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A RECIPE FOR SUCCESS IN THE 'ENGLISH WORLD': AN INVESTIGATION OF THE
EX-AMISH IN MAINSTREAM SOCIETY

by

Jessica R. Sullivan

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Sociology
Western Michigan University
December 2018

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Jessica R. Sullivan

RECIPE FOR SUCCESS IN THE 'ENGLISH WORLD': AN INVESTIGATION OF THE EX-AMISH IN MAINSTREAM SOCIETY

Jessica R. Sullivan, Ph.D.

Western Michigan University, 2018

As a largely understudied and misunderstood religious group, the Amish appear to be a relic of more traditional times. Because they are a secluded group with little influence from the outside world, they remain relatively untouched by technology and social media. This results in a strict, fundamentalist church community with extremely high rates of retention. Distancing themselves from outsiders and temptations in the English world aids in retaining strong church boundaries, and results in a population that doubles every 20 years (Kaufmann 2010). Acknowledging these aspects, this research delves into the lives of those who have defected from the church in which they were raised, often giving up all that they know.

Through 25 semi-structured, qualitative interviews with 14 men and 11 women, this study looks at the following research questions:

- (1) How does an Amish person make the transition to becoming ex-Amish?
- (2) What factors were involved in the participant's decision to leave Amish culture?
- (3) What has life been like since leaving?

The participants ranged in age from 25 to 78 years and came from various communities across the United States, with different levels of *Ordnung* (i.e., Amish rules and regulations). Using the principles of constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz 2014), the data were analyzed using emergent and overarching themes.

The analysis chapters are broken down into three main areas relating to the participants' exits. First, the traditional retention factors that previous research deemed useful were analyzed

for existing relevancy. Not surprising, the data suggests that these factors, like birth order, boundaries with the outside world, gender, education, and baptism, are in fact more complicated than they appeared 20 years ago. Further, the findings point to relationships with others while leaving, the age the participant is when leaving, and how long they are out of the community as fundamental influences when defecting from the Amish. The second theme explored here relates to the participants' rationales for leaving. Using Bromley's (1998) contested exits (i.e., defectors, whistleblowers, and apostates) and Mauss's (1969) breakdown of defectors (i.e., intellectual, social, emotional, religious, cultural, psychological, alienated, total, and circumstantial), it becomes evident that when a participant exits quickly they do not necessarily have the time to weigh the alternatives or test out new roles, as more recent research on becoming an ex suggests (Ebaugh 1988; Smith 2011). As a result, this more detailed analysis was needed.

The final theme that emerged involved the difficulties the participants encountered when adjusting to their new world. As one could imagine, there were issues of culture shock when it came to meeting or dating new people or trying new things. Even more subtle challenges were identified, however. Being secluded for most of their lives until the point they defected, many of the participants had difficulties with more common tasks, like finding a job, going to school, getting an apartment or even a driver's license. These issues and others made life in the English world more difficult, especially when compared to those who had left other religions. This study concludes with a discussion of the findings (briefly highlighted here), methodological issues and limitations, theoretical implications and the contributions of this study.

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CHAPTER ONE

RESEARCH INTERESTS AND AMISH CULTURE

Meandering through the country in a black buggy with their hair covered by either a bonnet or a brimmed hat and several children in tow, many traditional Amish offer what seems to be a stereotypical picture into the past—something maybe our great grandparents once did. While this is true in some sense, being Amish is a total and complete way of life in many aspects. The Amish faith is not something that is taught through Sunday church services, but rather something that is learned through everyday practice from one's start of life. In this way, being Amish is about much more than faith; it is about culture (Hostetler 1993). Those who leave it, leave much more than a spiritual community. They lose much of what they know about family, community, education (often only through 8th grade), support networks, traditional gender roles in a patriarchal society, contact with the "English" (Amish reference to mainstream society) world, as well as their spiritual belief system (Hostetler 1993; Kraybill 1993; Meyers 1993; Stevick 2007). Such is the objective of this dissertation—an examination of the process and experience of leaving the Amish faith.

While research on the Amish has been scarce in the last few decades, reality television shows, like *Breaking Amish*, *Amish Out of Order*, *Amish Mafia*, and *Amish in the City*, have abounded. Allegedly focused on the plight of the ex-Amish, such programs offer a slight glimpse of reality, but are predominantly embellished for rating purposes. The Amish are a very private and purposely sequestered culture that is difficult to access for scholarly (or any other) purposes.

It is challenging to even estimate how many Amish or ex-Amish there are in the United States, as they do not generally participate in the Census or have Social Security numbers (Kraybill 1993).

The Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies (2014) estimates, by looking at settlements (families living close together in a nearby area) and districts (congregations or individual church communities which share the same beliefs and rules), that the U.S. Amish population is just shy of 250,000. At best guess, approximately 10 percent of those that leave the Amish community remain an ex, or remain outside of the Amish faith, either by choice or exclusion, while the other 90 percent return to their communities. Those who do leave and remain gone will always be seen as an ex, although as this research shows, individuals have different stories linked to the communities they are from and how their families responded to their departure. As such, the ex-Amish provide an excellent example of a group of people who go from an extremely secluded life, where family and faith are the cornerstones to daily living, to a life in the English world where, in many cases, they lose all contact with their friends and family and must begin anew. They comprise a relatively uncultivated subject for scholarly research, given the difficulty of accessing the Amish and, by extension, the ex-Amish.

The process of leaving a group or role with which one has long been affiliated is a common experience, to be sure. However, defection from the Amish faith is quite extreme given its totality and irrevocable nature. Unless willing to come back to the culture and be baptized, or be held accountable and make a public confession for transgressions, those who leave remain unwelcomed or shunned. I had a unique opportunity, through years of building connections with the Amish and ex-Amish, to examine the lives of those who are disenfranchised from the Amish culture through exploratory qualitative research. Rich data emerged with regard to why leaving such closed groups like the Amish has such dramatic impacts (i.e., new resolve of a place in

heaven, despite Amish belief that this is no longer an option). So little is known about the Amish, and especially the ex-Amish, it was important to begin by asking broad, open-ended questions about their perspectives, understandings, and experiences so as to add to our theoretical understanding of becoming an ex. This research addresses the following broad questions: (1) How does an Amish person make the transition to becoming ex-Amish? (2) What factors are involved in decisions to leave Amish culture? And (3) What is life like since leaving?

I addressed these questions through 25 semi-structured (in-person, telephone, and Skype) interviews with individuals who have left the Amish faith. As such, I also augmented the methodological literature surrounding qualitative interviewing, for which an understanding and utility of telephone and video-conferencing is lacking (Sullivan 2012; Trier-Bienienk 2012). Mimicking face-to-face interactions, video-conference interviewing (such as that available via Skype) provides many benefits including increased ease of transcribing, the ability to capture video recorded interactions (e.g., being able to go back to the scene to re-watch for background and facial expressions), and sampling without the worry of geography (Sullivan 2012).

This research offers critical and theoretically informed insight into the process of becoming an ex and how individuals, coming out of a tightly closed community, negotiate this process (Caplovitz and Sherrow 1977; Ebaugh 1988; Smith 2011). It also adds to the nuance and complexity of the role-exiting and defection processes under a most extreme set of circumstances (Bromley 1998; Mauss 1969). The participants of this study have put a lot on the line, not only in terms of their faith, but also in regard to their sense of self and relationship to others. As a misunderstood and understudied population, the Amish, and by extension the ex-Amish, face a unique set of circumstances in comparison to the rest of American society. To appreciate these circumstances, in this chapter I will begin with an explanation of what it means to be Amish.

Exploring Amish culture in detail will provide a conceptual backdrop for understanding the role of religion and its influence on various aspects of daily life, much of which contributes to the awe and mystery surrounding these “plain folk” (an alternative reference to their unassuming appearance of plain clothing which is handmade from solid and subdued colored material) (Nolt and Meyers 2007). This includes a review of the religious persecution the early Amish suffered and their eventual exodus to America. Also important here is a consideration of the divisions that have taken place throughout the Anabaptist (or adult baptizers) faiths, over controversial issues of the time, which are responsible for the separations of the Amish and Mennonites today.

From here, I will discuss contemporary Amish faith and culture in greater detail. As a distinct culture, the Amish are perceived as contradictory and sometimes complicated. Often this results from a lack understanding that each Amish community is slightly different than the others, or drastically different in some cases. The *Ordnung*, or rules and regulations in Amish communities, can and do vary from one community to the next for more visible events or material objects like the order of baptism and dating, the color of shirts or dresses people in the community should wear, or how high the men’s hats should be (Kraybill 2001; Kraybill, Nolt, and Weaver-Zercher 2010; Nolt and Meyer 2007; Stevick 2007). Important milestones in the life of an Amish person include their education, *Rumspringa* (in German literally means “running around”), the decision to join the Amish church or not, adult baptism into the faith if they decide to join, and marriage in the church. All of these are significant influences, as discussed below in this chapter, concerning the ex-Amish’s decisions to leave.

Following the discussion of Amish history and culture, chapter two covers the conceptual framework for this dissertation, beginning with literature concerning resistance to and insulation from the outside world. This is followed by a discussion of the sociology of religion and how

particular research and theories (i.e., apostates, religious switching, fundamentalism) help to explain the resilience of the Amish faith and why leaving may in fact be so difficult. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of stigma, identity management, and the self (Goffman 1959, 1961, 1963; Irvine 2000), as well as previous research on becoming an ex (Caplovitz and Sherrow 1977; Ebaugh 1988; Smith 2011) and defection (Bromley 1998; Mauss 1969), which were used as the theoretical building blocks of this research.

The methods used for this research are reviewed in detail in chapter three. Using feminist standpoint theory (here involving asking participants for their interpretations and meanings of events or circumstances in their everyday lives) in addition to constructionist grounded theory (allows themes/codes to emerge from the data rather than imposing preconceived ideas or theories on the data), the theoretical position of this research is discussed. Additionally, chapter three contains information on the sample, interviewing procedures, data analysis, and other methodological issues.

Chapters four, five, and six relate to data analysis. In chapter four I address the influence of traditional retention factors (as delineated in chapter one), including birth order, contact with the outside world, gender, education, and baptism. This discussion includes details regarding these demographic factors' influence on the participants and their defection from the Amish church. Additional impacts include family support, the age of the participant when they left, and how long they have been out in the English world.

Chapter five explores the participants' contested role exits or their defection from their Amish community and identity. Mauss's (1969) intellectual, social, spiritual, and emotional dimensions provide the framework used to analyze the narratives from the participants. As will

become evident, there are many reasons to leave the Amish church. For these participants, such rationales were salient enough to justify life-changing decisions about their futures.

Chapter six concludes the analysis section with a discussion of how the participants have adjusted to the English world. Here I address some of the difficulties in being an ex such as the experience of shunning and other religious concerns, as well as navigating the English world. There is a focus on the participants' relationships with others, financial concerns, along with religious and other cultural issues. Also included is a brief synopsis of where the participants are today in terms of employment, education, and family relationships.

Chapter seven concludes the dissertation with a summary of the research, including a discussion of the pertinent findings from data analysis. The methodological issues and limitations of the research are also discussed, as well as the theoretical implications and the contributions to the academic discourse. First though, Amish history is explored to gain greater insight about the culture that the participants are leaving.

Amish History

The Amish are Protestant Christians who emerged out of the leadership of Jakob Ammann, after whom the church was named, in 1693 (Kraybill et al. 2013). The Amish faith has its origins in 16th century Europe, as a branch of the Swiss and German Anabaptists (Hostetler 1993; Kraybill et al. 2013). It is a long history riddled with religious persecution, which remains instrumental throughout the Amish faith. Although there might be little time or interest in seeking more knowledge about the Anabaptist martyrs outside of church services (they are often reminded of their tumultuous history through hymns and sermons), relaying the historical

persecution of the Amish in Europe is a part of daily life, signifying the importance of the persecution to the Amish faith and their insistence on adult baptisms (Kraybill et al. 2013).

During the early 1500s, the Protestant Reformation, and later the Radical Reformation, left much of Europe in flux. Stories about the “New World,” inflation, and an increase of Mexican silver in the European economy disrupted the stability of daily life (Kraybill et al. 2013). Additionally, outspoken religious critics began speaking against the Catholic Church, which eventually led to the formation of the Reformed and Lutheran Churches by men like John Calvin, Martin Luther (the Amish still use his German version of the Bible), and Ulrich Zwingli. This also opened the door for other religious critics and dissenters in more radical reform movements (Kraybill et al. 2013).

Such radicals challenged the notion of a continued relationship between the church and the state, arguing instead that followers should be focused on the teachings of Jesus and the Bible rather than the government, which was seen as corrupt. They also rejected baptizing all infants and instead baptized one another in adulthood as a way of signifying their conscious commitment “to ‘take up the cross’ of Jesus and live a disciplined life accountable to one another rather than to the state church” (Kraybill et al. 2013: 24). These radicals became known as the Anabaptists, or rebaptizers (who would later be called Mennonites, and eventually separate into the Mennonites and Amish), and stood in stark contrast to other Protestants and Catholics during this time. Anabaptists asserted the authority of the Bible and supported a more traditional understanding of salvation, or the idea of being saved, which was not all that controversial. More provocative, however, they believed in the “true” church as an alternative community, separated from the state, distinct from society, and out of the hands of government in regards to social

order. In other words, Jesus should be the one Anabaptists follow and are obedient to, rather than the state.

In an attempt to slow the movement of the Anabaptists, state authorities often resorted to imprisonment, harassment, and execution, which only reinforced their view of the world as sinful and cruel, and further justified their rejection of it (Kraybill et al. 2013). In fact, as many as 2,500 Anabaptists were martyred between 1527 and 1614, a part of history which is brought up frequently in church services. Indeed, by 1545, twenty years after splitting from mainline Protestants, the Anabaptist identity was strongly entrenched in religious persecution, and arguably still is. As one Amish man describes:

We plain people often refer to our ancestors, the Anabaptists. Willingly, they offered up their lives and accepted death. Hardly a sermon is preached in our churches today without some mention being made of our forebears and what they suffered. Many of our homes have a copy of the *Martyrs Mirror* [an ancient book describing the history of Amish persecution], well over a thousand pages, telling us about our ancestors in the faith, how they suffered, what they believed, and why they died (Igou 1999: 26).

During this time of persecution, the Anabaptists began moving to rural hideaways to escape harassment, and by the mid-1600s many had moved to the Alpine Valley, north to the Rhine Valley, and even to Moravia and Austria (areas of Northern Switzerland, Southern and Western Germany, Northwestern Austria, and Eastern and Northern France today). Even into the late 1600s, the Anabaptists faced harassment, fines, jail time, and a life of slavery on Adriatic ships (Kraybill et al. 2013).

