

Sharing and Holy Hugs: The Birth and Development of Intimization in Charismatic Stockholm

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Fifteen people have gathered for a “cell group meeting” in the basement of the Neo-Charismatic New Life Church. After the introductory worship, it is time for each of the participants to present an individual prayer request, or “to share,” as some call it. The regulars quickly seize the opportunity, but a female newcomer in her mid-twenties is evidently reluctant to air her troubles in the new group. As the topics are prayed for at the end, a man of about the same age comments upon her hesitation by asking the Holy Spirit to “loosen the bonds of her tongue” so that she may “open up.” Returning the subsequent week, the woman recounts a work-related conflict, asking the others to pray for its solution. As a response, she receives hugs.¹

Charismatic Christianity in Sweden is currently undergoing changes in theology, organization, and practice—the episode above is illustrative of the latter. Some of these changes are the result of inner dynamics in the organizations, while others take place due to cultural and structural shifts in the society where they are embedded. Studies conducted in the United States and other parts of the Anglophone world have analyzed the impact of late modern ideas concerning personal development, authenticity, and

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intimacy on Neo-Charismatic and Neo-Evangelical organizations, as well as in Charismatic Catholic communities (Csordas 1997; Griffith 1997; Hunter 1987; Miller 1997). However, the issue has not received the same attention in the study of Charismatic Christianity in the Nordic region.² The present chapter, which presents a case study of Stockholm County, scrutinizes a development that began in the 1990s but has boomed during the last five to ten years: the increased emphasis on the creation of intimate relationships between practitioners (Moberg 2013b, 45–49). The study introduces the birth of intimization and locates the tendency in the local Charismatic landscape, providing examples of how it is organized, materialized, ritualized, and understood. It also discusses how Charismatic norms and ideals inform and set limits to intimization. The phenomenon is discussed and analyzed in light of theories on late modern intimization, with particular emphasis on how this has unfolded on the national level. Furthermore, attention is paid to both national/regional processes, such as urbanization in Stockholm County, and influences from the international Charismatic milieu on the region in question. The main argument is that intimization in Sweden has taken the form of a strong current in the Charismatic churches, one that is characterized by particular practices and aesthetics. Like the *early* Pentecostal revival and the Jesus Movement of the late 1960s, the movement is carried by young Charismatics and is transorganizational; thus far, it has not spawned any distinct church structures.

The study draws upon ethnographic work in 16 congregations between the years 2009 and 2013, both Pentecostal and Neo-Charismatic.³ The material consists of field notes from observations and conversations with approximately 300 practitioners, interviews with pastors and churchgoers, and websites. The section on small group practice analyzes material collected at New Life Church, although visits to and conversations with members of other organizations indicate that the contents and orientation of the small groups is similar in most of the local congregations.

MODERNITY, INTIMACY, AND MOBILITY

Relationships between modernity, community, and interpersonal bonds have been addressed within various fields of research. In Pentecostal studies, scholars have attributed some of the success of Charismatic movements to their ability to re-embed mobile, modern urbanities into new communities (see Miller and Yamamori 2007, 22–23; Robbins 2010, 162–163;

cf. Martin 2002, 24). Others have taken interest in what can be described as an “intimate turn” in Neo-Charismatic churches like the Vineyard Movement, Calvary Chapel, Hope Chapel, and Hillsong Church. In this connection, Donald E. Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori have noted the rise of intimate displays such as hugs and the will to communicate one’s pain, flaws, and problems to others (Miller 1997, 13–18, 20–24; Miller and Yamamori 2007, 28; cf. Tangen 2008, 194–195).⁴ In a similar vein, Marie R. Griffith (1997, 137–138) and Kelly H. Chong (2011, 100) have observed how sharing emotions has become firmly integrated into healing practices in Charismatic-inclined organizations. Miller and Griffith, dealing with the United States context, also emphasize similar driving forces behind such developments. Miller (1997, 20–24; cf. Csordas 1997, 41–51) understands this as a response and adaptation to the therapeutic, individualistic, and antiestablishment values of the counterculture of the 1960s, whereas Griffith (1997, 33–39) underlines influence from the broader American therapeutic milieu and the “recovery movement.” These are doubtlessly important points. However, in order to conceptualize and theorize intimization in Stockholm, the discussion needs to be brought out of the North American context, and anchored both in broader changes in modern relationships, and in the particular way intimization has played out in late modern Sweden. The reasoning of Anthony Giddens, Eva Illouz, and Frank Furedi is helpful in this respect.

According to Giddens (2003, 59–65; cf. Furedi 2004; Illouz 2008) increased mobility is tightly interwoven with processes of detraditionalization, which have fundamentally altered and rearranged modern relationships and ideals surrounding them. In contrast to premodern cultures, in which they were interwoven with economic and social transactions, modernity has brought about “the pure relationship” (prevalent in friendships and marriages), disconnected from such bonds. Alternatively, this form of relationship is based on trust and disclosure of emotions, and upheld for the emotional and/or sexual gratification that it affords the involved parties. Giddens accounts for the connections between mobility and intimacy by referring to the emotion-based character of modern relationships, thus providing one of the theoretical perspectives informing this study. However, in order to analyze episodes like the one recounted above, Illouz’s and Furedi’s theories on a therapeutic shift in late modern self-understanding and communicative practice offer ways of finding cultural impulses. Illouz and Furedi propose that the West is undergoing therapeuticization, whereby psychological models of self-understanding spread to

other spheres of society. This process commenced during the 1960s (notably at the same time as Neo-Charismatic groups based in the United States emerged, featuring such elements) but has risen to prominence in recent years. Consequently, contemporaries are prone to interpret both their personal problems and those of others as the result of traumas, which can be solved by airing personal emotions and issues. In fact, revealing one's inner ("authentic") emotions to others has become an imperative, while keeping secrets is perceived to be potentially harmful (Furedi 2004, 17–19; Illouz 2008, 5). Discussing the advancement of therapeutization, Furedi suggests that it has influenced and further spread via new media, such as reality TV, in which people are expected to disclose the most private aspects of their lives to the viewers (2004, 66–72).

