirit of solidarity is somewhat surprising given the ways in which guests reproduce the hierarchies imposed by the staff and volunteers. Yet, this gift giving is not about creating hierarchy; for if it were, guests would not be so willing to accept the food shared with them. Rather, they accept and give in order to create a sense of egalitarian social relatedness. Never was this as clear as on November 4th, a few days after Halloween. Unsurprisingly, the kitchen had an abundance of donated candy and each of us was given our own bag of “fun size” treats. Recalling memories of my childhood, I expected that we might trade these candies once it came time to eat dessert. While some people did trade, I was struck by how many people willingly gave their candy to others, even the most prized pieces. Without prompting, John gave me his Snickers while everyone with Dots passed them to Luis. This giving was fun; we learned each other’s favorite candies and reminisced about our past Halloween costumes. We weren’t necessarily creating long-lasting social bonds (for this is the

work of gifts that require reciprocation), however, we did feel a strong sense of solidarity with one another that made the entire meal experience more enjoyable.

From my experience on the receiving end, it's clear that participating in this selfless giving can make guests feel welcome and cared for, feelings especially important for those experiencing the isolation of homelessness. As the outsider-anthropologist, food sharing was a way for guests to welcome me to this place. Klaus was the first guest to do so; after our long lunch and discussion, he ended our interview by offering me his orange. My initial reaction was to refuse, as I assumed that he needed this food more than I did. Yet I came to realize that this orange was infinitely more valuable to Klaus as something that could be given than as something to snack on later. In taking this orange, I felt a sense of solidarity with Klaus and the rest of this community.

Giving not only makes someone feel cared for, but also makes the givers feel like caring, generous people, both characteristics not usually associated with someone who is homeless or food insecure. For instance, John expressed that he cared about Stephanie after her recent heart attack by sharing healthy foods with her. While I watched their interaction, John explicitly stated, "I gave my grapes to her because they're good for her heart." He wanted to be sure that others knew how he cared for Stephanie. Similarly, many people would give their packaged sweet rolls and candies to Sara in anticipation of her scheduled visitation with her two daughters. While guests may have enjoyed these snacks themselves, they are clearly excited to give away these items knowing that they will make Sara's children happy. In doing so, guests illustrate their desire to show others that they care for them.

The sharing of food is so important to defining oneself as a 'non-soup kitchen guest' that it frequently occurs before, during, and after the meal service ends. As soon as guests arrive to

the dining room, this giving commences. Many bring snack items with them, such as chips, pretzels, popcorn, and soda; Jo always brought Cheetos. These items are typically placed in the center of the table to be shared among all those patiently waiting for lunch or dinner. After receiving our meal, guests would often share with one another directly from their plates. Since the kitchen would typically offer two main dishes (or sometimes three if there were multiple leftovers from the Friday lunch), guests would give each other portions of the different main courses. This ranged from offering someone a bite of mashed potatoes to giving away entire portions. As people finish eating their main course, dessert offers the most extensive opportunities for sharing. Many guests take these cookies, oranges, and chocolate candies with them to give away to others even after the meal ends. For instance, during our Saturday morning arts group, Sean offered me the muffin he had saved from dinner the night before. Again, I felt uncomfortable taking his food, especially since I knew that the kitchen only served one meal on both Saturday and Sunday. Yet he insisted, and I realized that sharing this muffin with me would make him happier than eating it himself.

Conclusion

Through these acts of baseline communism, this food fulfills a purpose that is just as important as that of feeding hungry people. Communistic giving has two important social functions: firstly, it creates solidarity among the guests in a way that their hierarchical judgments of one another makes difficult. By judging one another, guests raise their own social position; however, the resulting isolation from fellow guests is an unintended and undesired consequence. Through their giving, we see beyond this hierarchical judgment to the guests' desire to belong to a community. Secondly, by giving their food, guests challenge the notion that all they do is take

from the kitchen, that they are “sucking on the system” with nothing to contribute. While less recognized, the spontaneous, informal, and habitual giving of the guests is no less valuable than that of the volunteers. For guests, it is a powerful way that they can show themselves to be anything but the “soup kitchen guest” in need.