Despite persecution, the Anabaptists experienced rapid growth, attracting new members to a church whose congregants were seen “as saints, as the salt of the earth, as the true and chosen people and the proper core of all Christians” (Kraybill et al. 2013:

27). One of those converts was Jakob Ammann (mentioned above), born in February 1644. Coming from the Reformed Church, he joined the Anabaptists around 1679 and was later ordained as a preacher, then a bishop, and eventually a church elder. Like those before him, Ammann also eventually moved north to avoid persecution, and by 1695 he had moved to the Markirch/Alsace area in France along with other Anabaptists. There they found welcoming French nobles who were happy to have a workforce of hardworking, skilled farmers (Kraybill et al. 2013).

With religious tolerance in France, the Anabaptists soon realized they needed to be vigilant to remain distinct and separate from the world, whereas in Switzerland, state persecution ensured such segregation (Kraybill et al. 2013; Nolt 2003). Many supporters of tougher social order and stricter separation found their way to France to be a part of Ammann's community. In September 1712, however, the political atmosphere changed when King Louis XIV of France ordered all of the Anabaptists off of the land in Alsace, where they had been living for decades under a religiously tolerant climate. They were pushed to isolated areas and generally kept from buying land (Nolt 2003). What happened to Ammann after this is unknown (Kraybill et al. 2013).

Between the 1730s and 1850s, Amish families began moving from Europe to North America (United States and Canada) (Nolt 2003). The first wave of around 500 Amish emigrants arrived before the Revolutionary War, with a second wave of approximately 3,000 emigrants sailing mainly from Germany between 1815 and 1860. All of their European communities had dissolved by 1937. A few Amish communities also developed in Mexico, Honduras, and Paraguay, although none of these survived for longer than eleven years. For Anabaptists in the U.S., Pennsylvania was appealing because it granted freedom of worship and had no armed

militia (Nolt 2003). Today, Ohio has the most Amish church districts, while Pennsylvania is a close second. Additionally, Amish districts can be found in the following states in order of greatest population to smallest: Indiana, Wisconsin, New York, Michigan, Missouri, Kentucky, Iowa, Illinois, Minnesota, Tennessee, Kansas, Maryland, Delaware (single digits for here and the following), Colorado, Montana, Oklahoma, Virginia, Maine, West Virginia, Arkansas, Nebraska, South Dakota, Texas, Florida, Alabama, and North Carolina (Wesner 2015).

Foundations of the faith. Long before settling in the United States, however, Anabaptist faith traditions were built upon an earlier Swiss Anabaptist Confession called the Schleitheim Articles (also sometimes referred to as a Declaration of Brotherly Union) written by Michael Sattler in February 1527 (Hostetler 1993). These, in their original wording, include:

- (1) *Adult baptism...* Baptism shall be given to all who have been taught repentance and the amendment of life, who believe that their sins are taken away through Christ, and who desire to walk in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This excludes all infant baptism;
- (2) *The ban...* After taking baptism as a sign of commitment to the fellowship, if any inadvertently slip and fall into error and sin, the ban shall be employed. First they shall be warned twice privately, and the third time publicly before the congregation (according to Matthew 18). This shall be done before the breaking of bread, so that all may in one spirit and in one love, break and eat from one loaf and drink from one cup;
- (3) *Concerning the breaking of bread...* Those who partake of the bread (the Lord's Supper) must beforehand be united in the one baptism and one body of Christ. Those who desire to drink in remembrance of the shed blood of Christ, cannot be partakers at the same time of the table of the Lord and the table of devils. All who have fellowship with the dead works of darkness have no part in the light. We cannot be made one loaf together with them;
- (4) *Separation...* We have been united concerning the separation that shall take place from the evil and wickedness which the devil has planted in the world, simply in this; that we have no fellowship with them, and do not run with them in the confusion of their abominations;

- (5) *Shepherds...* The shepherd in the church shall be a person of good report according to the rule of Paul, who can read, exhort, teach, warn, admonish and properly preside in prayer and in the breaking of bread. If he has need, he shall be supported. If he is driven away or martyred, another shall be installed immediately;
- (6) *The Sword...* The sword [government] is an ordering of God outside the perfection of Christ. It punishes and kills the wicked, and guards and protects the good...[and];
- (7) *Rejection of oaths...* The oath is a confirmation among those who are quarreling or making promises. In the old law it was permitted in the name of God. Christ, who taught the perfection of the law, forbids all swearing. One's speech shall be yea or nay. Anything more is evil (P. 28-29).

Building on the Schleithem Articles, the Dordrecht Confessions of 1632 was a newer version proposed by the Dutch Anabaptists. Ammann used the Dordrecht Confessions as his rationale for reemphasis on church control for stronger social order. Ammann and his contemporaries pushed for Eucharist (communion) twice a year rather than annually, and included washing church members' feet, as Jesus did at the Last Supper, at each of the communion services (Kraybill et al. 2013). Ammann also pressed for strong social repercussions for disregarding church membership and discipline, arguing that shunning of excommunicated members should be enforced for those with unconfessed sins. As discussed below in more detail, shunning is "not to be a punishment but rather a lesson, a means of helping the erring members realize the seriousness of their offense against God and the church and encouraging confession and repentance" (Kraybill et al. 2013: 30).

The articles of the Dordrecht Confessions include: (1) "God as the creator of all things visible and invisible," and that there is only one God; (2) the "fall of man" via Adam and Eve and the "original" sin that is passed on from them; (3) reconciliation with Christ who was sent here to "raise the fallen race of man from their sin, guilt, and unrighteousness;" and (4) the coming of Christ because "Jesus is the precious promised Messiah, Redeemer, and Savior"

(Harbuck 2010). It continued with (5) the New Testament as the “Law of Christ;” (6) repentance for those who are wicked and impure sinners; (7) baptism for those adult believers who wish to be with Christ in death; and (8) baptized believers to be part of a “visible church.” In addition, (9) the importance of roles in the church and being faithful servants; (10) the Lord’s Supper regarding salvation and baptism and how it is a memorial for Christ; (11) the practice of feet washing for humility (not found in Schleithem Articles); and (12) marriage as a holy and honorable event to take place between two church believers— “[m]embers should marry people only of like communion, faith, doctrine, and practice.” Further, (13) civil authority (church elders) being seen as “ministers of God” because they maintain order while protecting and serving; as such, they should be prayed for and respected, rather than resisted; (14) pacifism, the dictate to “lay down the sword and praying for enemies”; (15) avoidance of undue confrontation, or “swearing of oaths,” and responding only “yes” or “no” in disagreements; and (16) the “ban” (shunning wayward members, more strictly enforced here than in the Schleithem Articles). Finally, (17) separation, which is seen as a protection for other members rather than a punishment for wayward members; and (18) the “resurrection of the dead” through “the incomprehensible power of God” (Harbuck 2010).

With support for increased social order vis-à-vis the Dordrecht Confessions, Ammann and some of his followers traveled to Switzerland for a meeting with church leaders to discuss his suggestions (Kraybill et al. 2013). After a failed meeting, where the Swiss Anabaptist leaders decided they did not want to alienate their sympathetic neighbors or hospitable government in order to self-segregate, Ammann was left with few options, one being to split from the Anabaptist/Mennonite Church.

Relationship with Mennonites. As a part of the group of Anabaptists who disobeyed the church and state in Europe during the 1500s, Mennonites rejected conventional religious practice and doctrine with their refusal to participate in infant baptism and insistence on pacifism (Juhnke 1999; Kraybill et al. 2013; Nolt 2003). After their split with the Reformed Church, the Amish and Mennonites, while sharing many of their beliefs about faith and family, separated in the 17th century. Their split was mostly due to differences in the Ordnung (or Regel und Ordnung, “rules and order,” as it is occasionally referred to) and the “promise not to depart from them in life or death,” relating to social order and separation (Hostetler 1993: 81-82). As previously mentioned, Ammann urged members to increase their compliance with stricter rules and regulations to avoid becoming “too worldly.” Menno Simon (one of the Anabaptist radicals discussed above and the leader the Mennonite Church whom it was named after) and his followers, on the other hand, were interested in maintaining the Anabaptist faith as it was, with little enforcement of shunning or excommunication of wayward members and little distance from outsiders (Kauffman and Meyers 2001; Kraybill et al. 2013; Nolt 2003).

While they initially maintained boundaries from American society through the use of nonconformity and separation from the world, reinforced by their plain clothing and the use of the German language, some Mennonites have begun blending into mainstream culture since the mid-1900s (Weaver 1999). With their distinct clothing and language all but gone, many Mennonites today distinguish themselves from other mainstream Christians by focusing on nonviolence and peace. While Mennonites were slowly uniting with mainstream society, the Amish continued to maintain their unique distinction through these same visible markers in addition to their traditional language. A result of resettlement and immigration in North America (1700s-1900s), the German dialect, which became known as “Pennsylvania Dutch,” was a mix of

various ways of speaking German that blending together (Kraybill et al. 2013). During the 1800s, many in the area spoke the language, but by later in the 20th century, traditional Anabaptists, like the Amish, were primarily the sole speakers of Pennsylvania Dutch.

To understand the connections between the Amish and Mennonites today, it helps to think of more traditional Old Order Amish (discussed below) on one end of a continuum and liberal Mennonites on the other. Many of the core beliefs are the same for both sects, including adult baptism, pacifism, and the role of the family and faith in everyday lives. This allows for different communities to blend aspects of both the Amish and Mennonite churches. A community of Amish, Mennonites, or a combination of both can fall anywhere along the continuum as long as the central tenets of the Anabaptist faith (outlined in the articles and confession above) are followed. Subsequently, the transition from an Amish to a Mennonite community can be an easy one, especially for those who long for a closer relationship with the English world, greater access to technological advances, or even just a little more freedom, among other desires (Kauffman and Meyers 2001; Kraybill et al. 2013; Nolt 2003; Weaver 1999). While both groups practice seclusion, when a community is more liberal on the Amish-Mennonite continuum, there are greater possibilities of contact with people outside of the faith.

Amish Faith and Culture

As evident in the tenants of the Amish faith, portrayed in the Dordrecht Confession, seclusion is deemed a central tenet of the faith. It is used not only as a means of protection from the pressures of the English community but also from fellow Amish who are not living according to the Ordnung (discussed below). One bishop describes it this way: “Our faith is at the heart of Amish life, the foundation on which we seek to build our relationships, vocations, family, and

communal life. If anyone fails to understand that, they will never really understand who we are and what we are about” (Stevick 2007: 21). For the Amish, living a purposed life, with religion included in every aspect, is critical. To make this possible, many safeguards are taken to ensure religion remains the focus and avoid outside influences of society vis-à-vis seclusion.

Getting to this point for Ammann and his followers involved a major shift from the Anabaptist/Mennonite faith, including issues with the Ordnung and shunning. While the following principles (influenced by the Dutch Confession discussed above) are fundamentally the same for various Amish communities, it is important to point out that the faith is not unified. Not all Amish practice all of the principles, or practice them in the same way or to the same degree. In other words, Amish communities are not identical. In fact, Amish communities are not generally defined solely by geography, but rather a combination of that and to what degree the tenets of their faith are followed.

To that end, there is a caveat when discussing the Amish, their culture, and each community’s Ordnung. For a variety of reasons, mostly relating to not being a unified church and their purposed seclusion even from other Amish communities, it is difficult to speak for all Amish groups. As Wesner (2015) describes, there are several errors people commonly make when discussing the Amish, and I would suggest the ex-Amish, by extension. First of all, many people generalize from one Amish group to all Amish, assuming the way the faith is embodied and practiced in one place speaks to all. With little communication between each community, different issues and needs arise in various communities; and among different pastors, church elders, bishops (discussed below); as well as families in each location. Depending on a variety of circumstances, there may be different responses to each particular situation that arises. Additionally, when a new Amish district forms, it is often times over a disagreement relating to

the Ordnung (e.g., use of rubber tires on buggies or bicycles, use of tools for work, type of bonnets or hats worn, number of pleats in a skirt, or what type of shunning is appropriate). When each new community forms, further changes can be made as well (Wesner 2015).

Another mistake is “romanticizing and demonizing,” based on the behaviors of one or a few individual(s). While there are aspects of Amish life that are appealing to some (e.g., simple life, focus on family), there are other, usually negative, aspects that are brought to light (e.g., child labor, limited education, women’s rights, abuse) (Wesner 2015). As the findings of my research will suggest, there are both positive and negative aspects of growing up Amish. What is important at this juncture is gaining an understanding of the overall Amish culture. Many of the nuances of particular communities will be highlighted throughout the analysis chapters in relation to the participants and their personal experiences.

Church leadership, meetings, and the Lot. Leadership in the Amish church, as discussed previously, is not based on a unified hierarchy with a single figurehead at the helm (Hostetler 1993; Kraybill 2001; Kraybill et al. 2013; Nolt 2003; Nolt and Meyer 2007; Stevick 2007). Instead, each district/congregation has distinct and separate leadership from other districts in the settlement, or larger grouping of individual Amish communities. Church leadership consists of a group of ministers, including a bishop, a few preachers, and a deacon. These are unpaid positions, although they are highly respected in the community. It is customary to meet in church members’ homes or barns for services every other week as a way of stressing the importance of simplicity, with a side benefit of checking in on families to see if they are living up to the Amish way of life. The focus of church service underscores the significance of Gelassenheit (or unity, patience, and humility combined), which reinforces the central values of Amish life (Kraybill et al. 2013). If there are any disciplinary or business issues the church community leaders would

like to discuss, those who are baptized participate in member meetings after the normal church service. Church leaders might address issues of hardship for families in the community, as the community would step in to help, or concerns relating to the Ordnung, regarding potential changes or wayward members and their accountability. Disputes between members would also be addressed at these meetings, with the hope of resolution (Kraybill et al. 2013).

Becoming a church leader does not involve religious education or family history per se. The Amish select ministers and deacons through ordination via the “Lot,” which is seen as “God’s divine choice” (Kraybill et al. 2013). Lasting approximately 90 minutes following a Sunday church service, ordination is a ritual filled with anticipation:

The Amish believe that the holy hand of Heaven reaches into the home or barn where the congregation is gathered to select a new shepherd for the flock. No other ritual approaches the emotion-packed experience of ordination, for the new leader will influence the decisions and direction of the group for years, if not decades (Kraybill et al. 2013: 90).

Leadership spots open up generally as a result of illness, death, or when a new district is established. When men are baptized into the faith, they pledge to serve as church leaders if the time comes and God so chooses. The decision to start the ordination process is usually made about two weeks prior to the service by the current church leaders. Leading up to the ritual itself, eligible members often spend this time praying and contemplating their future, if chosen. While members are not to seek out ordination as doing so would be considered vain, any member, men or women, may nominate candidates as long as those candidates are married men and members of the church in good standing.