Inspired by the work of these scholars, I understand "intimacy" firstly as a phenomenon, real in the sense of being anchored in modernity's "pure relationship," which includes the venting of emotions as well as sexual and non-sexual embodied practices. Secondly, intimacy is understood and approached as an ideal, or a project, which late modern people, mainly in the West, aspire to in their own lives. Following Furedi and Illouz, I believe that the longing for intimate relationships has been further fueled by the late modern spread of therapy culture, which offers both ideals and models for how intimacy should be accomplished.

INTIMIZATION IN SWEDEN

It is hardly surprising that scholars have detected therapeutic tendencies in Neo-Charismatic groups in the United States, where the "therapeutic turn" surfaced as early as the 1960s and has since grown to be particularly predominant. The work of Illouz and Furedi also accounts for therapeutization by drawing heavily on examples from the United States. In this respect, it should be stressed that the cultural climate in the Nordic region differs from that of the United States; concerning intimate communications, Swedes (like their Nordic neighbors) have traditionally been seen as withdrawn and unwilling to express emotions (Frykman 1993, 224–232). There is, however, evidence that Sweden—and Finland, as illustrated by Hovi in her contribution to this volume—have undergone a major shift in intimate direction since the 1990s. Not only have informal and intimate gestures such as hugs replaced the formal handshake among younger generations; therapeutic discourses have spread as well. It is likely that popular culture has been a major factor in this regard, with American talk

shows such as *Oprah* and *Doctor Phil* having attracted large audiences since then. Indigenous remakes of international reality programs like *Paradise Hotel* and *Big Brother*, where participants' private lives and emotions are put on display, have also likely catalyzed the transformation.

In the new millennium, therapeutization has continued to influence government/state institutions, as well as various religious and secular milieus and organizations (Frisk and Åkerbäck 2015; Hornborg 2012). In a study from 2015, Liselotte Frisk and Peter Åkerbäck note the emergence and vitality of a large, alternative, holistic healing landscape. A few years earlier, the Swedish government had allocated large sums to state employment centers in order for them to employ "work coaches" that would help long-term unemployed Swedes to re-enter the work market. Many of these coaches had New Age ties and offered their clients what can be seen as religious-therapeutic solutions to their problems: teaching them to air their emotions and personal problems, or finding and tapping into the power of their inner potential and thereby finding a job (Hornborg 2012). Yet another fresh example indicating Sweden's intimization is the establishment of "hugging courses" in Stockholm and Gothenburg just a few years ago. These courses, named "Intimacy and Integrity" (Intimitet och integritet), offer the participants settings in which they learn to hug and verbally set and discuss limits concerning what forms of intimacy they are able to accept (Intimitet och integritet 2015).

AN OVERVIEW OF STOCKHOLM COUNTY

Stockholm County, which constitutes the economic hub of Sweden, is one of the fastest growing regions in Europe. The area is not only home to hug-friendly Charismatics. Together, the central capital, its suburbs, and neighboring cities count over 2 million inhabitants, making Stockholm County the most populous area in the Nordic countries. Among its main characteristics are high levels of technologization and vast mobility, as well as ethnic, religious, and cultural pluralism. Collectively in 2012, inhabitants born outside Sweden made up around 22 percent of the population (Statistiska centralbyrån 2013). Thus, a visitor is likely to encounter not only the Church of Sweden and various Free Church denominations (some Charismatic), but also different strands of Islam, Orthodox Christianity, as well as new religious movements and New Age spirituality. The influx of new people is not showing any signs of exhaustion. Aside from international migration, the county is undergoing rapid

urbanization, with many young people moving in from smaller cities in search of employment or education. Yet, despite increased overcrowding, Stockholm city stands out nationally and internationally with its high number of single households. As of 2014, 43 percent of Stockholm's population lived in single households (Statistiska centralbyrån 2015).

LOCAL CHARISMATIC ORGANIZATIONS

Charismatic Christianity has a hundred-year-old presence in the region, and the current scene offers a microcosmic view of its history of various movements. Many of the denominations have roots in the Pentecostal revival (*pingstväckelsen*) of the early twentieth century. The largest is the Pentecostal Alliance of Independent Churches, PAIC (Pingst: Fria församlingar i samverkan), which grew out of the 1913 exclusion of pentecostalized congregations in the "Baptist Union of Sweden" (Svenska baptistsamfundet). Having been expelled, they formed the network known as the "Pentecostal Movement" (Pingströrelsen), which slowly transformed into today's denomination. PAIC encompasses the large and historically important "Filadelfia Congregation" (Filadelfiaförsamlingen), "City Church" (Citykyrkan), as well as organizations in neighboring cities (Pingströrelsens årsbok 2013).⁵ Except for PAIC, there is the "pentecostalized" denomination Interact (Evangeliska frikyrkan), which is the result of the fusion of three nineteenth-century denominations that embraced the Pentecostal revival.⁶ Among its congregations are the "Söderhöjd Church" (Söderhöjdskyrkan), the "Elim Church" (Elimkyrkan) and the "Cross Church" (Korskyrkan) (Moberg 2015, 32–33).

Later movements and initiatives have also made their mark on the scene. The 1980s saw the establishment of the independent "Center Church" (Centrumkyrkan; Centrumkyrkan 2013), although the decade was otherwise dominated by the emerging Faith Movement, led by the Uppsala-based "Word of Life" (Livets ord). The new movement resulted in a network made up of, on the one hand, new organizations like Arken⁷ and, on the other, transformed Pentecostal churches like "Södermalm's Free Congregation" (Södermalms fria församling) that disaffiliated itself from the Pentecostal Movement (cf. Coleman 2000, 97–103).⁸ As pointed out by anthropologist Simon Coleman (2000, 55–65), Neo-Charismatic culture is remarkably global in many ways, and local churches often constitute nodes in international church networks. In this regard, the Swedish Faith Movement constitutes an early example of a trend that has since continued. In 1992, Vineyard Stockholm, part of the international Vineyard Movement,⁹ was

created, and the year after, New Life Church saw the light of day—an organization with connections to the Neo-Evangelical/Charismatic milieu in the United States (Moberg 2015, 32–33).