CONCLUSION

Each Friday and Saturday, the creative arts group *Imagine Community* transforms the dining room of the Community Cafeteria. Their morning ritual always begins by breaking the sense of order that dominates the dining room, as tables are moved out of their straight lines and into interesting angles along the back of the dining room. Spread out over the faux wood tabletops is a large white tarp filled with paint splatters and crayon markings of past art projects. Strewn across the tarp are the supplies: the spread of beads, papers, yarn, and watercolors leave just enough space for each of us to work. We use these tools to make paintings, knitted scarves, and necklaces to give to one another more often than to keep for ourselves. Some share their skills, like Lucy who patiently teaches us the art of macramé. At the end of the table sits an electric keyboard, a guitar with three strings, and, on occasion, my violin. David strums the guitar while Clarice sings the songs of Bob Dylan and Ray Charles, setting a calm tone to our morning. Andrew, most fond of theatre, prints out skits at the library for us to recite. Josh, who doesn't consider himself creative, gives a sense of hospitality to the group by dividing a single cup of coffee for each of us in small Styrofoam cups. In its colorful chaos, *Imagine Community* manages to make a space where all are welcome and all contribute. Here, there is no privileged giver and marginalized recipient, but rather artists, teachers, and friends. While we may debate about our social and political beliefs, we are always brought back to this sense of solidarity, this knowledge that each of us plays an important part in this community. For a few precious hours, this is enough to help us forget that we are in a soup kitchen.

As soon as the supplies are packed up, the tarp folded, and the tables rearranged, we are reminded of where we are. Despite the idealized vision of Great Harvest's Community Cafeteria,

this is not an inclusive community where “everyone” has a role. In contrast, the people sitting on this side of the dividing wall are seen as supplicants with their hands outstretched for gifts that only the volunteers, staff, and donors can give. They are marginalized others that the volunteers and staff can stringently control from their position of power. While this might not be the goal of those who work, donate, and volunteer here, it is an unavoidable consequence of this highly political charitable model.

However, to stop here would be to suggest that the guests have passively stood by while their worth has been demeaned. In contrast, guests are aware of and resistant to the marginalizing effects of this charitable model. Despite what their position as a food recipient communicates, they are not just ‘homeless;’ they are parents, friends, teachers, and world travelers. They desire to give back to this kitchen to undermine the model of hierarchical giving that defines them as inferior to the volunteers and staff that serve them. While their dreams of formally volunteering may be denied for now, guests find ways to give that may go unnoticed or unvalued. And, despite their need to constantly reinforce their own worth, they show that they care about this community by sharing in a communistic way. In doing so, guests strive to bring this spirit of solidarity so easily found at *Imagine Community* to the rest of their soup kitchen experience.

These realizations have changed my own volunteer experience at the Community Cafeteria. Admittedly, I still volunteer here, for charity, while problematic, is unfortunately the only way that many people receive food. At the same time, I can no longer see my volunteer hours at the Community Cafeteria in the same altruistic light. With each plate passed over the serving station, I know that my control of these portions, the subpar food, and my limited interaction with guests reinforces my position of superiority. I am aware that what I do *for* these people as opposed to *with* them is the result of an unjust order. It’s an uncomfortable place to be,

and a place that many staff members have struggled with long before I came to realize it. As Alice described, the staff are similarly troubled by the impersonal nature of giving food in this way. Yet they have neither the energy nor time to find solutions, as the burden of feeding so many people is difficult enough. This is why the work of anthropology is valuable, not only to illuminate problems, but also to inform necessary change.

Despite the challenges and constraints of working within a charitable model, there are simple changes that could reduce the creation and enforcement of hierarchy here. Most simply, volunteers should listen to guests' requests regarding portion size, especially when they request less food than the volunteer feels compelled to give. After serving has finished, volunteers and staff could be encouraged to eat meals with guests in a spirit of solidarity. This would give them the opportunity to hear guest feedback and make changes to recipes and meals if needed. In addition, it would undoubtedly break down the defining roles of "volunteer" and "guest" in soup kitchen. By the same token, guests should be given the opportunity to volunteer in the kitchen if they desire.