For final selection, though, the Amish believe God makes the decision through the “Lot” (also called “casting lots”), which is similar to what took place in the earlier days of the Christian church (Kraybill et al. 2013). At the end of a communion service, the current church leaders sit

in a private room and hear the names of the nominees as church members whisper them through a cracked door. Typically, there are between four and eight candidates in the “Lot.” Once the votes have been tallied and the leaders determine how many candidates there will be, they prepare *Ausbunds*, or hymnals, for each of the candidates. One of them has a bible verse written on a slip of paper tucked in the front cover. All of the *Ausbunds* are then bound with a rubber band or string and shuffled. At this point, the ministers return with the *Ausbunds* to the waiting congregation, where the names of the candidates are read, either randomly or based on the number of votes received, depending on the congregation. These members, upon hearing their names are in the “Lot,” are asked to step forward and confirm their beliefs in the church. After prayer, each of the candidates is asked to take an *Ausbund* from the table. Once everyone has collected them, the bishop opens each book until the slip of paper is located, and the new shepherd is chosen. In a matter of 90 minutes, a male member of the church can go from being a father and husband to being a minister, with no formal training, preparation, invitation, or even a way out. He and his family are now in positions where they must serve as role models for the community, following the *Ordnung* much more closely as examples to the community (Kraybill et al. 2013).

Ordnung. The Amish *Ordnung* comprise the rules and regulations that guide everyday life. There are those which were set out centuries before in the Dordrecht Confession and the Schleithem Articles, illuminating the basic principles of exclusion (shunning) from those who are disobedient of church rules, separation from those who practice a different faith, and nonresistance (pacifism). There are also *Ordnung* specific for each district (guiding members in practicing the above principles) (Hostetler 1993). Although various Amish communities share many of the same *Ordnung*, there are also differences between them, as discussed above.

That said, much of the Ordnung is fairly consistent from community to community and has remained static over time. Prime examples include:

No high-line electricity, telephones, central heating systems in homes; no automobiles; no tractors with pneumatic tires; beards are for all married men, but moustaches are not allowed; [most require]... long hair (covering part of the ear for men, uncut for women), hooks and eyes on dress coats, and the use of horses for farming; [and] no formal education beyond the elementary grades is a rule of life (Hostetler 1993: 84).

Changes to the Ordnung are often done for economic reasons. Kraybill (1993) points out such changes can come to fruition because the Amish strive for more convenient and comfortable lives, while maintaining their dedication to a simple life. Many of the conveniences of modern life that are not accepted by the Amish are viewed as temptations that might lead individuals to stray from the faith. It seems “the Amish have an uncanny intuition for understanding how one seemingly innocent practice will lead to a more debilitating one later,” which is often why they take their time with change (p. 43). Despite centuries old Ordnung, they are open to new things and changes are possible, especially for the New Order Amish (discussed below): “They often snatch up new products along with their non-Amish neighbors. Amish mechanics [for example] have invented new products and creatively adapted old ones... The Amish are not a static relic from another era; they are changing and evolving” (p. 41).

In general, however, the Ordnung fulfill several roles for the Amish and their communities:

On one level, it is what sets their life apart, in practical ways, from ‘the world.’ It dictates everyday symbolic separators, such as driving a buggy when the rest of the world whizzes by in cars, trucks, and SUVs. It regulates in explicit ways the nature of interaction with the world, such as prohibiting college attendance or, in some communities, limiting the ability of fathers to take employment away from home. On another level, Ordnung locates Amish people in relation to other Amish. Even small differences in Ordnung concerning the size and shape of men’s hats, for example, identify Amish groups as more or less traditional (Nolt and Meyers 2007: 9).

As the above quote attests, the Amish's understanding of the Ordnung goes a long way toward identifying specific communities in regard to rejection of modernity.

New and Old Order Amish. In the 1950s and 1960s, there was a split in the Amish faith relating specifically to Ordnung, as some communities were committed to remaining unchanged and others were not. The Old Order Amish, or the traditionalists, came to predominantly define the Amish way of life, according to Nolt and Meyers (2007), by emphasizing simplicity and plainness through material possessions, refusing to adapt church service structures and pay ministers, and remaining skeptical of outside authority figures and government documents. Compared to Old Order Amish, who are content with the way things were and not as willing to modify or change their way of life, New Order Amish, who first appeared in the early 1970s, are characterized by greater creativity with regard to traditions that are viewed as dysfunctional (Hostetler 1993).

The New Order Amish are similar to the Old Order in many ways, but they lean towards both individual orientation and rational authority (Nolt and Meyers 2007). Their worldview “assumes much more latitude of individual choice in technology use, details of dress, and so on, than those of other Old Orders, but more importantly, it grants value to the role and experience of the individual in notable ways” (p. 175). This is in stark contrast to Old Order Amish, where the individual seems to fade into the backdrop of communities (Nolt and Meyers 2007). Additionally, the New Order Amish believe that members of the community can be assured of their salvation, rather than the “hope” of salvation, which remains the belief of Old Order (Hostetler 1993). The New Order are also more open-minded when it comes to critically thinking about and critiquing their faith, even distinguishing between essential and nonessential tenets by which to live. Unlike the Old Order where use of modern conveniences are strictly forbidden, the

New Order are more likely to partake in some modern conveniences, like the use of telephones, machinery, and electricity (at least in relation to work). Thus they are a bit closer to the Mennonites on the Amish-Mennonite continuum.

Out of the 25 participants interviewed for this study, 13 were from Old Order communities (or at least started out there), 9 were from “middle of the road” (somewhere between Old and New Order in their strictness) Amish communities, and 3 were considered Mennonites, but identified as Amish due to how they were raised (i.e., in close company with relatives who were Amish, or children of parents who were technically Mennonite due to shunning but lived as though they were Amish). With the Amish-Mennonite continuum in mind and because none of the participants identified as New Order Amish, they are distinguished in the analysis chapters as being from strict, middle of the road, or more liberal communities, based on how they classified the Ordnung (usually based on relationships with the English and modernity).

Modernity and the Amish. To outsiders, Amish choices concerning modernity may seem puzzling. In order to keep up with changes in the economy, it may be easy to question why the Amish have not changed the Ordnung to reflect what some might consider necessary to be successful in competition with the modern working world in terms of technology, for example, with farming or woodworking. For the Amish, however, it is “the traditional component of farming practices that makes them so significant, and modifying them hastily would eviscerate the very value in farming as an ideal way of life” (Nolt and Meyers 2007: 49). As a result, the relative inflexibility of the rules and regulations of farming has pushed many Amish to find other ways to earn money. Sometimes these occupations are more peripheral to the Amish identity and less threatening to the Ordnung, like working as a hired hand for someone else (both Amish and

English), doing construction, or seeking employment as a nanny or maid (for young women).

Occasionally, Amish people actually leave their community for another that is more flexible and where it may be easier to find work outside of farming. However, this is problematic in that the tightknit quality of Amish communities is intentional; moving to a more flexible one may also introduce temptations connected to modern society. Community members know one another in numerous ways, as neighbors, co-workers, church members, and relatives; these connections serve to bolster the Amish sense of group identity that is definable and durable within the faith. Interacting outside of these communities, even just for work, is often viewed as a threat to this purposeful seclusion.

Indeed, to aid in maintaining group identity, clear boundaries between “us” and “them” are distinguished. The most obvious may be in clothing, and the other, which is commonly misunderstood by outsiders, is the rejection of most modern conveniences. As Hostetler (1993: 349) points out:

Maintaining Amish standards, but accepting some modernization to solve the human problems of living, requires compromises that must not disrupt the social structure. By rejecting certain types of modernity and accepting others, some Amish appear to the outside to be contradicting themselves. From the viewpoint of Amish culture there is no contradiction. But the outsider who sees no logic to Amish selectivity may be inclined to point out apparent hypocrisy. The more pronounced inconsistencies concern the use of modern conveniences, which the Amish person is not allowed to own.

Thus, although the Amish may not own a vehicle (in most communities), they are allowed to accept rides from others and even hire drivers to take them from place to place, depending on the circumstances. Most Amish communities do not allow members to ride with the shunned or excommunicated, but can be seen in a full-sized van with a hired driver heading to a family wedding or even an amusement park. Additionally, the use of telephones is primarily forbidden in Amish communities, except in the case of emergencies. In some communities, telephone

shanties are located at the end of driveways, by barns, or in sheds for use in outgoing and incoming calls that are of an emergency nature or even related to business. Further, electricity is not allowed in most Amish homes, although generators fueled by gasoline or diesel are permissible for tools, farming equipment, and refrigerators (Hostetler 1993).

As detailed below, some rules may be suspended during Rumspringa, which is a time for young adults to partake in modern conveniences, like owning a car, a cell phone, or even a computer. However, even then, such deviations are done in secrecy and usually only if the respective community allows Rumspringa. Moreover, the Amish are not immune from change, despite appearing as relics from the past. Although it may be slow, change does happen when the Ordnung is not equivalently enforced within a community. Examples of such cases include situations where a community's ministers hold varying attitudes regarding opportunities for economic gain, or when parents or other community members look the other way when their children transgress so as to not threaten their standing within the community (Hostetler 1993). While it may seem their relationship with modernization is contradictory, the primary rationalization behind the various rules relates to preserving the sanctity of the faith for future generations. Essentially, the Amish believe that by "holding technology at a distance, by exercising restraint and moderations, and by accepting limitations and living within them, the Amish have maintained the integrity of their family and community life" (p. 384).

Shunning and forgiveness. As noted previously, the use of shunning, or social avoidance, is a way of life in the Amish faith. They believe that the Bible instructs them to shun excommunicated and other disobedient members of the church (Kraybill 1993). Although it might seem extreme, it is important to note:

The Amish do not expel persons quickly. They try to “win them back” and persuade them to cooperate with the church... Although the Amish hope to win wayward members back, they also believe that those who persist in disobedience must be banned from fellowship in order to maintain the purity of the church. To tolerate sin and worldliness would only breed more of the cancerous moral blight (P. 35).

Shunning and excommunication are done in hopes of the person realizing the mistake, repenting for it, and then changing their ways. It is seen as a form of love that preserves the purity of the church and an attempt to urge deviants to repent.

For those who do not atone and change their ways, a lifetime social quarantine is a strong possibility, wherein the excommunicated person is no longer a member of the church, the community, or even their family. The practice of shunning, in both literal and symbolic ways, is intended to stigmatize those who are disobedient and reinforce the moral boundaries within the community for both the deviant and other members. Stated differently, shunning in Amish society is a type of solitary confinement from friends and family, in an attempt to purify and preserve the Amish faith. Shunning is often applied, then, to members of the community who refuse to join the church through baptism, which is interpreted as a rejection of the community. It may also be applied to those who have been baptized into the church but lost their way (i.e., violating rules), according to the Ordnung. Also at risk are those that do not respect the decision to shun another, which are most often immediate family members of a shunned individual.

While shunning is a physical action of avoidance, reinforcing moral boundaries like “breaking of the bread” (eating dinner) with someone who has been shunned is often symbolic. If an ex is allowed inside for a meal (because maybe they were never baptized or they have children who are not shunned), a separate table is set for the individual, with their food dished up ahead of time. The Amish family will sit in a different space, eating from different serving

dishes, and refrain from talking with the ex. Meant as a way of reinforcing the strict boundary between “us” and “them,” the article of faith concerning the breaking of the bread further symbolizes for the ex an important aspect of the Amish life that they have given up—familial contact (Hostetler 1993; Kraybill 1993, 2001; Kraybill et al. 2010; Kraybill et al. 2013; Nolt and Meyers 2007).

While shunning of community members remains a central tenet of the Amish faith, forgiveness is also of critical importance. This was perhaps nowhere better illustrated than after the school shooting in 2006 at Nickel Mines in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, where Charles Roberts shot ten Amish girls (killing five and then himself) (Kraybill, Nolt, and Weaver-Zercher 2007). The Amish’s ability to forgive was a hot topic of discussion and raised a myriad of questions about forgiveness and shunning in the Amish faith, because it seemed unbelievable to those outside the Amish community. Seen as an unconditional gift, however, Amish forgiveness is available whether or not a wrongdoer expresses remorse, apologizes, or even confesses. With this in mind, many outsiders wonder why it is possible for strangers to be forgiven, even after such a horrific tragedy, while other ex-Amish individuals may not be vis-à-vis shunning. What is actually happening in such scenarios is that the ex-Amish are forgiven, but not pardoned. The difference between the treatment of non-Amish and Amish in this regard has to do with a promise made to the church. An ex-Amish person made a promise to be a part of the church for life when he or she is baptized, so the community does not pardon them because they did not live up to their commitment. Someone from outside of the Amish faith has not made that commitment to the church and community, and therefore, can be forgiven (Kraybill et al. 2007).

Thus, in situations in which outsiders harm an Amish person or community, church members are asked to “*fuhgevva und fuhgessa* (forgive and forget—or more precisely, pardon

and forget),” although of course this is not an easy prospect and not necessarily always followed (Kraybill et al. 2007: 145). Conversely, the Amish rationalize their use of shunning and social avoidance of (former) community members as a concern for the deviant’s soul. This is seen as a necessary evil to bring wayward members back into the fold of the faith and procure their future in heaven. Without repentance through a confession and a promise to change their ways, the ex-Amish remain forgiven outsiders of their own community. As noted, shunning is not taken lightly and usually employed only as a last resort. Control of worldly influences for Amish children is one way of limiting the need of shunning in the future, and the best way to do so is through purposeful education.

Education. The Amish generally avoid public education due to the fear of otherworldly influences that can accompany it (Stevick 2007). Furthermore, they believe that schooling through eighth grade is “more than adequate” for their children’s future roles as members in the Amish community. They view anything more than this as producing *Hochmut* (or high-mindedness and pride). As such, it is argued that an Amish education is both traditional and intentional – “[i]t is traditional in that it has changed little over many generations. It is highly intentional in that virtually nothing is left to chance in their eight years of schooling” (p. 62). During the 19th century, there was little difference between a public school and an Amish school, but as things began to change in American schools, the Amish wanted nothing to do with them. With mandatory attendance for students including at least some high school, conflicts emerged with the state regarding the Amish’s vision of education. The view of education is so firm that if an Amish youngster really does want to attend high school or college, often the only way to accomplish this is to leave the faith (Stevick 2007).

In terms of quality, many Amish feel that their education is more than adequate, and the studies support this with many Amish youngsters scoring equivalent or higher scores than mainstream youth on standardized tests (Stevick 2007). Amish see public education as emphasizing creativity and expression, which goes against their beliefs in cooperation and humility, potentially leading to self-sufficiency and pride. Likewise, they fear the influence of other students and teachers who are not Amish. With an absence of religion in the curriculum at public schools, the Amish view such schools as threatening their traditional way of life. As a result, they have struggled in the courts repeatedly for the right to school their children as they see fit and in ways that agree with their way of life (Stevick 2007).