Global migration, as well as the initiatives of local entrepreneurs, continue to pluralize the new millennium’s landscape. Neo-Charismatic churches in particular are mushrooming, although many of them have short lifespans. The influx of Charismatic migrants from Latin America and from West and East Africa has been important in this respect (Malmström 2013, 75–78). Also significant for the increase of Charismatic bodies was the rise and fall of Karisma Center, a prosperity-inclined organization with megachurch ambitions that existed at the turn of the millennium. As it was dissolved due to bankruptcy in 2005, several of its pastors created their own churches. Two examples are Hillsong Church Stockholm (originally Passion Church) and “Peter Church” (Petruskyrkan). The latter, however, soon fused with United Stockholm (*Dagen* 2011). Other additions are SOS [Save Our Souls] Church, Yahwe’s Revival Center (previously “Power Source”, Kraftkällan) and Calvary Chapel Stockholm.

PATTERNS OF GROWTH AND DECLINE

We lack statistics on Charismatics in Stockholm County, since the majority have been counted as part of the total membership of the largest Free Church denominations. In 2010, Free Church members made up 1.3 percent of the population—a relatively low figure in comparison with other parts of Sweden (Skog 2010, 69–70). It should be kept in mind, though, that this includes both Charismatic and non-Charismatic denominations, but excludes independent Charismatic organizations, Lutheran and Catholic Charismatics, and network-based churches. At first glance, Charismatic Christianity appears to be growing after some decades of decline; figures from both PAIC and Interact show such growth (Lilja 2015). At the end of 2012, PAIC counted 12,457 members in the region (Pingströrelsens årsbok 2013, 46). The creation of new organizations also seems to support the growth thesis. However, the latter tend to draw members from existing organizations rather than attract new converts, and many are relatively short-lived—as illustrated by the fate of the Karisma Center and Peter Church. Also, the county per se is growing; between 1950 and 2012 the number of inhabitants doubled, and between 2000 and 2012 alone almost 300,000 people relocated to the county (Statistiska centralbyrån 2014). In other words, the number of Charismatics does not appear to be growing in terms of percentage of the whole population.

Although it is difficult to speculate in total numbers, it is possible to detect trends of growth and decline. The only suprastructure that seems to be losing affiliates as a whole is the Faith Movement network, otherwise growth and decline patterns cut across denominational boundaries. More important today are Charismatic groups' location and orientation. Firstly, it is possible to speak of a shift from organizations in the surrounding cities to Stockholm. The Filadelfia Congregation, City Church, and Södermalm Church exemplify this trend, and have all increased their membership in the course of the last few years, with a substantial number of the newcomers being immigrants.¹⁰ However, Neo-Charismatic organizations founded over the last 20 years seem to attract the most people. New Life Church presently counts around 400 members, and has also founded sister congregations in the area, and in other Swedish cities (New Life Church 2015). At the end of 2012, Hillsong Church Stockholm counted 1520 members, and in 2015, SOS Church estimated that it had around 600 (Pingströrelsens årsbok 2013; SOS Church 2015). Recent "church plants" United Stockholm and Calvary Chapel also appear to attract contemporaries. Even though they are still small, with around 30 members each, the numbers of casual attendees seems considerably higher.

THE MEMBERSHIP

Practitioners make up a mixed group in terms of class, age, and socioeconomic status, although female practitioners are slightly overrepresented across the Charismatic spectrum. The majority have also been raised in Charismatic organizations or in the broader Free Church environment. Even though people convert, converts still make up a minority; from what I have observed, conversion is also more common among residents with immigrant backgrounds than among ethnic Swedes. Regarding age, members of old Pentecostal congregations are (unsurprisingly) older, while the youngest are found in Neo-Charismatic churches. One influential category of people on the contemporary scene is that of young Charismatics who have moved in from smaller cities and the countryside; this group constitutes the backbone of many new and popular Neo-Charismatic organizations. On resettling, they tend to disregard their denominational background and join youthful organizations they find appealing, such as Hillsong Church, New Life Church, SOS Church or Calvary Chapel and United Stockholm (Moberg 2013a, 211; 2015). In sociological terms, the

developments in Stockholm follow larger urbanization patterns in Sweden as a whole, of which the “Charismatic urbanization” of Stockholm forms a part. In an international comparison, Charismatic Christianity and urbanization are hardly odd bedfellows. In Sweden, however, this form of Christianity has been far from an exclusively urban phenomenon. The Pentecostal Movement, for instance, has had a strong standing in smaller cities and rural regions as well as in the larger cities (see Alvarsson 2007, 341–344). On the national level, Charismatic urbanization obviously has the effect of draining small- and medium-sized cities of young Charismatics, which in turn concerns rural Charismatics (Dagen 2014).

It is also worth noting the attitudes to organization among today’s practitioners, particularly urbanized young Charismatics and immigrants. These groups are highly mobile, tend to disregard denominational boundaries and labels, and have a consumer-oriented approach to religiosity and affiliation; they visit, join, or drop out of churches depending on the churches’ ability to cater to their preferences and needs for the moment (Moberg 2013a, 187–188, 199–212).