Other solutions that seem necessary, like allowing guests to serve themselves, may face practical limitations of feeding people quickly and upholding health codes. For these reasons, it's clear that soup kitchens will never be able to promote the dignity that all people deserve. I cannot end this thesis, therefore, with an idealized version of what the soup kitchen might look like, for to do so would suggest that improved soup kitchens are a potential solution to widespread hunger. In contrast, our focus should turn toward how individuals can access food without relying on this inherently flawed charitable model. For instance, investing, as opposed to cutting, funds for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) would increase one's ability to purchase foods and reduce the need for soup kitchens. By supporting permanent and unrestricted

access to food for all people in this way, we refute the notion that food should be a “gift” from those with resources to those without. Instead, we uphold that access to food and the ability to eat with dignity is a universal human right.

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Appendix A: Methodology

This study was approved by the IRB for exempt status on July 3, 2013. This research took place from July until November of 2013. Throughout this time, I aimed to understand the Community Cafeteria from every possible perspective, including that of the volunteers, staff, donors, and guests. In order to understand the volunteer role, I worked in the kitchen either one or two days per week. While I had been volunteering at the CC since 2010, my role as anthropologist changed the lens with which I worked. I asked questions and observed volunteers and staff members, making sure to also document in detail my own experiences in this role. My shifts were varied, including lunch, dinner, and weekend meals. I was able to formally interview and audio-record the kitchen coordinator during one of her lunch breaks.

I also spent time at the Great Harvest office where I interviewed more individuals involved with the organization. I first spoke with the GH volunteer coordinator and from her was given the contact information for three volunteers and a former CC intern that all interviewed with me. Except for a husband and wife volunteer-couple that wanted to interview together, these interviews were one-on-one and always took place at the Great Harvest offices. Additionally, GH administrators put me in contact with two of their leading donors and two representatives from partner agencies whom I also interviewed. Except for one donor interview at the GH headquarters, these interviews took place at the agency site. For all of these interviews, I brought with me a set of questions specific to the employee, donor, or partner-agency role. I never put a time limit on these interviews and they lasted anywhere from thirty to ninety minutes.

In order to become involved with the guest community, I tried to spend as much time at the Community Cafeteria as possible. I spent many of my Saturday and Friday mornings attending a creative arts group called *Imagine Community* that met in the soup kitchen dining

room. Here is where friendships developed and stories were told, first informally. My inquiry about the food and guests' experiences led guests to ask me whether I had tried this food myself. When I admitted that I had not, guests encouraged me to eat with them. After receiving approval from the kitchen coordinator, I began eating at the cafeteria in mid-July. During my first meal, the coordinator introduced me to the guests as an "anthropologist" and "student" here to learn about their experience. Her introduction gave me both the interest and trust of the guests.

I ate at the kitchen a total of seventeen times between July and November. While eating, I often had my notebook and pen beside me. At first, guests would jokingly ask if I was a food critic, only to be even more surprised when I told them that I was here to do research on their meal experience. At first, my presence was new and exciting; it wasn't uncommon for a guest to run up to me after finishing their meal to make sure that I took down their opinion in my notebook. As I became more of a familiar face at the kitchen, this excitement waned and my conversations with guests seemed less forced. Over the course of the meal, I asked specific questions about their experience in the serving line, how they enjoyed the food, what they thought of the staff, and many more. However, as time went on, I these conversations became less forced and I ate and participated in the daily conversation. I aimed learn from as many guests as possible, so I often sat in different places with different people. However, as I began to form friendships with certain guests, I was often drawn toward those whom I knew.

During our lunch or dinner, I would ask if anyone at my table would be willing to interview with me after the meal service. Since the kitchen closed at 1:00PM, I would often talk with people outside, either near the bus stop or on the smoke deck. In addition, I interviewed two guests during the art group meetings on Friday afternoons. These interviews lasted anywhere from thirty to ninety minutes. While I started with specific questions, I let the interviews go in

whichever direction guests led. Without fail, we would often discuss other issues that affected their lives as homeless individuals, such as the lack of public transportation, the inefficiency of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the difficulty of applying for government services like the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). I interviewed a total of eleven guests, five men and six women. All of the women I interviewed were residents of the attached homeless shelter, while all the men but one were living either on the streets or what they called “couch surfing” with friends. Most interviews were audio-recorded as I simultaneously took paper notes. While I interviewed numerous staff members, volunteers, donors, and partner agency representatives, this thesis focused on my interviews and participant observation with the soup kitchen guests, as it is this experience that is least understood.