One of the major court cases that allowed for this religious freedom was *Wisconsin vs. Yoder* in 1972 (Meyers 1993). When Amish moved into the New Glarus area in Wisconsin, they were less than welcomed. In an attempt to set limits on the Amish community, three fathers were sent to jail when they refused to send their children to high school. All of the children had completed eighth grade but none were 16 yet, which was/is the legal age to drop out of school in Wisconsin. Subsequently, the fathers were found guilty of violating the state's compulsory attendance laws, although the judge added that he "acknowledged that their religious liberty has been violated but [he supplemented] there was a superior state interest in forcing the children to attend school" (Ball 1975: 120). The court case made its way to the Supreme Court where it was universally ruled the Amish had a right to refuse to send their children to high school (Meyers 1993). The historic ruling of *Wisconsin vs. Yoder* "settled the question of the right of Amish parents to follow the lead of their conscience in educating their children... [and] permitted the [continued] establishment of Amish schools" (Meyers 1993: 101). Thus, while the Amish have control over how long schooling will go, they often opt to delay its start so that youth turn 16

during their 8th year, so as to avoid any additional legal challenges (Ball 1975; Meyers 1993).

They also control what type of school their children attend, as well as various other aspects of their lives, up until young adulthood when many adolescents are allowed to go on Rumspringa.

Rumspringa. It is said, “life on the inside is rarely as simple or as perfect as it appears from the outside” (Stevick 2007: 12). As noted earlier, Rumspringa, a German word, refers to:

“running around” and does not necessarily denote wild or deviant behavior. It simply means that youth have freedom at age sixteen to socialize and date without close supervision. To varying degrees, they begin socializing with their friends on weekends instead of staying at home (P. 13).

While such behavior may become deviant, there are many misconceptions related to Rumspringa presented by the media. For example, it is often believed that during this period:

Amish adolescents are given total freedom, if not parental and community encouragement, to taste the forbidden pleasures of the world before rejecting them to join the church. Thus they equated “sowing wild oats” with Rumspringa and assumed that most Amish youth ‘go wild’ during the running-around years (P. 13).

Many of these assumptions are based on highly unusual and publicized cases, such as those presented on the documentary, *Devil’s Playground*, and many recent reality television shows.

One significant factor for the type of Rumspringa in which youth participate, if even offered it (the option of having Rumspringa is dictated by a community’s Ordnung), is the size and location of the community. As one bishop’s wife indicates: “It’s the anonymity our youth have that leads to trouble” (Stevick 2007: 16). In larger communities with greater numbers of young people, Amish youth have a greater choice of peers and sense of privacy, leading to the possibility of social interactions that are a bit more daring (e.g., driving a car) and potentially threatening to the central tenets of the culture. This is not unlike youth in English society, where there is an increased impact of peers during the teenage years. It is more likely a matter of degree. The notion of “running around” for Amish must be considered within the context of their

cultural norms. For youth in small or sparsely populated communities, there may simply not be access or interest in more flagrant activities during Rumspringa (Stevick 2007).

For those who are not allowed Rumspringa, there may still be a grace period for attending church singings, which are only open to young Amish adults interested in dating. In such scenarios, the surrounding community often attempts to exert “a constant counterbalance to the excesses of the young, tacitly reminding them of adult values and expected behavior” (Stevick 2007: 46). Regardless of what this time period is called, at the end of it Amish youth face the decision of joining the church through baptism or not.

To join or not join. Many thought that the Amish faith was doomed long ago because of their failure, as some see it, to adapt to modern technology and conveniences. However, the Amish culture has survived, thrived, and grows larger every year with about 90 percent of the youth choosing to join the church and remain there for life (Kraybill 2001). The future of the faith is still a concern for its members though, with some predicting a sudden demise due to an inability to maintain traditional practices and values in the face of modern society. As one elder Amish man pondered: “How much of our tradition can we give up and still be Amish?” (Stevick 2007: 232). However, Meyers’ (1994) asserts that rural isolation contributes to retention. Those who live closer to English towns find it more difficult to keep their children in the community through baptism. Public education, as discussed above, is also a contributor to some leaving the faith. In fact, Meyers (1994) found that children who attend public schools are twice as likely to leave as those who attend Amish schools.

Indeed, it is believed that “[f]or an individual to become Amish, the person must be kept within the Amish community, physically and emotionally, during the crucial adolescent years” (Hostetler and Huntington 1992: 30). Such is often the rationale for keeping Amish youth close

to home and far away from the English world and its influences. Another problem regarding retention is the decision by some to leave a district for a less conservative one. Because there are many different Amish communities with somewhat distinct Ordnung, it is possible to leave a stricter group for a more lenient one. Again, the distinctions between them may be subtle to outsiders (e.g., getting to use zippers on clothing, having a covered buggy, using rubber wheels on bicycles, farm equipment, and buggies), but are quite symbolic, relatively speaking, for those making the switch (Stevick 2007).

Meyers (1994) also finds that birth order is a predictive variable for leaving the faith. Children in early/older sibling positions are more likely to leave, rejecting the values of their parents, as compared to younger siblings. This may be a result of the greater pressure and responsibility exerted on older siblings, who due to their heavier familial workload and relative proximity to their parents possibly have a deeper understanding of the life ahead of them if they remain Amish. Gender also comes into play, with men being more likely to leave than women. Amish culture is deeply patriarchal, discussed further below. As such, some Amish men have expressed the belief that it was easier for girls to be submissive and obedient to the community's rules (Stevick 2007). As indicated in previous research, "Boys generally have more contact with the world, have more opportunities, and are more confident that they can make it out there than the girls" (Stevick 2007: 237).

Another major, if not the most important, factor in deciding whether or not to be baptized is the fact that the consequences for leaving are so comprehensive. One does not just leave the church; they abandon a way of life, which is reinforced by their parents, family, and the rest of the community. As one young Amish man explains: "The thing that keeps many of us from leaving is knowing that we will deeply hurt our parents if we go. Most Amish youth have great

respect for their parents” (Stevick 2007: 237). Other reasons for staying in the faith, for those that might not otherwise, include the fear of going to Hell, losing financial support from the community, prior commitments like baptism or marriage (discussed below), receiving conscientious objector status (for men), and a fear of the English world.

Kraybill (1993) asserts that the decision to join or not join the church is crucial to Amish retention and viability, and it also offers young members a sense of having a choice in their own destinies. As Stevick (2007: 242) advises, “ultimately...the extent to which parents succeed in establishing a bond and a secure attachment with their children is probably the critical factor in whether a child decides to leave or stay.” Once a person leaves the Amish faith after they are baptized, it is possible to come back, though the community does not make it easy. With a full public confession, a person can be reinstated as a member of the community after repentance is complete. If a person is not yet baptized, a confession will also take place, followed by baptism into the church. The aim of Amish families and communities is to raise competent, respectful, and faithful young adults with strong Amish identities:

As an Amish community and as individual couples, they diligently and intentionally work to construct for themselves and their children a social world that includes extended family, schooling, work, social events, courtship, and marriage. All of these provide gravitational forces that keep their youth in the Amish orbit and exert strong pressures to pull the wayward back from their *Rumspringa* wanderings. This careful attention, along with high parental and community involvement with their sons and daughters, provides a strong Amish identity and helps explain the amazing retention, growth, and longevity of the Amish. They trust that as long as they maintain their vigilance, with God’s help their future viability will continue through the generations to come (P. 247).

Stereotypical images presented in popular culture suggest that Amish youth are most likely to leave the faith after *Rumspringa*, however it can happen at any time. Culturally, young Amish are not considered adults until the age of 21. They do not have access to any official documents, if such even exist (e.g., birth certificate, Social Security card) until that time. Since

not having such documents make it difficult to get a job, a driver's license, or even into school, those hoping to leave during adolescence often face uphill battles. They have extremely limited financial or social support and may face legal troubles without proper identification, especially if they leave before turning 18 and/or subsequently get into trouble with the law (Kraybill 1993; Stevick 2007). If the families and communities are successful in their molding of young adults, they open the way for baptism into the church.

Baptism. As indicated earlier, the Amish are Anabaptists—they believe in adult baptism. During early adulthood, Amish make the decision to join the church or not. Signifying total commitment to the church and community, baptism stands as a promise of repentance and formal admission into adulthood (Hostetler 1993). The commitment is a lifetime one and includes conformity to the order. Stated differently, it “embodies the spiritual meaning of becoming an Amish person, an acceptance of absolute values, and a conscious belief in religious and ethical ends entirely for their own sake, quite independent of any external rewards” (p. 77).

Although a baptismal vow in the Amish faith is similar to that in other Christian denominations, a significant emphasis is placed on the obligation to live by the Ordnung regardless of whether certain rules are explicitly stated and/or change in the future. “By inference or otherwise, the strict Amish churches include in the vow the promise to help maintain the Regel und Ordnung and the promise not to depart from them in life or death” (Hostetler 1993: 81-82). It is recognized that walking the “straight and narrow path” is not always easy, which is why the young adults readying for baptism are reminded that it is best to not make a vow versus deciding to break it in the future. As a result, the applicants, on the day before their baptism, meet with the preacher, and are offered an opportunity to “turn back,” although not without

repercussions (i.e., shunning). Hostetler (1993: 82) discusses his own experience while considering baptism:

As a young man considering baptism in the Amish church, I remember the above two opposing views [following the Ordnung for life or follow the teachings of the Bible in a different district] being expressed by two ministers. I did not want to take a vow I could not keep, nor take a vow that implied social avoidance in case I could not live by Amish standards. Consequently, on the day my chums began their instruction for baptism, I drove my horse and buggy to the nearby Mennonite church.

Once baptized, those who do not obey the Ordnung risk expulsion, either in the form of excommunication or shunning. Leaving the Amish faith and breaking baptismal vows becomes all the more difficult after a person is married.

Marriage and gender roles. The Amish believe in “endogamy”—marriage within one’s group (Stevick 2007). This means that most Amish people marry someone in their own community, a neighboring Amish community with the same Ordnung, or on rare occasions, a person who is first an outsider but converts to the Amish way of life. Marriage in the Amish faith:

[m]eans a new home, another place to hold preaching services, and another family committed to rearing children in the Amish way of life. Marriage also means that the young man and young woman are ready to part with their sometimes wild adolescent behavior, to settle down and become respectable members of the community. Marriage is the rite of passage marking the passing from youth to adulthood (Hostetler 1993: 192).

The unmarried Amish are viewed, and often feel, as if they are at an incomplete stage in their lives. “To be Amish almost always means being married” (Stevick 2007: 174). With Amish identity so tightly intertwined with being married, most Amish communities put much stock into preparing their children for this important occasion.

When a boy and girl begin dating, or “courting,” usually between the ages of 16 and 22, the identity of the potential mate is usually kept a secret from the community until there is a

marriage proposal. Interaction between the two generally occurs during church, school, singing events, and other community gatherings like weddings. Dating practices fluctuate between communities and diverge between the varying degrees of the Old and New Orders. One practice for courting that is seen as controversial in some Amish communities is called *Uneheliche Beischlof*, which means bedding, bed courtship, or bundling (Stevick 2007). This involves the couple lying together in bed during the night, fully clothed, in the girl's bedroom, following the guidelines: "lips off, laps off, hands off" (p. 181). Although not practiced in all communities, those that do promote bundling suggest that this is not a cause of or invitation for premarital sex. Maybe because courting is not often discussed within the family and especially with outsiders, it is difficult to know how common bed courtship is. For example, about half of this study's participants talked about some experience with this form of dating, but there seems to be little consistency on where, when, and how it took place.

Amish parents often claim they do not know much about what is going on in the lives of their children, but try to guide their children in the right direction by instilling them with traditional Christian values. Additionally, they encourage:

Courtship practices that avoid entanglements with worldly youth, because the future of their society depends on it. Other than having their children receive baptism and join the church, nothing brings more joy to an Amish couple than having their children marry within the faith (Stevick 2007: 197).

One Amish bachelor describes marriage as "the time when Amish youth settle down once and for all and leave their foolish, youthful ways behind" (p. 199). Marriage in the Amish faith is not simply a romantic affair. A marriage signifies a couple's recognition of the values expected of them and is reinforced by their families and community (Hostetler 1993). Because of their views on marriage and faith, divorce and separation are almost unheard of. Also not accepted in Amish

communities are forms of sexuality other than heterosexuality. Aside from conformity, the only option for non-heterosexuality is leaving the faith.

Moreover, the Amish are strongly patriarchal, not only in the home but also in the workplace. As Stevick (2007: 9) describes, “males are expected to be the head of the home and of the church; and females, married or single, are to wear head coverings...to reflect an attitude of prayer and submission.” Gender roles are clearly defined and based on a traditional understanding of the German Martin Luther Bible (Kraybill 2001). Men and women interact in same-sex groups throughout their lives and even at church, where men are welcomed into church services first in order of age, with elderly going ahead and followed by women in the same order. They often sit on opposite sides of the church to further clarify the separation.

There is differentiation between men and women in dress, work, and in the home; and in all of these spheres, men have greater freedom and choices for work compared to women. Men are able to work away from home more readily and choose from a greater range of options, including farming, construction, and metal work. Women who are unmarried without children are generally schoolteachers, clerks, housekeepers, or waitresses (if the family needs extra income); otherwise they help at home. Married women are expected to bear children and stay at home to raise them as well as cook, clean, and complete any other chores necessary on the homestead. Customary to Amish communities, most families are quite large, often leaving plenty of work for women, their older daughters, and other children in the home. This further serves to limit their contact with the outside world (Stevick 2007).

Chapter Summary and Conclusion

With so much to lose and so much to learn, ex-Amish have a lot to overcome in order to be successful in the English world. The process of making and living with such decisions is the focus of this research. As will be seen, factors like family, community, education, support networks, gender roles, contact with the English world, and continued faith contribute to such decisions. An understanding of Amish history, including their religious persecution, journey to America, and relationship with Mennonites, are all vital in order to appreciate the Amish faith and culture in relation to the ex-Amish.