INTIMIZATION: ORIGINS AND DISTRIBUTION IN THE FIELD

The first signs of intimization appeared in the 1990s. While the early intimizers were affiliated with international churches or milieus where similar features have been observed, the majority of these features were not instigated by foreign missionaries, but created on the initiative of locals and were later integrated into and adopted the names of those churches. One example is Vineyard Stockholm (and later Hillsong Church Stockholm), which was essential to intimization, particularly in terms of introducing interaction-friendly furnishing (see below). Another congregation that picked up and furthered the trend was the New Life Church, whose orientation in several ways is similar to that of Vineyard. Also indicating intimization in this decade was the choice of Evangeliska frikyrkan (literally “The Evangelical Free Church”) to take the official English designation Interact in 1997—which bears strong relational connotations. Yet, it would be anachronistic to speak of intimization as a current before the new millennium, when a new generation of Neo-Charismatic congregations—Hillsong Church, United Stockholm, SOS Church, and Calvary Chapel—adopted such elements, and older organizations began to move in that direction. It is worth noting that although intimization remains strong in new-millennium organizations, they neither materialize nor

embody the trend to the same extent, nor in the same ways. As explored later in this chapter, it is more prevalent at Calvary Chapel and Vineyard Church than at Hillsong Church and United Stockholm; the former host small-scale and interactive Sunday services, whereas the latter combine intimate features with Sunday services influenced by the Faith Movement.

Gaining strength as a current, intimate practices and therapeutic language have impregnated most Charismatic churches, and are visible in sermons, theology, slogans, activities, and practices. A contemporary visitor to a sermon in old Pentecostal Filadelfia may be informed that being a Christian is not only about being close to God, but about developing deep emotional relations to others. As I happened to pass by Södermalm Church one evening in 2014, I also noted a new emblem and the slogan “an open embrace for you” (*en öppen famn för dig*), covering one of its large windows. Most congregations have also begun to offer relationship courses and lectures, such as preparatory courses for engaged couples, where spouses to-be are offered tools with which to improve their communication skills. Such courses can currently be found in both new and old organizations. In the same vein, the Filadelfia Congregation recently launched a three-evening course in parenting teenagers (Filadelfiakyrkan 2015). Other forms of intimate arena and activity are also thriving across the field. The popular small-group meetings are the most important of these (i.e., gatherings at which members congregate in smaller numbers), and are vital to the cultivation of close relations. Although the small-group concept has a prehistory in Protestant revivalist settings, its present content is highly interaction-oriented and its purpose framed in intimate language. On Filadelfia’s website (2013), the small groups are described as venues where people share each other’s lives, discuss “the big questions” while growing—both in faith and as human beings—within the setting of a close community.

FURNISHINGS AS FACILITATION OF SMALL-SCALE COMMUNICATION

Religious cultures are not only embedded in ideas and language but anchored in the body and material culture. Taking an interest in early Pentecostal church buildings, Nils G. Holm (1978, 82) and Ulrik Josefsson (2007, 54) suggested an interpretation of the central placement of the pulpit as an indicator of the sermon’s central standing. In agreement with this interpretation, it is possible to see how intimization has brought about change to

Charismatic material culture, evident in new approaches to furnishing and decorating church venues. Such novelties not only signal the breakthrough of a new ideal of peer-to-peer communication, but also invite and bring about new patterns of interaction among visitors.

In the 1990s, Vineyard Stockholm introduced what can be referred to as “the coffee-table model.” Although the congregation kept a low stage at the front, the customary rows of seats were abandoned, and the floor dotted with small coffee tables surrounded by four to six chairs. This café-inspired setup divides the practitioners into smaller groups and situates them face to face. Soon thereafter, New Life Church adopted the same model. Visiting these two congregations today, it becomes apparent that they not only furnish with socializing in mind, but also set time aside for it. The service is usually divided into two parts intermediated by a coffee break, during which churchgoers are encouraged to chat over sandwiches or cinnamon rolls. To promote friendly chats, one of the leaders signals the start of this break from the stage, inviting visitors to take the opportunity to interact and get to know new people. On the one hand, such requests serve to establish the norm of participant-to-participant interaction while, on the other hand, they establish the temporal frame in which it is to occur. Going by the rather loud murmur of voices, the occasion is appreciated both by regulars and newcomers. As for the latter, the coffee-table model also serves a pedagogical purpose, introducing them to the peer-to-peer chats that occur in other contexts, such as the small groups.

Lately, communication-friendly furnishing has increased in popularity, and been adopted by older organizations like the Söderhöjd Church. As I visited this congregation, a female member in her mid-twenties recounted the congregation’s furnishing history: A few years back, the old pews had been declared outdated, and were at first replaced by more spacious lines of chairs. Shortly afterwards, the congregation rearranged the interior once again, bringing in the coffee tables. The woman, proudly pointing them out to me, explained that she found them more “contemporary and easy-going” than the “traditional rows.”

SOCIALIZING IN NEW AND COZY LOCATIONS

While small tables may add an informal, café-like atmosphere to any church, some twenty-first-century organizations have taken further steps in this direction. Calvary Chapel, United Stockholm, and Hillsong Church Stockholm rent semi-public venues such as nightclubs, theaters,

or actual cafés, which are then redecorated and turned into cozy and conversation-friendly sites. On visiting Calvary Chapel, I observed that the group resided in a rented locale consisting of a combined café and concert venue. Consequently, the furnishing—small tables surrounded by stuffed chairs and sofas—was already optimal, allowing visitors to chat and have coffee prior to and following the service. In order to further “cozy up” (*mysa till det*) the place, as a young male visitor told me, the organizers illuminated the otherwise rather dimly lit café with soft spotlights and candles.