The goal of participant observation is to show these experiences in the most honest light. However, it would be naïve to ignore the way that my role as a food-secure, college student affected my interactions with guests. For instance, guests may have felt pressured to deny the stereotypes of homelessness or food insecurity in my company. They might have assumed that I harbored negative perceptions of someone in their situation. Not only this, but my simultaneous position as a volunteer and a person of power could have changed how guests interacted with me when I ate with them. Many guests were apprehensive of my motives and made sure that I wasn't working for the Community Cafeteria before talking with me. Others specifically told me not to associate their name with what they told me in case their criticisms were to get back to the staff. I took great care to heed their requests by changing all names and omitting any identifying information from this thesis.

Aside from these issues, my research presented its own moral challenges. Surely it wasn't my place, I thought, to eat in a soup kitchen when I could afford to buy my own food. It was the guests, however, who welcomed me into this space and told me to eat the food I seemed to be so interested in. Despite their encouragement, I still felt the need to repay the kitchen for what I had been given. This was easy, because unlike the other guests, I could float seamlessly between the role of volunteer and recipient. On the days that I was eating in the kitchen, I always made sure to come early and offer to help or stay late to clean up. It was my way to repay the volunteers for the free meal I had just consumed. My internal moral struggle with eating here was a window into the moral implications of being a soup kitchen guest.

Appendix B: Meal Images



Lunch 8/19/13



Lunch 8/23/13



Lunch 9/1/13



Dinner 9/6/13



Lunch 9/14/13



Lunch 9/20/13



Lunch 10/4/13



Lunch 10/18/13



Lunch 11/4/13



Lunch 11/16/13

Appendix C: Meal Nutrition

In order to determine nutritional information, pictures were taken of each meal prior to eating to reference the serving size. After approximating the quantity of each item, this information was put in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food-A-Pedia (2013) calculator to estimate the amount of Calories, grams of fat, saturated fat, protein, carbohydrates, and milligrams of sodium. Ten meals between 8/19/13 – 11/16/13 are shown below along with a summary table for all ten meals.

Lunch 8/19/13						
Food	Calories	Total Fat	Sat. Fat	Protein	Carb.	Sodium
Sloppy joe with Cheese						
<i>sesame seed bun</i>	100	2	0	3	18	172
<i>American cheese slice (2)</i>	142	12	6	8	4	550
<i>ground beef in sauce (1 cup)</i>	341	17	6	27	21	1544
Salad						
<i>iceberg lettuce (1 cup)</i>	8	0	0	0	2	6
<i>carrot (1/8 large)</i>	4	0	0	0	1	7
<i>tomato slices (4)</i>	4	0	0	0	1	1
<i>green bell pepper (1/8)</i>	2	0	0	0	0	0
<i>French dressing (2 tbs)</i>	143	14	2	0	5	261
Pickle slices (4)	27	0	0	0	6	137
Small apple	71	0	0	0	19	0
Crackers (1 oz)	141	7	2	2	17	242
Sugar cookie (2.5 in across)	119	5	2	1	16	104
Water	0	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	1102	57	18	41	110	3024

Lunch 8/23/13						
Food	Calories	Total Fat	Sat. Fat	Protein	Carb.	Sodium
Spaghetti						
<i>noodles (1 cup)</i>	261	6	1	8	43	291
<i>beef sauce (3/4 cup)</i>	184	7	2	6	24	733
Salad						
<i>romaine lettuce (3/4 cup)</i>	8	0	0	1	1	7
<i>cucumber slices (3)</i>	3	0	0	0	0	0
<i>French dressing (2 tbs)</i>	143	14	2	0	5	261
Wheat bread (1 slice)	69	1	0	4	12	132
Butter (1 tsp)	36	4	3	0	0	29
Potato chips (1 oz)	152	10	1	2	14	147
Cinnabon Honey Bun	560	25	14	7	77	410
Orange	62	0	0	1	15	0
Water	0	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	1478	67	23	29	191	2010