The next chapter covers the conceptual framework for this study, beginning with literature concerning resistance to and insulation from the outside world. This is followed by a discussion of the sociology of religion and how particular research and theories (i.e., apostates, religious switching, fundamentalism) help to explain the resilience of the Amish faith and why leaving it is often so difficult. The chapter concludes with a discussion of stigma, identity management, and the self (Goffman 1959, 1961, 1963; Irvine 2000), as well as previous research on becoming an ex (Caplovitz and Sherrow 1977; Ebaugh 1988; Smith 2011) through defection (Bromley 1998; Mauss 1969). The need for this investigation into the ex-Amish will soon be apparent, given the lack existing knowledge on the subject and the theoretical implications for research on becoming an ex, or defection from such a strict religious culture.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

As explained in the previous chapter, being Amish in itself is a largely misunderstood identity. Leaving it poses another set of challenges relating to the struggle to adopt the English way of life without the support of the community with whom one has lived all of his/her life. In exploring how the ex-Amish adjust to the English world, it is necessary to refer to previous research. However, in this case, very little if any scholarly research centers on these interesting individuals. There are, nevertheless, investigations about the Amish, although some of them are relatively old, as well as various theoretical perspectives, which have informed this research project on the ex-Amish. This chapter focuses on the conceptual and theoretical framework relating to the Amish and, by extension, the ex-Amish, including the sociology of religion and social psychology as a way of framing the circumstances surrounding the exiting process.

As will be shown, the Amish lifestyle and faith allow for great insulation from and resistance to the outside world, which may be explained through modernization, fundamentalism, and strict church theory, while endogenous growth with higher birthrates permits a thriving population. Research on apostates (including religious “nones” and atheists) and religious switching (i.e., moving from one faith or denomination to another) explain just how much those who leave strict religions have to lose, in addition to explaining how exs and those close to them respond. The chapter concludes with a discussion of stigmas, becoming an ex, and a bit about dependency on roles, to frame the discussion of my research findings (in chapters four, five, and six).

Resistance and Insulation Framework

For the Amish, living a purposed life with religion infused at every level of their daily lives is deemed critical. To make this possible, many safeguards are taken to allow religion to be the focus and avoid outside influences. What follows is a discussion of the sociology of religion theories that relate to the Amish, and as an extension, the ex-Amish, which help explain their boundaries from the English world. First, though, is a brief exploration of the influences of Durkheim and Weber on the sociology of religion.

Coming from a functionalist perspective, Durkheim saw religion as serving an important role in society. Religion ties people together and provides a moral base for society, even during secular times. Further though, Durkheim (1976: 47) provided a definition of religion, including two components (“sacred” and “profane”): “a religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things which are set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all of those who adhere to them.” For Durkheim, the sociological focus should be on what inspires individuals to act in a moral manner as a collective group. Paradoxically, this study focuses on what motivates the participants to go against the collective and moral order of their church in order to be free.

While Durkheim focused on a functional definition of religion, Weber’s view of religion remained substantive. Weber’s (1963; Weber and Loader 1985) interest lied in how the material each church presented impacts behavior, collectively and individually. “Religious ethic,” as he called it, is different for each faith, and therefore, can lead to different outcomes. Moreover, Weber described the relationship between religious ways of thinking and the material interests of groups as not random. As shown below, those religious groups who expect much of their

members, but also offer ample returns for their commitment most often end up being more successful in the long run. In an attempt to rationally analyze these relationships, Weber developed a comparative methodology involving the “*ideal-type*—a hypothetically concrete reality, a mental construct based upon relevant empirical components, formed and explicitly delineated by the researcher to facilitate precise comparisons on specific points of interest” (Swatos 1998: 90). This developed into the church-sect typology, which focused on how social inequality in society leads to divergent theology. Those in higher stratification positions, according to Weber (1958; 1963), are more interested in rewards received in this world as evidence of God(s) approval, while those from lower stratification positions look to the promise of salvation in the afterlife (their suffering in this world is worth it) for their reward. As the first to develop this typology, Weber placed various religious organizations along a continuum based on their relationship with membership (how members are recruited—birth or decision) and society (how congruent their ideas are with mainstream culture). Those groups who believed in the status quo and did not stand in sharp contrast to society and rationality belonged to churches. Those who stood in protest of society and rational thought, for Weber, were considered sects.

Troeltsch (1931) expanded the criteria for churches and sects including hierarchy in the organizations. For him, sects produced otherworldly explanations for religion with little hierarchy or authority in their organizations. Moreover, they stood in contrast to churches that offered trained clergy and official dogma while accepting secular society. Johnson (1963) furthered the expansion of the typology to account for tension with broader society. This means “sects are religious groups in a high state of tension with dominant society, while churches are religious groups accepting of the social order” (Sherkat 2014: 19).

Useful for “identifying, organizing, comparing, and testing social-scientific perceptions and explanations of the nature, development, and interactions of religious groups,” a broader typology is particularly useful when comparing one dimension of religious change (i.e., tension with society, religious doctrine, clergy training, and methods of membership) (Dawson 2009: 526). This expanded typology includes the church (very accepting of social order) and denominations between the church and sects (not accepting of social order). Sects can become institutionalized sects (still in opposition to social order, but with some hierarchy and organization) or a denomination if they become more accepted in society and therefore become more mainstream. Another option on the continuum are cults or new religious movements which stand in protest against social order, have small membership numbers, and unlikely will become mainstream (Dawson 2009). For the Amish, their place in this continuum is as an institutionalized sect, where there is some organization within each community, but they are still in opposition to English society. This opposition is not necessarily a result of disagreeing with the dominant culture, but instead a desire to maintain their traditional lifestyle.

Modernization theory. Modernization theory is described as a process by which traditional societies become modern. There are four forms of modernization, according to Abercrombie, Hill, and Turner (2000: 229): economic modernization associated with intense economic change, social modernization which often results in a deterioration of traditional authority, political modernization which aids with decision making, and cultural modernization which involves ideologies and may lead to secularization. Taken together, these lead to changes in society, which result in increased social and structural differentiation, or social change. This change often results, according to Abercrombie et al., when different institutions begin performing more specialized activities. Prior to modernization, religion served more than just a

spiritual function in members' daily lives. If a family was in need, they would have provided for themselves or maybe gone to church leaders. There were few real options. However, as a result of social and structural differentiation, other institutions, like government, schools, religion, and places of employment, all became specialized. Consequently, people had specific places to go for specific needs.

The intense impact of modernization on various religious institutions, practices, and beliefs does not eliminate the possibility that religion can adopt new forms and implement distinct sorts of influence while still in the confines of modernity or late/post-modernity (Beckford 2003). Some suggest that modernity took place with the rise of capitalism and industrialization, which spearheaded the development of specialization. This allowed, for example, a blacksmith to become highly skilled in making horseshoes because it was the only thing he was working on. There was someone else who was specialized in woodworking, while someone else had expertise in machinery. This also increased the emphasis on social classes (Abercrombie et al. 2000). Post-modernists, on the other hand, see society has having moved past these initial levels of specialization, creating further social and political divisions (e.g., gender, ethnicity, age, class). In the economic realm, post-modernists now assert that we are in a development stage—post Fordism, or industrialization, so to speak—where people want specialized products rather than something off of a production line.

Two additional factors presented when discussing modernity and post-modernity are their relationships with culture and politics. For modernity, there is less importance on culture and the individual; while with post-modernity, the focus is on the individual and identity. Moreover, post-modernity has moved on to supporting a smaller government with fewer social programs to promote self-reliance and competition, which stands in opposition to modernity (Abercrombie et

al. 2000). As Norris and Inglehart (2007: 25) point out: “Modernization does indeed bring a de-emphasis on religion within virtually any country that experiences it, but the percentage of the world’s population for whom religion is important, is rising.” As Berger (1999: 3) attests: “To say the least, the relation between religion and modernity is rather complicated... Modernization has had some secularizing effects, more in some places than in others.”

By creating religious subcultures, groups are better equipped to reject modern values and ideas in their lives, allowing the possibility of relatively little influence from modern mainstream culture. As an extremely powerful force, modern culture proves a strong enemy to religious self-segregating communities, or enclaves (Berger 1999). Per Appleby (2011: 233), a religious enclave is defined as:

A community set apart from the larger society and concerned with maintaining boundaries to prevent its members from deserting. Moral persuasion is the glue that keeps the enclave together as a social group. Enhancing the effectiveness of moral suasion are ideological claims such as the doctrine that the enclave members are elect, chosen, set apart from the fallen world and practical rewards such as social or economic benefits.

By remaining insulated from the larger society, religious enclaves strive to maintain their boundaries, barring influences from outsiders. As discussed in chapter one, the Amish are well equipped at rejecting modern ideas and practices as a subculture/enclave.

The Amish protect themselves from modernization through control of communication with mainstream culture, despite the ease of socializing, media exposure, and otherworldly influences in the English world. However, as Berger (2010: 10) advises, maintaining this type of subculture “becomes ever more difficult under modern conditions, because the walls of separation from the outside world have to be kept very strong and in good repair.” When enclaves are able to retain these boundaries from the outside world, they are better armed to

resist modernization. Purposed seclusion in the Amish faith, however, is not necessarily done as a response to modernization, but because it has been a part of their religion since its conception many years ago and is today practiced through the Ordnung of each community.

Fundamentalism. As Berger (2010: 7) indicates, “fundamentalism is the attempt to restore or create anew a taken-for-granted body of beliefs and values.” The fundamentalist worldview interprets unbelievers or outsiders as a threat: “He or she must be converted (the most satisfying option), shunned, or eliminated, be it by expulsion or physical liquidation” (p. 7). To shield members from these skeptics, those in charge of fundamentalist projects control communication with and influence of naysayers, remaining insulated from the nonbelievers outside of their faith. One version of fundamentalism sees the movement as relating directly to societal enclave, though this is often a more ambitious goal:

The recipe for the maintenance of a fundamentalist subculture is simple enough; control all communications between your members and the outside world, and especially control all social relations with outsiders... This kind of control is easiest to achieve if the subcultural community is physically segregated from the larger society—often remote rural villages or, less effectively, in compact urban neighborhoods. If physical segregation is not possible, controls over interaction and information have to be particularly stringent (P. 10).

Indeed, this type of fundamentalism is challenging under modern conditions, because keeping separation from the outside world is difficult to achieve.

However, within the Amish faith, religious participation and belief do not seem to falter as in many mainstream religions. A major reason for this is likely related to the level of insulation the culture requires. To be sure, Kaufmann (2010) views fundamentalism as a response to secular modernity, in terms of reinforcing traditional gender roles, maintaining high fertility rates, and therefore keeping retention rates high. With all of these evident in the Amish

culture, this form of fundamentalism seems successful especially in light of the population doubling every twenty years (Kaufmann 2010).

In this way, then, fundamentalism offers a new, more resilient type of religion in contrast to many mainstream belief systems. By creating tension with and opposition to society, fundamentalists develop a counterculture through education, control of the media, restrictions to modernity, use of different languages, and marks of distinction (e.g., clothing, facial hair, the use of buggies, “Pennsylvania Dutch” as the primary language of Amish communities). The restrictions of the Amish faith create a separation from the English world and are strongly advised by the Ordnung. By remaining an enclave separated from the rest of society, the Amish are able to conserve their fundamentalism. With restricted access to nonbelievers and the outside world, the Amish remain purposely secluded from alternative worldviews that may contradict or influence their own. Although difficult to achieve, the Amish appear to keep strict walls of separation in good repair, per Berger’s (2010) contentions, thus contributing to the survival and growth of the faith.

Strict church theory. According to Finke and Stark (2007), the history of religion in the United States shows the most striking trend has been the “churching of America,” starting at the beginning of our nation in 1776 and continuing today. Despite what others believe, they argue the “churching of America” was more than just a rise in religious participation:

Many observers have discounted the rise in church membership on the grounds that it was accompanied by a decline in acceptance of traditional religious doctrines. But this simply isn’t so. Not all denominations shared in the immense rise in membership rates, and to the degree that denominations rejected traditional doctrines and ceased to make serious demands on their followers, they ceased to prosper. The churching of America was accomplished by aggressive churches committed to vivid otherworldliness (P. 1).

This otherworldliness, or life in the unverifiable and non-empirical afterworld (with rewards only available in this afterworld), is a big part of the assurance for current members (Beckford 2003). Furthermore, by relying upon a theology that encourages sacrifice and comforts those who are suffering, newer sects are better able to compete with denominations who require more from their members. The comparative success of each religious body, in the face of unregulated religious economies (where some denominations are succeeding and others are failing), depends on their ability to use evangelizing techniques and religious doctrines to increase participation from clergy, congregations, and communities when the payout and rewards come in the afterworld.

Finke and Stark (2007) point to the content of church doctrine or the lack of it as a means of explaining many failed and failing denominations. They also discuss the effects of modernization and fluctuating or flexible demands upon church members as reasons behind such declines. As Kaufmann (2010: 36) describes, “‘Strict church’ theory predicts that the density of social ties in demanding religious communities makes it much more costly and difficult for members to leave. Those who depart lose their entire world, not just one part of it, and may even be refused access to their parents.” Additionally, it becomes more difficult to leave a demanding denomination when social and economic ties, identities, and worldviews are all linked to that church. In other words, a break with a strict church is more befuddling and pricey than leaving a more liberal church. By creating high costs (actual and perceived) for members, strict church theory advocates religious communities are in a better position to succeed than those without because members who have made the commitment have more to lose, as the Amish do when thinking about their families, communities, and ways of life.

In short then, it appears many of the mainline denominations in America have declined due to modernizing and asking less and less of their members. As noted above, Kelley (1972: 95) asserts that, “Strong organizations are strict...the stricter the stronger.” With a strict *Ordnung* to live by, Amish are better equipped to maintain their seclusion and protect their sheltered way of life, as some might see it. As described in the previous chapter, the austere nature of being Amish seem to encourage lifelong obedience to the faith. Isolation from the outside world, strict baptismal vows, and excommunication for deviant members make leaving it very costly on several levels. Such sternness seems to set the Amish faith apart from most mainline denominations. To this point, even those who leave the faith often remain religious, as will be seen in my findings chapters. Many remain committed to a church, perhaps one that is a bit less strict than the one they were brought up in, but rather stringent nonetheless. Moreover, they continue to struggle with the very severe consequences of having left their Amish communities and their large, but tightknit families.

Endogenous growth sects. For the Amish, high retention of its members and strong religious beliefs are a vital part of their faith, which as discussed, permeates every aspect of daily life. Endogenous growth sects, according to Kaufmann (2010: 253), are “those that segregate themselves from society and grow their own... They benefit from the strong communal boundaries and membership retention that ethnic groups possess, but supercharge it with a universalist fervor [or an ‘everyone will be saved’ kind of optimism].” These religious groups, including the Amish, separate themselves from others by encouraging large families, which allow them to benefit “from both a fertility premium over others and a strong capacity to retain and transmit membership to their children” (p. 253). While demographic factors like population size and fertility rates are often seen as resulting from lower levels of socioeconomic

development, in the guise of endogenous growth sects, religiosity is viewed as a critical link between fertility and socioeconomic security (Karpov 2010). Stated differently, higher birthrates are often related to those belonging to more conservative religions with higher levels of religiosity. Rather than diminish, the Amish population has actually grown larger despite predictions of their demise (Kaufmann 2010). In this way, Kaufmann (p. 269) argues, “fundamentalism cannot be stopped... [and] the religious shall inherit the earth.”