Since its establishment, Hillsong Church Stockholm has rented music venues, a choice that reflects its strong emphasis on worship music. In 2009, it resided in Göta källare, a centrally located two-floor nightclub, with the bar and dance floor situated in the basement. In contrast to Calvary Chapel, where the whole service was held in the same interaction-friendly place, Hillsong divided the service into three parts, taking place in different rooms in the basement. In preparation, the innermost dance floor was sealed off from the bar section and turned into a softly illuminated café with sofas, where people drank coffee and mingled prior to the service. In this section, they could purchase Hillsong CDs and DVDs. The “inner room,” or the dance floor, was furnished like many Faith Movement churches: with lines of chairs placed before an elevated stage. After service, churchgoers reassembled in the outer, café-like space. A similar threefold spatial-temporal division was applied by United Stockholm, which rented the theatre Teaterstudio Lederman. Utilizing the existing interior—an outer, café-like foyer, consisting of several small rooms, and an inner room where the theatre stage was located—the foyer was used for mingling and interaction before and after the service. The latter activities took place in the inner room. Adding to the already cozy atmosphere—enhanced with red-painted walls and soft lighting—the foyer was decorated with candles and flowers, and the regulars offered and served visitors non-alcoholic drinks. Upon being asked about their choice of venue, the organizers drew upon a rhetoric of evangelization, explaining that they wanted potential converts to see that they were not “a bunch of stiff and boring Christians,” by offering informal and intimate communication in a cozy “low-threshold” setting.

HUGGING THE FAITHFUL

As pointed out by Daniel E. Albrecht (1999) and Martin Lindhardt (2011), ritualized action is part and parcel of Charismatic identity, visible in practices like prayer with the laying on of hands, glossolalia, or Neo-

Charismatic worship. Historically, one form of ritualized action has been especially significant as an identity marker within the Swedish Pentecostal Movement: “Peace greetings” are a form of greeting where a firm handshake is combined with the phrase “peace” or “peace brother/sister,” and was at one time central to signaling Pentecostal affiliation.¹¹ Today, elderly Pentecostals still use this greeting, although middle-aged practitioners from various Charismatic orientations usually do not. As for intimization, the movement has ritualized a new practice involving physical interaction, one which would otherwise be considered informal and mundane: the hug. Over the last 15–20 years, this gesture has gained a prominent position in many congregations and churches during greetings, as well as in connection with sharing and prayer. Being most common in the organizations founded in the 1990s and the new millennium, the hugging trend has spread to Faith Movement and Pentecostal churches as well. To a large extent, it follows generational lines, with younger Charismatics being more frequent “huggers,” not unlike their secular counterparts.

Looking more closely at the practice, the Charismatic hug is obviously similar to its mainstream sibling, but has, nevertheless, a few distinct traits. Observing a “secular” hug involving two friends, their faces usually light up with smiles, their eyes widen somewhat and they look into each other’s eyes for a short moment. They proceed by embracing each other, using either both arms or the less intimate “shoulder-to-shoulder” variety of hug. In the Charismatic milieu, all of these features are enhanced, particularly facial expressions. Upon spotting each other, practitioners look extraordinarily happy; smiles are broader and eye contact more extensive. Regarding gender, there are also a few differences worth mentioning. Women tend to smile, hug, and touch each other more frequently and more extensively than men. Female embraces also tend to last longer and include both arms, while men hug for shorter periods of time and tend to settle for the “shoulder-to-shoulder” hug.¹² To some extent hugging, especially outside the greeting situation, follows gender lines, with men hugging men and women hugging women, a topic to which I will return.

MINI-COMMUNITIES WITHIN CONGREGATIONS

During the last 20 years, small group gatherings led by lay persons have become popular as complementary to Sunday services. The groups, which go under different names (house groups, small groups, cell groups, city groups, or connect-groups), can be found basically everywhere, and

participation is more or less mandatory; members are expected to be part of one, and those who do not attend on a regular basis are reminded by their peers. Usually, they contain 8–15 participants, who gather for an evening during the working week to socialize and lean on each other for emotional support. In terms of content, sharing a meal, praying, presenting testimonies, and prayer requests are steady components, whereas Bible reading and lay sermons occur less frequently, contrary to what one might assume.

Even though similar groups have been studied in international Charismatic settings (Chong 2011; Griffith 1997; Hovi 2011; Tangen 2008) the phenomenon is not unique to this religious tradition; on the contrary, it has been observed in various religious and semi-religious settings in different parts of the Western world. Danièle Hervieu-Léger (1993) and Robert Wuthnow (1996), discussing declining membership rates in old churches and denominations, have called attention to this thriving new form of community. Wuthnow (1996, 52) notes its presence in New Age circles, and in Charismatic and Evangelical milieus. The impetus for joining them is “the desire for intimacy, support, sharing and other forms of community,” which participants find to be lacking in their lives. The small groups in this study are doubtless part of this larger trend, and as suggested by Hervieu-Léger and Wuthnow, they are vital fora for the cultivation of close and intimate bonds.

INTERACTING IN AND REVEALING THE PRIVATE SPHERE

Gatherings usually take place in members’ homes, sometimes in accordance with a rotating schedule. Evidently, this setting, which is already associated with close and informal relations, provides the meeting with a casual and intimate frame. However, since people rarely design their homes with this type of gathering in mind, adjustments are made to optimize interaction. Before starting, the host and early arrivals often rearrange a living room containing sofas and armchairs by bringing in additional chairs and cushions from other parts of the home. These are placed so as to form a circle, enabling eye contact in the same manner as the coffee tables do. While this home-framing and redecoration invites the cultivation of intimacy, hosting meetings may also be said to constitute intimization by means of disclosure, although not in the “therapeutic” sense. The very act of welcoming others into one’s home, offering them food and soft drinks, implies putting one’s private life on display, revealing preferences in aesthetics, music, food, literature, and so forth. In case the

host is married, the visitors also have the opportunity to meet, and probably interact with the spouse, and perhaps the children as well. Since all members are expected to host meetings at some point, all participants are committed to revealing themselves in this way.

PRAYER REQUESTS AS SHARING

In a study of female Neo-Charismatics in the American organization Women's Aglow, Griffith (1997, 137–138) proposes that revealing oneself to others through sharing secrets is central to cultivating closeness. The small groups in Stockholm County serve a similar purpose, whereby the airing of emotions, thoughts, and secrets allows participants to get to know each other's struggles rather early. In comparison with how the sharing secrets usually takes place, requiring that the speaker knows the listeners and has established trust in them, sharing in the small groups bypasses the often lengthy process through which trust is established, and gets "right to the point."