Lunch 9/1/13						
Food	Calories	Total Fat	Sat. Fat	Protein	Carb.	Sodium
Baked, skinless chicken thigh (2)	162	5	1	27	0	490
Orzo (3/4 cup)	160	4	1	6	28	221
Canned Corn (3/4 cup)	100	1	0	3	23	397
Salad						
<i>romaine lettuce (1 cup)</i>	8	0	0	1	2	10
Hard boiled eggs (2)	154	11	3	13	1	278
Wheat Bread (1 slice)	69	1	0	4	12	132
Butter (1 tsp)	36	4	3	0	0	29
Cupcake with frosting (2 medium)	299	9	3	3	51	320
Water	0	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	988	35	11	57	117	1877

Dinner 9/6/13						
Food	Calories	Total Fat	Sat. Fat	Protein	Carb.	Sodium
Barbeque pork sandwich						
<i>wheat bread (2 slices)</i>	158	2	0	8	26	302
<i>American cheese (2 slices)</i>	142	12	6	8	4	550
<i>pulled pork (6 oz)</i>	398	23	8	45	0	653
Sweet potato (1/2 large)	101	0	0	2	23	0
Salad						
<i>iceburg lettuce (1 cup)</i>	8	0	0	1	2	10
<i>hard boiled egg (1/2)</i>	39	3	1	3	0	70
<i>italian dressing (2 tbs)</i>	86	8	1	0	3	486
Pineapple (1 cup)	78	0	0	1	20	2
Water	0	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	1010	48	16	68	78	2073

Lunch 9/13/13						
Food	Calories	Total Fat	Sat. Fat	Protein	Carb.	Sodium
Pulled barbeque chicken						
<i>chicken breast (1 medium)</i>	141	3	1	26	0	341
<i>barbeque sauce (2 tbs)</i>	47	0	0	0	11	350
Roasted potatoes						
<i>potato (1 medium)</i>	164	0	0	4	37	300
<i>olive oil (1 1/2 tbs)</i>	179	20	3	0	0	0
Bread (1 slice)	79	1	0	4	13	151
1 tsp butter	36	4	3	0	0	29
Almonds (1/8 cup)	119	11	1	4	3	65
Cole slaw (1 cup)	270	24	4	2	14	521
Hard boiled egg	77	5	2	6	1	139
Ice cream sundae						
<i>chocolate ice cream (1 1/2 cup)</i>	431	22	14	8	56	152

<i>whipped cream</i>	19	2	1	0	1	10
<i>apple topping (1 cup)</i>	137	1	0	0	34	6
Orange	62	0	0	1	15	0
Water	0	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	1761	93	29	55	185	2064

Lunch 9/20/13

Food	Calories	Total Fat	Sat. Fat	Protein	Carb.	Sodium
Pork stew (1 cup)	490	21	8	56	18	651
Pasta						
<i>egg noodles (1 cup)</i>	261	8	1	7	40	299
<i>Pea Pods (1/2 cup)</i>	59	1	0	4	10	100
Cole slaw (1 cup)	270	24	4	2	14	521
Cinnamon roll (1/4)	154	7	1	3	21	159
Grapes (1 cup)	104	0	0	1	27	3
Ice cream sundae						
<i>chocolate ice cream (1 1/2 cup)</i>	431	22	14	8	56	152
<i>caramel sauce (1/4 cup)</i>	210	4	1	3	42	135
<i>pineapple (1/4 cup)</i>	19	0	0	0	5	0
Water	0	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	1998	87	29	84	233	2020

Lunch 10/4/13

Food	Calories	Total Fat	Sat. Fat	Protein	Carb.	Sodium
Ground beef (3/4 cup)	323	24	9	22	2	385
Ground chicken (3/4 cup)	226	13	4	26	0	385
Fettucini						
<i>fettucini sauce (2 tbs)</i>	125	12	8	3	1	158
<i>noodles (1 1/4 cup)</i>	275	2	0	10	54	2
Salad						
<i>lettuce (1/2 cup)</i>	4	0	0	0	1	5
<i>French dressing (2 tbs)</i>	143	14	2	0	5	261
<i>turkey (1/4 cup)</i>	110	5	1	16	0	126
<i>croutons (1/4 cup)</i>	47	2	1	1	6	124
<i>jalapenos (1/8 cup)</i>	60	0	0	3	14	12
Bread (1 piece)	69	1	0	2	13	177
Butter (2 tsp)	72	8	5	0	0	58
Mozzarella cheese (1/2 cup)	170	13	7	13	1	354
Cantaloupe (1 slice)	23	0	0	1	6	11
Chocolate covered raisins (1 1/2 cup)	1112	42	30	12	195	102
Water	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	2759	136	67	109	298	2160