To be sure, the Amish, when compared to mainline denominations and those with no religious preference, are a force to be reckoned with in terms of population as a result of soaring birthrates. The Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies (one of few able to find demographic information on the Amish due to very limited access to the data) looked at population changes for Amish communities, comparing data from 1991 (Luthy 1992) and 2010 (from Amish sources including Raber’s Almanac, various Amish publications, *The Diary’s* migration report, Amish directories containing important dates [birth, death, marriage, etc.], and informants of the Young Center). Looking at settlements (discussed in chapter one), districts, and the estimated population, the percentage of change for all of the Amish communities in the United States in 2010 showed an increase of 102 percent, with the estimated population increasing from 123,550 in 1991 to 249,495 in 2010. Some communities in Montana and Virginia grew as much as 400 percent.

Compared to population changes for other religions from comparable years (1990 to 2008), rates of those identifying as Christian, generally speaking, rose by 12.8 percent (US Census 2012). Evangelical/Born Again rates rose by 75 percent, Mennonites by 46.3 percent, and Muslims by 61 percent. Those identifying as Jewish decreased by 17 percent.

Evangelical/Born Again was the only comparable religious group to the Amish. While it is

important to acknowledge the footnote within these data, which indicates that such rates are based on measures of feelings about religion, not necessarily about denomination belonging, the results, for comparative purposes, are still indicative. Indeed, while current data is not available, the birthrate for Amish was an average of seven births per woman in 1979 and Amish researchers see little reason to believe it has changed (Kaufmann 2010). With a population that is doubling every twenty years, it seems hard to imagine that the Amish faith is going anywhere anytime soon.

As indicated above, both the resilience and growth of the Amish faith in the United States can be well explained by contemporary religious theories. Fundamentalist religions are an established fixture of modern life (Kaufmann 2010). By having a strong Ordnung, adult baptisms, and the use of shunning, the Amish faith demands plenty from its members, along with strict punishment for disobedience. As evident above, the Amish provide an excellent example of a community resisting modernization and secularization while remaining insulated, using principles of strict church theory, and presenting themselves as an endogenous growth sect with a fundamentalist foundation. With this in mind, what then will stop the Amish, to borrow from Kaufmann (2010), from inheriting the earth? Within such a context, several theoretical constructs are helpful to understanding the situations through which members defect.

Becoming an Ex

What follows is a discussion of ideas that proved useful in exploring the plight of the former Amish as they adjust to being in the English world. Research on apostates and religious switching, stigma associated with leaving a role or status (like a role of a church member,

sibling, or child), and the process of becoming an ex all add to the understanding of factors that come into play with the decisions they have made and the lives they live as ex-Amish.

Apostates. According to Hadaway and Roof (1988), apostates are those who have previously held a religious identity but now do not for whatever reason. Religious “nones,” apostates, and invisible affiliates—those who rarely attend services but do identify with a religion—make up what is often termed the “unchurched” population. More specifically, religious “nones” consist of apostates who have newly rejected religion and non-stayers who have never held a religious identity. In particular, a religious identity is “more than an affirmation of a particular religious faith, and, in fact, for many people a religious identity is not religious at all, but rather an affirmation of what a religious group symbolizes” (p. 30). This suggests, for example, that a person may hold the religious identity of a Catholic or a Methodist, signifying that they belong to that group. It does not mean, however, that they are practicing their faith through traditional channels of regular church attendance, volunteer work, or other things deemed appropriate by each particular religious denomination.

Denominations in the United States, for Hadaway and Roof (1988), are culture-affirming institutions that represent the values of a “good American” who believes in “truth, justice, and the American way.” If a denomination closely aligns with “American” beliefs and values (mainly Christian ones), they can be easily accepted. Conversely, apostasy signifies a rejection of the prevailing culture’s values and/or a religious identity. This is a difficult position to be in, however, for a group or individual: “It is much simpler in this society to remain ‘something.’ To become a ‘none’ is an active step taken by those who either reject the teachings of the church or reject the church as an institution. In either case, the motivation is strong enough to violate a

cultural norm and risk the consequences” (p. 30-31). Suffice it to say that atheism, apostasy, and unaffiliation are unsettling for many Americans and religious scholars:

The boundary between the religious and the nonreligious is not about religious affiliation per se. It is about the historic place of religion in American civic culture and the understanding that religion provides the “habits of the heart” that form the basis of the good society. It is about an understanding that Americans share something more than rules and procedures, but rather that our understanding of right and wrong and good citizenship are also shared (Edgell, Gerteis, and Hartmann 2006: 230).

In most instances, apostasy is the abandonment of all religions or religious faith (Phillips and Kelner 2006). Apostates of this type are often associated with the labels of agnostic (i.e., doubting or skeptical of their belief), atheist (i.e., rejecting a theism or belief), or religious “nones.” Brinkerhoff and Mackie (1993) point out that apostasy can be understood as a multidimensional progression of severance with two major components: religiosity (embracing a set of beliefs) and communality (a feeling of belonging). Consequently, apostasy “indicates not only a loss of religious belief, but rejection of a particular ascriptive community as a basis for self-identification” (Caplovitz and Sherrow 1977: 31). As a result, a person who becomes an apostate in any form is giving up or rejecting an often deeply held societal belief as well as the community that they have been associated with for possibly their entire life.

Furthermore, Bromley (1998) contends apostasy in fact occurs under particular circumstances. It involves a contested exit with one of three types of organizations based on a continuum: allegiant, contestant, and subversive organizations. Allegiant organizations are those with high levels of autonomy and self-protection. Authority is taken as legitimate and often not questioned because the burden of proof lies on the claimsmaker, or in this case the ex-Amish person. The second in Bromley’s (1998) typology includes contestant groups like economic for-profit organizations. These have limited autonomy and often work within the boundaries of

regulatory agencies. Here the claimsmaker has a bit more power with the ability to make public claims about any disputes with the contestant organization. The final organization type is subversive, with few allies and many opponents. There are high levels of tension with external groups resulting in low levels of legitimacy, especially in comparison to others. These organizations, according to Bromley (1998) pose the greatest risk to established social order.

Additionally, there are three contested exit roles associated with these. The defector role, for Bromley (1998: 28), is “one in which an organizational participant negotiates exit primarily with organizational authorities, who grant permission for role relinquishment, control the exit process, and facilitate role transition.” The defectors, or ex-Amish in this case, hold primary responsibility for breaking with the moral standards of the organization, which are often held in high regard, much like the Amish church. The church, retaining control of the narratives of those leaving, at least in their retrospective communities, is setup in many instances as an allegiant organization. As such, they manage exits through the use of shunning and excommunication in extreme examples. When this does not prove worthwhile, the person becomes an ex and must then deal with their supposed culpability in this failed relationship, all while building new social networks, stabilizing their personal lives, and rebuilding their identity (Bromley 1998). For this sample, there were a total of 20 defectors out of 25 participants (see B1 in Appendix B: Table 1).

A whistleblower often defects from a contestant organization (i.e., economic for-profit organizations), where the defector is in a position of power once they have made public claims about the organizations (Bromley 1998). Here, the whistleblower is tasked with shining light on practices in the organization, which are seen as contrary to their mission (Bromley 1998). While not common amongst the ex-Amish in this research (3 whistleblowers out of 25; see B2

Appendix B: Table 1), some cases of abuse warrant this role for the defectors, although they are still leaving from an allegiant organization.

Apostates, for Bromley (1998), coming from subversive organizations, stand in contrast to the group's oppositional view of society. The organization has high levels of tension with others in external groups as a result. Those leaving develop loyalties to another group, which provide helpful narratives and social groups to align with when defecting (Bromley 1998). Much like whistleblowers, this type of defector is not common in the Amish community (two apostates in this sample; see B3 in Appendix B: Table 1), although for those that leave the faith for another one, they would fall into this category.

Furthermore, Mauss's (1969) breakdown of defection relating to intellectual, social, and spiritual/emotional dimensions provides the analytical structure needed when looking at why ex-Amish leave their community and church. Mauss (1969) discusses these aspects of religious defection, which help explain "dis-involvement" in the Mormon Church in particular. The intellectual dimension relates to a disbelief in religious doctrine or the central tenets of a faith. The social dimension, for Mauss (1969), relates to the importance of various social factors including family, social class, and socialization. These factors often enforce conformity to community norms and church values. The emotional or spiritual dimension relates to other types of defection where there is a negative feeling or possible rebellion to blame. Further, though, he developed a typology to describe those types of defectors who rank high on some dimensions and low on others, including: (1) intellectual, (2) social, (3) emotional/spiritual, (4) cultural, (5) psychological, (6) alienated, (7) total, and (8) circumstantial defectors [see Appendix D: Table 3: Mauss's (1969) Typology for Defection applied to the ex-Amish].

In certain cases, ethno-apostasy is a better description of what occurs, particularly in reference to American Jews and possibly the Amish (Phillips and Kelner 2006). For exs' in these faiths, it does not really matter whether or not a person is switching religions or leaving a faith altogether in the classical formulation of apostasy. Once they have left the faith they were raised in, regardless of their religious future, they have abandoned their self-proclaimed belonging in the community. Additional rationales for leaving religion include conflict with clergy or other members of the church, life course or lifestyle changes in the church, doctrinal disputes, and geographic mobility (Hadaway and Roof 1988). With this in mind, many people partake in religious switching, rather than abandoning religion altogether. For those looking to leave the Amish church, this often means moving to a more liberal church on the Amish-Mennonite continuum (discussed in chapter one).

Religious switching. Predictors of religious switching include factors as mundane as age, marital status, occupational or residential mobility, and moral, social, or lifestyle conflicts with the church or clergy. Religious switching and denominational mobility has been explained in many ways over the last century. Sherkat (2001) finds support for both status mobility and rational choice theories (RCT) in explaining religious switching. Status mobility theories argue that switching is often done from a more theologically conservative denomination to a more liberal one, signifying that some switch for a higher social status that results from a liberal religious switch.

In contrast, RCT explains denominational switching “in part through supply-side models that relate denominations’ abilities to retain and attract members to the cost-benefit ratio involved in the collective production of goods” (Phillips and Kelner 2006: 508). In short, people switch denominations to be with those that are socioeconomically similar. RCT also explains

religious switching through demand-side models, focusing on preference, human capital with regards to religious meaning, and the limited social choices that some religions propose, especially the Amish. What is lacking in this account is a theoretical explanation of those who move to another faith to find a religious home similar to the one that they left, like the Amish and Mennonites.

To this end, Nelson and Bromley (1988: 12) find that “[t]he primary denominational destination of defectors and the denominational origin of converts are those churches that are theologically closest.” As mentioned earlier, when individuals do decide to leave their faith, they often find a religious home at a more liberal Amish church or at the Mennonite church because the principles are predominantly similar. Likewise, if conservative Mennonites leave their church, it is often to one that is more liberal, but still close to what they know and likely still on the Amish-Mennonite continuum.

An often overlooked aspect of religious switching deals with ethno-religious communities. Sherkat (2001) finds “quasi-ethnic” religious groups have high degrees of loyalty, with for example over 80 percent retention rates for American Jews. Using RCT, Sherkat (p. 1464) reasons that within ethno-religious communities, there are intensified “group pressures by linking a variety of social rewards to religious participation.” This in turn increases both the benefits of participation and the costs of exiting. As noted earlier, RCT explains religious involvement via a cost-benefit analysis. While this may accurately describe why individuals stay in particular religions, it does not adequately explain those who leave. Logically speaking, there does not seem to be a benefit for religious switchers or apostates, since they are losing the most. The only group that does not have so much to lose would be those individuals who did not grow up in a religious environment.

Furthermore, Phillips and Kelner (2006) point out that the distinction between religious switchers and apostates needs to be understood through culture-specific concepts (the differing implications and meanings within various religious communities). Sherkat (2001: 1464) emphasizes, “In groups with ethnic or quasi-ethnic characteristics, ties to the community through language, folklore, custom, intermarriage, and solidarity make disaffiliation difficult.” Likewise, in Jewish culture, and I would suggest Amish culture, boundaries between daily life and religion are often blurred, with an emphasis on practice rather than belief (Phillips and Kelner 2006). This makes leaving much more difficult and helps explain why those who leave the Amish faith, despite the high costs, often find an alternative religious home in the Mennonite church. For example, finding a new church that requires almost as much of the members as the previous faith did can be comforting to an ex, as will be explored in chapters four, five, and six.

Stigma. Dealing with the stigma of becoming an ex, and the impression management required as a result, is often difficult. Stigma is an attribute or characteristic that is profoundly demeaning and is often applied to individuals by others. Goffman (1963) discussed the importance of stigma on social identity, including what information is presented by those with a stigma and how such information affects personal identity. He also examined how stigma plays into group alignment including in-groups (groups that a person belongs to) and out-groups (groups that a person does not belong to but are held in opposition of), and how deviations from what is “normal” are considered deviant in society, which can lead to stigma for individuals and/or groups. Stigmas not only apply to those who are visibly or mentally impaired but also those, like Amish and ex-Amish, who appear and act differently than those in mainstream society.

Furthermore, stigmas are comprised of relationships between stereotypes and attributes, often leading to inappropriate and possibly imagined identities. Cahill and Eggleston (1994), for example, describe “non-person” treatment, where individual capabilities are based on these imagined identities, resulting in treating the individual with this stigma as a non-“normal” (discussed below). This “non-person” treatment can be seen when people ask helpers questions about the individual who holds the stigma (e.g., a person in a wheelchair, a child, the elderly, or even someone who appears to be Amish) rather than that person directly. Based on stereotypes and norms about those with this stigma, others can correctly or incorrectly assume a lack of understanding, resulting in a lack of communication with the individual or altogether. For this research, this can be seen when the “normals,” or English, talk with the Amish/ex-Amish as if they are not as intelligent as others or even talk around them, asking questions like, “Does s/he understand English?” or “Will s/he be able to keep up?” While this type of “non-person” treatment is not necessarily applied to everyone, it is an issue when there is little known about that person’s culture.

Goffman (1963) distinguishes between three types of stigma: abominations of the body (i.e., physical disability which affects an individual’s self-concept), blemishes of individual character (i.e., flaws of an individual’s moral character), and tribal stigmas (e.g., ethnicity, race, or religion, especially in the case of the Amish). What all of these have in common is “an individual who might have been received easily in ordinary social intercourse possesses a trait that can obtrude itself upon attention and turn those of us whom he meets away from him, breaking the claim that his other attributes have on us” (p. 2). These stigmas in social interaction stand in opposition to “normals,” or those without visible stigmas. When a stigmatized individual is not accepted or has not successfully “passed” as a “normal” (i.e., an ideal one often tries to

accomplish in social interaction), shame may result. When in the presence of “normals,” stigmatized individuals, if trying to pass as “normal”, often feel as though they are onstage, having to perform roles to manage the impressions they are giving. Being disgraced in a particular role leaves the stigmatized individual with a spoiled identity, which then requires stigma management (i.e., an attempt to conduct oneself acceptably, living up to normative expectations which society has in place) (Goffman 1963).