In Stockholm, the practice of sharing has been introduced into, and fused with, the Charismatic speech genres of prayer requests and testimonies; it also so happens that members use "sharing" as a term that includes and refers to those practices. In the small groups, sharing often takes the form of prayer requests, presented at the beginning and prayed over at the end. The participants normally stand or sit in a circle facing each other, encouraged by the leader to present a topic they want others to pray for. The leaders' actions are crucial to creating a comfortable and sharing-friendly environment. He or she often takes the initiative by calling upon others to "put their problems and fears on the table," assuring them that they are among friends and that the topics brought up will stay in the room. Occasionally, the leader adds that keeping secrets from one another, and from God, is potentially harmful, underlining that sharing is part of the process of surrendering to and getting closer to God: a central revivalist motif. Such statements not only frame the practice theologically, but also put pressure on members to "speak out," implying that reluctance to do so presents an obstacle on the path of serving God.¹³ Themes are sometimes presented spontaneously, but usually, the members take turns presenting a topic. Following the norm, they highlight a troublesome issue, and express their concerns, then a wish that the others pray for God's intervention. Afterwards, the leader normally thanks each person, while the others offer emotional support in the form of a tap on the shoulder, a warm hug, a sympathetic word, or an assurance that they will continue to pray over the topic.

LIMITS TO DISCLOSURE

My observations revealed that frequently broached topics concerned troublesome relationships, work-related problems, and health issues. Many of them also reflected the difficulties of young urban people, including problems in securing an apartment or a job, or passing a school examination. In accordance with the rhetoric surrounding the gatherings, participation allows the involved parties to air their most personal issues. During interviews, participants often expressed deep appreciation for the gatherings, where they could “tell each other everything.” From the perspective of an outsider, there were nevertheless rules regulating what could and could not be shared, setting boundaries for intimization (cf. Griffith 1997, 125–126). As one might expect, rules were internalized by regulars, and questions of what could or could not be said were never explicitly raised. Some were no different from rules in any other social context. Others appeared to be rooted in particular Charismatic notions and ideals. For instance, dislike of other members in the congregation was never aired. Also, it seemed more of a general rule not to bring up problems between Charismatics. The unwillingness to touch these matters is likely the result of the inherent belief that those who had submitted their lives to Jesus were expected to have good relations, especially with fellow congregants. Breaking this social taboo would not only result in worsening conflicts, but to call that image into question. Moreover, the state of one’s relationships was often described as an indicator of one’s spiritual state. Love, affection, and patience were often portrayed as qualities given by the Holy Spirit, and to publicly highlight conflicts and anger risked reflecting badly on the person who raised such matters.

Some issues were also considered too sensitive to bring up in the small group context, limiting these groups’ function as venues for communicating the most intimate concerns. Among them were experiences of abuse, including sexual abuse. Practitioners who had such problems normally addressed them in even more confidential exchanges, either in pastoral care (*själavård*) or with a close friend within the congregation—generally a member of the same small group. The latter in fact indicates that the “mini-communities” also serve as greenhouses for the cultivation of more intimate friendships that enable members to discuss topics that are too delicate for the small group setting.

RITUALIZED INTIMACY AND THE FEAR OF EROTICIZATION

Although cultivation of closeness is a central mission to many Charismatics today, other motivations are occasionally at odds with it. It hardly comes as a surprise that this form of Christianity involves various forms of self-discipline. The people with whom I interacted carefully sought to manage their sexual behavior and impulses, and to uphold norms concerning proper relationships between men and women. Such norms regulated who they could be closely involved with, drawing boundaries for and gendering intimacy. Even though some forms of physical and emotional interaction were encouraged and understood as positive and “godly intimacy,” there were nevertheless worries that this could lead to the opposite: the formation of improper sexual intimacy. Such worries were typically articulated by young and unmarried Charismatics, who shared the standpoint that sexual relationships prior to and outside of heterosexual marriage were sinful, and who strived to stay chaste until having married a Christian partner. Maintaining sexual purity involved different forms of self-control. Many were concerned about their (unwanted) sexual desires and spoke lengthily about the methods they employed to rid themselves of them. For example, they would seek the company of supportive, like-minded people, pray regularly, avoid visual sexual stimuli (ads featuring semi-nudity, certain TV programs, etc.) and, importantly, restrain themselves from becoming emotionally involved with people they might feel attracted to. Since the Charismatic scene is strongly heteronormative, meaning that people are expected to be heterosexual, it was mainly interaction between men and women that was considered problematic in this respect. I have already accounted for the gendered hugging patterns, whereby most hugs were exchanged between Charismatics of the same sex. In a similar vein, many restrained themselves from becoming close friends with people of the opposite sex; a few women explained that they avoided meeting male congregants alone outside of church, since “troublesome” situations may arise. In some cases, even the setting of the church did not suffice; I was informed, and warned about, “men who go to church to flirt.” Yet, physical gender-crossing interaction that took place in church was evidently perceived to be less problematic than informal “hanging out” outside of church activities.

One reason why certain activities were regarded as harmless whereas others were seen as threatening can be detected in their ritualization. Several scholars studying ritual have noted how the prestipulated character

of ritualized action permits people to interact in otherwise impossible ways. Catherine Bell (1997, 81), who argues for a wide definition of ritual, including all forms of “ritualized” action, suggests that such action is comprised of strategic ways of allowing the involved actors to achieve aims that would be unthinkable in a nonritualized context. From Bell’s perspective, both hugs and intercession include ritualized action, being prestipulated and formalized; one knows what to anticipate and when. Moreover, they are social acts everyone is expected to participate in. One cannot turn down a hug or a friendly invitation to be prayed over. In the Charismatic milieu, ritualization evidently plays a vital role in rendering potentially threatening physical interaction harmless, turning it into the desired form of “godly intimacy.” Another feature that should not be underestimated is that hugs and prayers in a church setting are collective events at which participants socially monitor each other.