Lunch 10/18/13						
Food	Calories	Total Fat	Sat. Fat	Protein	Carb.	Sodium
Pulled barbeque chicken						
<i>chicken breast</i>	141	3	1	26	0	341
<i>barbeque sauce (2 tbs)</i>	47	0	0	0	11	350
Roasted potatoes						
<i>potato (1 medium)</i>	164	0	0	4	37	300
<i>olive oil (1 1/2 tbs)</i>	179	20	3	0	0	0
Cornbread (1 piece)	167	5	2	4	26	404
Butter (1 tbs)	102	12	7	0	0	82
Salad						
<i>lettuce (1/2 cup)</i>	4	0	0	0	1	5
<i>green peppers (1/4 cup)</i>	7	0	0	0	2	1
Cheddar cheese (1/2 cup)	228	19	12	14	1	351
Grapes (1 cup)	104	0	0	1	27	3
Water	0	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	1143	59	25	49	105	1837

Lunch 11/4/13						
Food	Calories	Total Fat	Sat. Fat	Protein	Carb.	Sodium
Hot dogs on white bun (2)	500	30	11	18	38	1435
Salad						
<i>lettuce (1 cup)</i>	8	0	0	0	2	10
<i>pumpkin seeds (1/4 cup)</i>	326	28	5	17	8	145
<i>green onions (2)</i>	10	0	0	1	2	5
<i>red pepper (1/4 cup)</i>	12	0	0	0	2	1
Tuna salad (3/4 cup)	287	17	3	22	11	605
Chicken 'n waffle potato chips (1 3/4 oz)	271	18	2	3	25	263
Grapes (1 cup)	104	0	0	1	27	3
Halloween candy						
<i>funsized M&Ms (1)</i>	103	4	3	1	13	11
<i>funsized Snickers (3)</i>	240	12	6	6	33	129
Water	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	1861	109	30	69	161	2607

Lunch 11/16/13						
Food	Calories	Total Fat	Sat. Fat	Protein	Carb.	Sodium
Chicken enchiladas	440	16	7	25	46	946
Cheese sauce (1/2 cup)	239	18	10	13	7	599
Sour cream (1/4 cup)	111	11	7	1	2	46
Brown rice (1 cup)	176	4	2	4	31	786
Bread (1 piece)	69	1	0	2	13	177
Butter (1 tsp)	36	4	3	0	0	29
Salad						
<i>lettuce (1 cup)</i>	8	0	0	0	2	10

<i>hard boiled egg</i>	77	5	2	6	1	139
<i>italian dressing (2 tbs)</i>	86	8	1	0	3	486
<i>croutons (1/2 cup)</i>	93	4	1	2	13	248
Chocolate ice cream (1 cup)	287	15	9	5	38	101
Orange	62	0	0	1	15	0
Water	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	1684	86	42	59	171	3567

Meal Totals						
Meal	Calories	Total Fat	Sat. Fat	Protein	Carb.	Sodium
8/19/13	1102	57	18	41	110	3024
8/23/13	1478	67	23	29	191	2010
9/1/13	988	35	11	57	117	1877
9/6/13	1010	48	16	68	78	2073
9/13/13	1761	93	29	55	185	2064
9/20/13	1998	87	29	84	233	2020
10/4/13	2759	136	67	109	298	2160
10/18/13	1143	59	25	49	105	1837
11/4/13	1861	109	30	69	161	2607
11/16/13	1684	86	42	59	171	3567
Average	1578.4	77.7	29	62	164.9	2323.9
Max	2759	136	67	109	298	3024
Min	988	35	11	29	78	1837