This raises two additional concerns. First, the stigmatized is seen as paying a great price for the normal performance, often exhibited through fear and anxiety about (the possibility of) a collapsed performance, which could occur at any moment. Second, there are also issues of loyalty to the stigmatized group when and if the individual trying to pass discredits other stigmatized individuals, potentially leading to further guilt and shame. Furthermore, Goffman distinguishes between discredited and discreditable. The first takes place when the stigma is noticeable or visible during social interactions, like someone who is wheelchair bound, someone relying on a seeing eye dog, or in this study, perhaps someone with a long beard, tall hat, homemade and plain clothes, and/or driving a buggy. A discreditable stigma, on the other hand, is not that noticeable and does not necessarily interfere with social interactions unless it becomes known. This type of stigma usually comes out in more developed relationships. Examples include being incarcerated, having a mental illness, or again, relating to my research, being ex-Amish. These are not visible stigmas, but may be sources of stigma nonetheless (Goffman 1963).

According to Goffman (1963), groups are, in broad terms, collections of like-situated individuals. This can be a formation of like-minded individuals, those in like situations, or those with an “in-group orientation” (where they move away from the standards of mainstream society and what is “normal” to a group that values their group identity). Moreover, how individuals see

themselves is based on the nature of his or her group affiliations. It is also possible for stigmatized individuals to see themselves from the perspective of “normals” (perceived rest of society), which may produce an out-group alignment. Differentness may stem from either what people tell themselves or what they perceive society suggests about them. In such circumstances, “society tells him he is a member of the wider group, which means he is a normal human being, but that he is also ‘different’ in some degree, and that it would be foolish to deny this difference” (p. 123).

The idea of moral careers in relation to stigma is also important to understand when talking about the Amish and ex-Amish in social interaction. Goffman (1961) argues that the label of deviant is often the reaction to various patterns of behavior in the social world, which hold prominence over actual behavior. Career, in a broad sense, refers to any direction in a person’s social life. Offering the benefit of moving between the public and personal, or between the self and its significance in society, the concept of career is also two-sided. One is connected to inner issues held near and dear, like self and felt identities. The other is part of the institutional complex in the public realm, concerning official place in society and life. Similarly, the moral aspects include “the regular sequence of changes that career entails in the person’s self and in his framework of imagery for judging himself and others” (p. 128).

For example, Goffman (1961) proposes three stages in the career of a mental patient (in a sociological sense, where their social fate is altered): the pre-patient phase, where the person is either self-identified or “betrayed” by someone close and help is sought (e.g., a person is committed to a mental hospital; a defendant is found guilty in a court proceeding; or for the Amish who are thinking of leaving, they may begin making plans and decide to leave); the in-patient phase, where hospitalization occurs and rationalizations begin (i.e., this is where the work

takes place; old identities are broken down for the mental hospital patient, the criminal, and the Amish/ex-Amish); and the ex-patient phase (i.e., this is when life begins again with the ex labels applied [ex-mental patient, ex-criminal, and ex-Amish] although this phase is not final or necessarily the end of the process). With this in mind, each self and moral career is changed within the given institutional system (e.g., mental hospital, prison or jail, and English society—with or without the help of others, as will be seen in the analysis chapters):

The self, then, can be seen as something that resides in the arrangements prevailing in a social system for its members. The self in this sense is not a property of the person to whom it is attributed, but dwells rather in the pattern of social control that is exerted in connection with the person by himself and those around him. This special kind of institutional arrangement does not so much support the self as constitute it (P. 168).

Accordingly, during the transition of becoming an ex, those who are leaving the Amish will go through a period of difficulty in shedding the old self and their former identity while creating a new self in English society, all the while trying to understand the “normals” and their new way of life.

Society’s norms guide our behavior and when individuals deviate from this, whether it is intentional or unintentional (as in the case of many of those stigmatized), they are not in compliance (non-conforming). In some cases others help the stigmatized abide by society’s norms through tacit cooperation, while others appear as deviants. For those considering an exit from the Amish faith, or those who already have, this can be difficult. Because they no longer comply, they are viewed as deviant and, therefore, not a part of the normal group. As discussed, a stigma of disobedience within Amish society is detrimental, often resulting in shunning. The threats of the repercussions due to such a stigma are so impactful that individuals may reconsider decisions to leave the faith.

Becoming an ex. Role exit is a process of detachment from a central role of a person's identity, resulting in a "reestablishment of an identity in a new role that takes into account one's ex-role" (Ebaugh 1988: 23). This is a social process that usually takes place over time, often originating before the individual has even realized it. The process of role exiting generally involves four stages: (1) first doubts about one's commitment to a current role; (2) seeking and weighing alternatives; (3) turning points; and (4) establishing a new role. Ebaugh, an ex-nun herself, explored this process through examinations of various individuals (e.g., ex-doctors, transsexuals, recovering alcoholics, mothers without custody). Using Merton's work on anticipatory socialization (i.e., "the acquisition of values and orientations found in statuses and groups in which one is not yet engaged but which one is likely to enter"), Ebaugh (1988: 7) theorizes the process needed to become an ex by exploring the ways in which individuals go through voluntary role exiting. Moving beyond the idea of exiting as a basic social process, she emphasizes the importance of both role taking and role making, which together permit various role prescriptions with role exiting as a viable alternative in many cases. Ebaugh focuses not only on these stages but also on central variables or properties that she sees as influential in the process: voluntariness, centrality of the role, reversibility, duration, degree of control, individual versus group exit, single versus multiple exits, social desirability, degree of institutionalization, degree of awareness, and sequentially. Many of which are important to ex-Amish transitions as well.

During the first stage of role exiting, which can either be conscious or unconscious, individuals begin to doubt their current roles which to this point had often been taken for granted. It is a phase of reinterpretation and redefining of one's current reality, role commitments, and value judgments. As Ebaugh (1988: 42) articulates, "essential in this process

is the function of cuing behavior on the part of role exiters, the positive and negative impact of others' reactions to first doubts, and the interpretation of subsequent events once the individual begins to question and reevaluate role commitments." First doubts arise because of organizational change, burnout, disappointments and changes in relationships, and events that trigger doubt (e.g., a doctor begins to doubt her profession because of the number of surgeons being sued for malpractice—she's reconsidering not because she is fearful of being sued, but because the surgeons she knows are in the wrong). These usually manifest themselves in cuing behavior, where cuing is defined as "those signs, conscious or unconscious, that an individual is dissatisfied in his or her current role and is seeking role alternatives" (p. 70). Because this stage is not always a conscious effort, when individuals begin seeking alternatives in the next stage, they may come back and re-interpret their first doubts with hindsight.

In the second stage, seeking alternatives, individuals actively compare their current roles with prospective options (with which they are likely unfamiliar) (Ebaugh 1988). This evaluation process can either be a rational and deliberate process, or a less systematic and more spontaneous process that can be emotional and seemingly non-rational (e.g., the above referenced doctor considers going back to school to become a malpractice attorney). For most involved, the process of seeking alternatives includes pursuing and contemplating role choices, reacting to positive and negative social support, weighing the pros and cons of one's current role with the alternatives, acquisitioning a new reference group, and rehearsing the alternative role. Additionally, Ebaugh (p. 95-96) advises that in most cases, "the process of comparing a current role with role options took place in a vague and off-and-on way over a period of years until pressures mounted or events occurred which significantly altered the perceived advantages and disadvantages of either the current or the alternative role."

Upon successful seeking of alternatives, the next stage, the turning point, occurs when preemptive behavior in the seeking process enables individuals to picture their place in the desired, new role and emotionally prepares them for a conclusive exit. A turning point is an incident, which rallies and infuses awareness for an individual that his/her previous role has been disrupted and is no longer viable. This provides individuals with the opportunity for change (e.g., returning to the doctor illustration, perhaps she is called to testify in a court case and is unhappy with the decision of the court, believing the defense attorney should have approached things in a different manner). There are five major types of turning points that Ebaugh found in her research: specific events, “the straw that broke the camel’s back,” time-related factors, excuses, and “either/or” alternatives. These can either be gradual or sudden, although Ebaugh focuses on those that are gradual to advocate for a more defined process of role exiting. A vacuum experience is “one in which taken-for-granted anchors of social and self-identity are suspended for the individual, leaving him or her feeling rootless and anxious... The resolution of these feelings of worthlessness and anxiety were closely tied to successful efforts to begin to create and adapt to a new role in society” (p. 145). For those exiting a role, there are a range of feelings—elation, euphoria, fear, anger, etc.—that result during this stage as well.

The final stage in the process of role exiting is creating an ex-role once the individual has actually severed ties with his/her former identity. An ex-role “constitutes a unique sociological phenomenon in that the expectations, norms, and identity associated with it do not so much consist in what one is currently doing but rather stem from expectations, social obligations, and norms related to one’s previous role” (Ebaugh 1988: 149). For many, becoming an ex involves a struggle between the past, present, and future. Many struggle to emotionally disentangle their previous role with their new one in terms of normative expectations and self-perceptions. Using

Goffman's (1963) work on role behavior, Ebaugh points out many of the individuals use cuing behavior in order to change their presentations of self, including clothing, hairstyles, mannerisms, physical expressions, and even habits like drinking or smoking (e.g., the doctor, who is now a law student, is having difficulty adjusting to her new life—her doctor friends shun her as they think she has gone to the “dark side,” and she does not feel she fits in with the younger law school students).

Ebaugh (1988) goes on to identify six major areas of adjustment for those creating an ex-identity: (1) various ways of presenting themselves and their ex-identities, (2) dealing with social reactions to their ex-statuses, (3) establishing and negotiating intimate relationships, (4) developing a new network of friends, (5) adjusting to different relationships with those in former roles, and (6) dealing with role residual that loiters after the exit (Ebaugh 1988). With such a detailed framework of the process of becoming an ex, Ebaugh's work (combining ideas from Goffman and Merton) provided structure for the interview guide I used during data collection (see Appendix A) and was instrumental throughout data analysis.

Another example of research on becoming an ex relates to a recent advancement of the apostasy literature. Smith (2011) describes the process of becoming an atheist—how individuals construct identity and meaning while rejecting theism. Some common influences on apostasy include family socialization, university influence, beliefs, and doubts. As an achieved identity, much like becoming ex-Amish, atheists tend to transition through four major components in the process (although not linear). The first involves the “ubiquity of theism”—the idea that there is a pervasive norm in society of theism or a belief in a higher power. For Smith's participants, there was a need to properly understand these beliefs before they could progress. The second component involves questioning theism, related to Ebaugh's doubting stage, where individuals

begin questioning what they learned during childhood after having an opportunity to be involved in difference social contexts. Third is rejecting theism, where for Smith, individuals take on and willingly accept an atheist identity, often with other non-believers. Lastly, there is a “coming out” atheist component, which is when the atheist, or in my research ex-Amish, identity takes on social significance. As Smith (2011: 229) concludes, “The significance and influence that any particular identity has been both explicitly claimed and validated in meaningful social interaction.”

For Smith’s research, the final two stages, rejecting theism and “coming out,” were critical to his participants as they accepted an atheist identity. Given the silent and simplistic nature of Amish culture, however, Smith’s framework was not as relevant to my research though it was useful for comparison. The participants in my study did not give up on their beliefs in God or religion. For the few that now belong to a Mennonite church, their beliefs regarding a higher power did not substantially change. As for the others that made more significant religious switches, one could say that their views evolved but did not disappear as they learned of other perspectives. Additionally, the stage of “coming out” is likely something that very few ex-Amish do. Those who have participated in documentaries or other types of mass media may have inadvertently “come out,” but they are likely to be the exceptions and not the rule. Also for reasons related to Amish culture, opening up about the past is not always beneficial for the ex-Amish, as will be seen in the methods and analysis chapters. Disclosing too much about their families and backgrounds would be very detrimental to any relationships they may be trying to maintain with their families and former communities.

Potentially more useful for examining the troubles related to becoming an ex and adjusting to new roles, Irvine (2000: 10) describes the self as “more than a sum of its parts, and

narrative is what allows it to *be* more.” Essentially, the narratives that we tell ourselves allow for a complex and changing self, similar to Smith’s atheist identity. Furthermore because the self consists of overlapping roles, and because we are more than just these roles, the experience of having a self includes an internal conversation about who one is. Irvine asserts that one creates this selfhood through the use of narrative, which ideally would “persuade one’s audience that one ‘is’ a particular kind of person” (p. 10). Contrary to Goffman’s (1959) work on the presentation of self, Irvine emphasizes that this type of narrative is actually impression management directed at oneself. While this is helpful for those exiting a role and moving on to something else, it may also cause a problem. Individuals, who are dependent, whether it is on a person, thing, or idea, can fulfill their needs by becoming codependent on a group or other substitute. Irvine suggests that this codependency on a substitute might in fact take over and become more important than the earlier outcome. For the ex-Amish who have always relied heavily on their community and family and are now in a world that they barely understand and where they often feel alone, there may exist a greater vulnerability to these codependent relationships on other people or groups (i.e., other exs, new religions or churches, other support groups, or new friends or family for the ex-Amish). For those who do not find others to depend on (like those that leave when they are young, for a short time, or without any support from others), this might help explain why they go back to what they know.

Chapter Summary and Conclusion

This chapter begins with examining the Amish protections from the outside world and resistance to modernization vis-à-vis fundamentalist and strict church theory principles. As a result, the Amish are in a position to flourish, unless of course the ex-Amish are a part of an emerging trend. The research on apostates confirms that while there is a significant change going

against the cultural norms of theism, there are a growing number of individuals who identify as apostates, “nones,” or atheists. Research on apostates (including religious “nones” and atheists) and religious switching explain just how much those who leave strict religions have to lose.