If ritualization establishes the special nature of certain forms of physical intimacy, the narrative portraying such action as an aspect of meeting and serving God further underscores its uniqueness. Yet, it would be wrong to consider these approaches airtight, since congregants nonetheless expressed doubts about others’ motives for engaging physically, even during “holy hugs” and prayer. The topic however, was highly sensitive, and I never heard it openly discussed in a collective forum; it only came up during interviews and informal conversations between members. One male New Life Church member, while viewing physical contact as good and natural, brought up the possibility that psychologically “damaged” people might take it as an opportunity to clandestinely obtain sexual gratification. Adding that he has had such suspicions while being hugged for “too long,” he assured me that none of the members in his present small group seemed to have such “impure” intentions.

MEETING JESUS AND RESTORING NATURAL COMMUNITY

Therapeutic discourses, underlining the need for emotional communication, have also become intertwined with older Charismatic narratives and self-understanding. One theme that resurfaced in sermons and informal conversations across the Charismatic field was that of fellowship (*gemenskap*), often articulated in the trope: “being a Christian is all about relationships, with God and with people.” In this rhetoric, the tight bonds which were seen to exist between “brothers and sisters in Christ,” especially members of the same small groups, contrasted with the brokenness

and isolation believed to exist among secular people and those of other faiths—both on a societal and an individual level. In several sermons, non-Christians were described as alienated from an original and natural way of life that would allow them to be in touch with their emotions, and be integrated into a community where these could be communicated. In such accounts, reference was often made to the regional context. In the Filadelfia Congregation and New Life Church, Stockholm was depicted as a city that was “broken” not only because of sin, but also because people lived isolated lives and had no one to turn to for support, which was seen as a major cause of contemporary depression. Loneliness was often connected to secularization, in the course of which Stockholmers (and Swedes in general) had become deeply lonely and removed “hyper-individualists” without a sense of caring for and interacting with others. Several pastors pointed out the central island Kungsholmen, labelling it “the loneliest island in the world”—a reference to its exceptionally high percentage of single households, a phenomenon seen here as a sign of loneliness. By the same token, many Charismatics proposed that non-Christians attempted to substitute meaningful human contact with drinking, overeating, “empty” sexual affairs, and the like. Becoming a Charismatic Christian and a members of a congregation was accordingly presented as a way of healing an unnatural separation from God by accepting Jesus, as well as breaking social isolation by returning to the close, emotional communities God had intended.

DISCLOSURE, HEALING, AND CONVERSION

Late modern ideals such as the unfolding of the authentic inner self and psychological models of interpretation have also merged with Charismatic conversion, miracle, and healing narratives. Hence, submission to God, combined with emotional communication, was presented as the method for overcoming emotional problems and living authentic lives. Accepting the idea that people are broken because of previous relationship traumas, leaders and practitioners presented conversion and embedment in a close-knit Christian community as the solution. Central to this rhetoric was that secular Swedes deny their true feelings and pretend everything is fine since they lack a place in which to air their problems, which only adds to their distress. It was often pointed out that it was impossible to overcome trauma via secular therapies, since they were incapable of addressing a primary cause of human discontent: alienation from God. Drawing upon

the theme of conversion, pastors and members explained that the one way to surmount such problems was submitting one's life to God, who would initiate a process that would heal emotional wounds and make people whole. Hence, secular people, regardless of personal success, would never know true happiness but always experience a sense of inner emptiness.

Apart from God's ability to work miracles, sharing among Christians was ascribed a central role in restoring and healing the individual. Becoming, and living as, a Charismatic meant no longer pretending that everything was fine, and openly admitting one's brokenness—to God, oneself, and fellow Charismatics. This was sometimes communicated in connection with sharing in the small groups. In New Life Church, one leader initiated meetings by telling the participants that it was time to "take off their masks," signaling both that people wore such masks in everyday life, and that they had come to a place that offered them the opportunity to take them off and reveal their "authentic" selves. Additionally, bonds cultivated through sharing were often seen as the work of the Holy Spirit, and stories about intimacy and disclosure were given a Charismatic twist; because the parties involved had accepted Jesus and therefore were "inhabited by the same Spirit," they were able to develop a deeper and closer form of intimacy than non-Christians.

A MOVEMENT BORN OF A MOBILE DOCTOR PHIL GENERATION

Charismatic intimization in Stockholm is part of a broader Western cultural turn. Influences from global Neo-Charismatic networks, where intimate and informal features have been observed, have also been vital for fueling the current in Sweden, as illustrated by early intimizer Vineyard Stockholm. Yet, Charismatic intimization also mirrors the particular way in which Sweden has been intimized. In contrast to the United States, where churches like Vineyard and Calvary Chapel were created as early as the 1960s and 1970s, they did not appear in Stockholm until thirty years later. One important reason for this comparatively late introduction is that intimization in Sweden did not take root until the 1990s, meaning that there was no fertile soil for Charismatic enterprises of this kind prior to that time.

It is significant that both Vineyard Stockholm and New Life Church were founded in the very same decade in which Sweden saw the breakthrough of international therapy TV like *Doctor Phil*, and docusoaps, making these early features of Swedish intimization. The strengthening of the intimization current in the new millennium also mirrors Sweden's growing

intimization, visible in the trend's spread to new societal spheres and institutions (see Hornborg 2012, 11–14). Looking at the membership of organizations that have furthered it in the twenty-first century, they are dominated by socialized Charismatics between 18 and 35; that is, they belong to the first Swedish generations brought up in a society saturated with therapeutic TV shows, ideals, and practices. This has evidently informed their religious preferences and choices. It is also possible to see how intimization has been fueled by mobility on the national level, with a substantial number of the members having relocated from smaller cities to Stockholm County as adults. Employing Giddens' terminology (2003) their "uprooting" in combination with the wider cultural turn seems to have further fueled their longings for intimacy and their seeking of communities of like-minded others, with whom they might develop new emotional ties. As illustrated, practices like sharing allow participants to form such bonds quickly. Uprooting also seems to have contributed to the creation of new Charismatic theology and norms. The dichotomization of the warm "Christian communities" on the one hand, and "lonely Stockholm" on the other, does appear to reflect the experiences of newcomers with few contacts with the native population. In conclusion, contemporary intimization is rooted in a wider therapeutic shift in Sweden, as well as in Charismatic urbanization. It has its institutional base in young Charismatic churches that offer solutions to the uprooting and contemporary longings of a mobile "Doctor Phil generation."

While intimization of older Charismatic organizations is part of the same trend, I believe it is fruitful to view it in light of the current mobility within the local Charismatic landscape. It is well known among pastors and churchgoers that younger Charismatics in particular visit, leave, and affiliate with organizations depending on their current needs and preferences. For older churches, particularly those with aging memberships, this has become a challenge; in order for them to thrive, or even survive, they depend on the interest and commitment of new generations. Speaking with middle-aged and elderly practitioners in some of the older churches, many expressed fear that "the young" would find "their" organizations boring and leave in pursuit of more youthful organizations. Against this backdrop, the introduction of Neo-Charismatic novelties like worship music and contemporary instruments in Pentecostal churches (often at the expense of the older psalms), and the creation of specific youth services, as well as therapeutic language and relation-building practices, are all means for securing continued engagement. It is telling that none of the relation-building courses are designed for the stable elderly membership (who are

probably not interested in them either), but for those who belong to and have the opportunity to raise future generations; that is, congregants who are about to marry, and the parents of teenagers. These novelties are not always welcomed by elderly members. Visiting the Filadelfia Congregation a few years back, I observed a neatly dressed lady between 70 and 80 demonstratively covering her ears during the loud electric guitar solo that was part of the weekly worship. Interestingly, as social anthropologist Jan-Åke Alvarsson continues to discuss in the next chapter, old Pentecostals' disappointment with current developments in the churches may in turn give rise to further innovation.

CONCLUSIONS

I have proposed that Charismatic Stockholm has seen the birth of intimization, visible in the creation of communication-friendly environments, and the use of therapeutic language and new forms of ritualization and practice. Intimization took off in the 1990s with the establishment of Vineyard Stockholm and New Life Church, but did not gain significant strength as a current until the new millennium, when it was furthered by Hillsong Church, United Stockholm, and Calvary Chapel, and started spreading to older Charismatic organizations. Charismatic intimization in Sweden is part of a Western late modern cultural shift, and has developed parallel to overall intimization, which began at the same time, and is possible to detect in the wider Swedish context. For the most part, Charismatic intimization is carried forward by younger socialized individuals who have grown up in an intimized nation, many of whom have moved to the Stockholm region from smaller cities as adults, and lack social networks in the new setting. However, the current is also shaped by the tradition where it has taken root, and the forms of intimacy enacted by the Charismatics differ in some respects from intimate practices in other religious and secular settings, or those broadcast on TV. In particular, sexual norms and chastity training undertaken by practitioners engender intimization, informing them of who they may develop close relationships with. Moreover, the possibility of attaining aims such as becoming free of emotional trauma and finding one's authentic self have fused with Charismatic theology and been given a particular twist: this means that they are obtainable only in Charismatic settings, since they depend upon submission to God and intimate communication between practitioners "inhabited by the same Spirit."

NOTES

1. I have borrowed the term “holy hug” from anthropologist Thomas Csordas (1997, 69) who used it to describe ritual practice among charismatic Catholics in the United States.
2. Exceptions are Tuija Hovi’s (2010) studies of Neo-Charismatics in Finland and the work of Karl Inge Tangen (2008).
3. This chapter draws upon the classifications and terminology laid out in the introductory chapter. The congregations in question are: Arken, Calvary Chapel Stockholm, Centrumkyrkan, Citykyrkan, Korskyrkan, Hillsong Church Stockholm, Maranataförsamlingen i Stockholm (tent meeting), New Life Church, Filadelfiakyrkan, SOS Church, Kraftkällan, Söderhöjdskyrkan, Södermalmskyrkan, Tomaskyrkan, United Stockholm, and Vineyard Stockholm.
4. Donald E. Miller does not use the term Neo-Charismatic, but refers to Calvary Chapel, Vineyard Church, and Hope Chapel as “New Paradigm Churches.”
5. Pingst: Fria församlingar i samverkan was instituted as a “national organization” (*riksförening*) in 2001, and decided to keep the name when it became a registered denomination in 2004 (Pingströrelsens årsbok 2013, 40).
6. The new denomination initially took the name “The New Building” (Nybygget), but soon changed it to Evangeliska frikyrkan.
7. The Swedish name Arken has an ambiguous meaning, and is possible to translate either into “The Ark” or “The Arch,” both of which have biblical connotations. For this reason, the church is referred to by its Swedish name.
8. A few years ago it returned to PAIC.
9. “Nordic Vineyard” (Vineyard Norden) is not only part of the international Vineyard Movement, but also a registered denomination in Sweden.
10. This estimation is based on knowledge about known congregations—a study of underground churches might point in another direction.
11. Conducting fieldwork, I encountered several Neo-Charismatics with Pentecostal family backgrounds who reported that their Pentecostal grandparents had warned them that unless they used the “proper” peace greeting rather than a “good day” or an informal “hi,” common in the majority culture, they would go to Hell.
12. The latter, chaster hug has sometimes been referred to by Charismatics and Evangelicals as “the Christian side hug.”
13. On a few rare occasions, new members did object to such an interpretation, or questioned the need for them to “open up” to strangers so quickly. Such critique, however, was never uttered in the sharing context, but broached afterwards.

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