Using the work of Goffman (1959; 1961; 1963) and Ebaugh (1988), and to a lesser extent Smith (2011) and Irvine (2000), this chapter concludes with an exploration of the process, emotions, and issues relating to the self and identity that are associated with becoming ex-Amish. To be sure, these individuals are susceptible to stigma on both ends (as Amish as well as an ex). Those who leave the Amish faith face myriad identity issues as well as adjustments (e.g., how to live in mainstream society, what they should do about education and employment, where to live, and how to survive without former family and friends). Ebaugh’s (1988) and Smith’s (2011) research on becoming an ex are also instrumental as a theoretical framework for understanding the experiences of the ex-Amish. The process individuals go through when leaving a role, while not simple or linear, will prove beneficial in explaining how ex-Amish adjust to the outside world and come to terms with their new roles as members of the English community. This framework provided the structure to the interview guide, while Bromley (1998) and Mauss’s (1969) work was the basis for the analysis in chapters four, five, and six. First, however, I will address my research methodology, which will include the theoretical position related to my interviewing strategy, sampling methods, the interviewing procedures and process, data analysis, and other methodological issues.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

With little academic research on the ex-Amish, exploratory research methods were employed to understand the process of leaving and the lives of the participants of this research. Additionally, standpoint theory and constructivist grounded theory, along with the theoretical framework laid out in chapter two, provided the structure needed to analyze the data and organize the findings throughout this dissertation research examining the lives of the ex-Amish participants. What follows is the research design for understanding the ex-Amish transitions when they embark on their lives in the English world. I begin by detailing the research philosophy of this study, followed by the research design including the research questions, sampling and participants, data collection and analysis, and the methodological and ethical issues relevant to my study.

Research Position

Qualitative research aims at explaining, discovering, and creating theories about what is being studied while understanding social patterns in everyday life (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2006). Through qualitative techniques researchers are allowed to share the perceptions and understandings of others and discover how people give meaning and structure to their daily lives, all the while taking note of one's position in (and possible impact on) the research (Berg 2007). To this end, Charmaz (2004: 981) describes the importance, when conducting qualitative research, of "entering" the phenomenon:

Being fully present during the interview and deep inside the content afterward. Not only does this focused attention validate your participant's humanity, it also helps you take a close look at what you are gaining. Entering the phenomenon means that you come to sense, feel, and fathom what having this experience is like, although you enter your participants' lives much less than an ethnographer does.

Through qualitative and inductive reasoning with an eye towards standpoint and constructionist grounded theory, I gained an appreciation of what it means to be ex-Amish through the eyes and ears of my participants.

Standpoint theory. While not traditionally used to study both women and men's experiences, feminist standpoint theory provides a unique way to understand the perspectives of the ex-Amish. Harding (1991), for example, asserts that in order to gain an appropriate and adequate understanding of women's experiences, we need to ask women what they think, understand, and know. Understanding how and what people know involves asking for their interpretation and the meaning of events or circumstances in their everyday lives. As such, standpoint theory and how this relates to patriarchy provided a starting point for the design of this research project.

Connell (2005) discusses the "patriarchal dividend" to explain both prestige and honor that men accumulate under patriarchy. Importantly, these dividends are not equally dispersed among men although they are universally distributed based on patriarchy. Essentially, while men as a whole gain advantages by living in a patriarchal society, these gains are not experienced to the same degree or in the same way, hence the importance of understanding intersectionality. Patriarchal systems are interwoven with other hierarchical relations, like race, class, origin, ability, generation, region, sexual orientation, and, I would argue, religion. Hill Collins (1990: 226) further asserts: "Depending on the context, an individual may be an oppressor, a member of

an oppressed group, or simultaneously oppressor and oppressed... Each individual derives varying amounts of penalty and privilege from the multiple systems of oppression which frame everyone's lives."

Certainly an important aspect of standpoint theory is privilege. Johnson (2006) explores privilege (e.g., male, white, epistemic) as a result of commanding attention of lower status individuals. McIntosh (1988) further advises there are two types of privilege: (1) "unearned entitlements," which can lead to "unearned advantage" if the entitlement is limited to certain groups; and (2) "conferred dominance," which results when one group has power over another group. Additionally, Johnson (2006: 33) states:

To have privilege is to be allowed to move through your life without being marked in ways that identify you as an outsider, as exceptional or 'other' to be excluded, or to be included but always with conditions... Any category that lowers our status relative to others' can be used to mark us; to be privileged is to go through life with the relative ease of being unmarked.

Moreover, a person can be privileged in one category but then unprivileged in another.

Everything is not a matter of either/or—"either you're oppressed or you're not, privileged or not—because reality is usually a matter of both/and," or intersectionality at its finest (p. 52).

Despite the power differential between men and women in a patriarchal society such as the United States, and more specifically, the Amish, it is important to understand "epistemic privilege" in the interpretations of the participants from their points of view, especially considering their disadvantaged status due to the restrictions of being raised Amish (Johnson 2006).

Furthermore, a similar issue or circumstance may be socially constructed and experienced differently by women and men. As Dougherty (1999) explains through her research on sexual harassment, it is important to understand individual standpoints in regards to these experiences. I

would argue the same is true in regards to becoming ex-Amish, for both men and women. Standpoint theory places great importance on addressing the various power dynamics that come into play. While there remains a difference in relationships with standpoint theory, with men holding power *over* their standpoint and women holding power *with* their standpoint (where the same language is used by both men and women, but different meanings are implied and construed), “there appear to be points of intersections and commonalities among men’s experiences and women’s experiences that could greatly enhance our understanding of men’s and women’s experiences” (p. 439). Fundamentally, Dougherty (1999) is suggesting the need to incorporate more than just the standpoint of educated, white women. Furthermore, she proposes that feminist standpoint theories continue to push researchers to move beyond dominant social constructions of reality, giving voices to and understanding marginalized groups in our society, which have been and continue to be predominantly women (Dougherty 1999).

One of the major criticisms of standpoint theory concerns generalizability. Utilizing standpoint theory certainly allows for previously marginalized voices to be heard, but such voices do not speak for all such situated individuals. Further, those who conduct research, for the most part, do not come from the marginalized groups on which their work centers and this may limit the extent to which they may acknowledge particular vantage points. As an example, Hill Collins (1990) and hooks developed black feminist standpoint theory to speak for women in circumstances like their own, because mainstream standpoint theory failed to do so. While these women had the social standing and education to do such a thing, many other women do not or find themselves busy with other life responsibilities, and fighting privilege may not be a high priority. In response to such critiques, Welton (1997) argues standpoints are not absolute or intrinsic of certain groups. On the contrary, our roles in society are shaped not only by innate

differences, but also mostly because of external forces (Tavris 1992). Thus, Dougherty (1999) urges researchers to look at both men and women's standpoints to create a dialogue in order to adequately explore gender differences. While Harding (1991) and Hartsock (1987) seem to generally assume that men are not interested in understanding others, or even their own standpoints, as it might lead to questioning the status quo and/or encourage change in social power and privilege, more recent standpoint theorists contend that this makes men's standpoints no less important to explore especially in relation to marginalized populations.

Coming from white patriarchal societies, Amish men are afforded luxuries of power and privilege in their Amish communities. When they leave, however, they are thrust into a world where they might look like those in power, but in reality are not well positioned to partake in it (e.g., their eighth grade education is problematic). By including women and men in my research, interesting dynamics emerged as a result of fleshing out the dynamics of being Amish/ex-Amish from multiple standpoints. For example, I found the transformation of becoming an ex is very different for men than women due to their upbringing in an extremely patriarchal community.

Constructivist grounded theory. In addition to standpoint theory, I consciously employed Charmaz's (2014) constructivist grounded theory, which helped provide space for themes to emerge from the data rather than imposing preconceived ideas or theories on the data. Grounded theory, as Glaser and Strauss (1967) first envisioned it, involved developing theories from qualitative data rather than constructing hypotheses from existing theories, by creating a positivist (verified by our senses), systematic method of analysis. According to Charmaz (2014: 8), they intended to "move qualitative inquiry beyond descriptive studies into the realm of explanatory theoretical frameworks, thereby providing abstract, conceptual understandings of the studied phenomena." In the 1990s, grounded theorists moved away from the positivist version of

grounded theory and towards constructivism, acknowledging the benefits of using grounded theory as a tool for analysis more so than for a theory in itself:

The constructivist approach perspective shreds notions of a neutral observer and value-free expert. Not only does that mean that research must examine rather than erase how their privileges and preconceptions may shape the analysis, but it also means that their values shape the very facts that they can identify” (P. 13).

An added benefit of using this analytic framework is that it allows analysis to continually evolve.

What seems important or unimportant at the beginning of the process will evolve, change, or be redefined as the process continues. Subsequently, constant and more focused coding is required (Charmaz 2014). For example, in the beginning, Ebaugh’s (1988) process of becoming an ex, as discussed in chapter two, appeared to be poignant for the participants. As the analysis and coding continued for this study, however, it became apparent that becoming ex-Amish was not a linear process where a person goes through one phase and then continues on to the next. Eventually, through more focused coding, the themes that emerge from continuous analysis point to a more complicated process, better explained by Mauss’s (1969) defector roles and Bromley’s (1998) contested exit roles. This is discussed further in the data analysis chapters. Also of significance in regards to the research position of this study is my initial interest in the Amish and ex-Amish, acknowledging my own place in this research, which is next.

Interest in the Amish. As a Midwesterner, I have been curious about the Amish for many years with communities scattered throughout Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, and Michigan. As a child, I would see horse drawn carriages traveling down the road when we would visit family. We would also frequent Amish bulk stores, furniture shops, quilt stores, and fruit stands along the way. Growing up, I wondered why the Amish wore different clothes, did not have electricity, did not drive cars, and did not play with the same toys I had at home. When I started graduate

study in sociology and became interested in culture and media, my quest to know more about the Amish continued. A professor asked me early on, “If you wanted to see the influences of media on society, you would have to find a culture that was not influenced by it. Is that possible?” My response was “Yes, kind of.” The Amish provide the contrast to a society that is inundated with media from all angles. As I began to look into this more, I was still interested in why the Amish lived the way they did, but what they gave up to leave fascinated me. As explained already, those that leave have much to lose. At the time, I could not imagine being strong enough to leave my family, friends, community, and culture with little chance of returning. This interest created the basis for the research questions, with the goal of learning more about why staying out for these ex-Amish individuals was so important.

Research Questions

Using a constructivist grounded theory approach to data collection and analysis, this study used qualitative, semi-structured interviewing as a means of collecting data (the interview guide can be found in Appendix A). The broad research questions addressed include:

- (1) How does an Amish person make the transition to becoming ex-Amish? I addressed this research question by asking the participant about their Amish community and family (part two and three of interview guide-Appendix A);
- (2) What factors were involved in the participant’s decision to leave Amish culture? I addressed this question by asking about circumstances that lead to their decision and difficulties associated with it (part four), and
- (3) What has life been like since leaving? I addressed this by asking about identity issues resulting from no longer being Amish, support networks, and if they are happy with where they are now (part five and six).

Following the traditions of qualitative research and semi-structured interviewing, the goal here is to allow the participant narrative to emerge through a more natural conversation rather than a forced, prescribed interaction.

Using semi-structured interviews for exploratory research of this nature was ideal. Moving freely through the interview guide based on the natural flow of each conversation provided the participants with the space to fully explain aspects of their departure in their own ways. Before tackling the interview process with this type of guide, a deep understanding of the culture was needed in order to ask appropriate questions. After looking at previous research on the Amish, these questions seemed most relevant. In order to be confident with the interview guide, my key informant looked over the questions. She was also the first participant to be interviewed so if there were any issues they could be addressed in the beginning. Thankfully, this was not needed.

Participants and Sampling

Using a snowball sampling scheme, I began participant recruitment for the interviews with informants I met while familiarizing myself with the Amish community over the course of several years. Despite my fear that collecting a sample of ex-Amish participants would be difficult, I was pleasantly surprised by the ease of gathering and the willingness of my contributors to partake in this study. My primary informant was an ex-Amish woman I met several years ago at an Amish tourist restaurant and have since kept in contact with. She is currently 31 years old, newly married, and a first time mother who is deeply involved with the ex-Amish community in the Midwest. With help from Elizabeth (a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality and used for all names throughout the dissertation), I recruited several individuals who were being helped by a program that she and another ex-Amish woman founded. As is the hope with snowball sampling, word spread through the ex-Amish community via this program, through various webpages of similar groups, and by word of mouth from early research participants. As my list of contacts across the United States grew, I was able to interview people

from various regions with different Ordnung and levels of devotion to the traditional rules and regulations. Recruitment for my study was also aided after I interviewed an ex-Amish man in the Midwest who has helped many others with housing, support, education, and jobs when they first leave. This individual has gained some notoriety within the ex-Amish community by having been involved with documentaries and television programs on the Amish and ex-Amish.

Recruitment and interviewing started in November of 2014 and ended in May of 2015. The sample includes adults who are U.S. citizens, were self-identified as being raised Amish, and have left the faith. In total, I interviewed 25 ex-Amish individuals (14 males and 11 females). They ranged in age from 25 to 78 years, averaging 43 years old. Of the 25 participants, 15 of them were baptized before leaving the faith as older teenagers or young adults, while 10 of them were never baptized in the church. 4 of the participants were married before they left the faith, 4 were/are married to Mennonites, 15 married after they left, 5 of the participants are divorced, and 2 of them identify as homosexual. Four of the participants were married couples in their 60s and 70s who preferred to be interviewed together. When asked about what type of community the participants came from, 18 said they were from Old Amish communities (discussed in chapter one—very strict on the Amish-Mennonite continuum), 5 of these were from middle of the road communities (considered more liberal in relation to Ordnung), and 2 of them stated they came from very strict and technically Mennonite homes, but self-identified as Amish given their upbringing and contact with Amish family.

As described in chapter two, family size, education, how long they have been an ex, and the age they became an ex were relevant in past studies, when looking at whether or not someone will stay or leave the faith. These variables were included in the demographic data collected and will be discussed in more detail in the upcoming chapters. However to summarize here, their

families were generally quite large, as is the case with most Amish families. While I did not ask all of the participants whether their parents were still living, three shared that their fathers had died when they were younger and still a part of the Amish community. Only in these three cases, where the mothers were widowed, were there any remarriages. Otherwise, all of the participants' parents are still married (i.e., no divorces or separations). The average number of siblings is 8, with a range of 0 to 23 (including blood, half, and step siblings for one of the participants whose mother remarried).

Of the 25 participants, 5 of them are the only ones to leave the faith in their immediate families. The remaining 20 participants left either before or after others in their families, affecting the type of support available while they were making the transition. In terms of education, nine stopped with an eighth grade Amish education; five earned a G.E.D. or high school diploma; six attended some college or earned either an associate's or bachelor's degree; and five have gone on to earn master's degrees or higher (one is a lawyer and another has a Ph.D.).

Their average number of years "out" is 18.5, with a minimum of 9 years, a maximum of 57 years, and a standard deviation of 10.4 years. The average age that participants permanently left the Amish church was 21.5 years old, with a minimum of 16 years old and a maximum of 40 years old. While some Amish youth leave before turning 18, staying out at that age is unusual. Exploring the possibility of leaving often occurs during Rumspringa, when Amish youth are able to try out aspects of the English world and test their boundaries, as some of my participants and others who remain Amish today do and did. This is not uncommon. What is unusual is when a person permanently stays out and becomes ex-Amish, as discussed in chapter five.

While a snowball sampling technique was used to recruit participants, the size of my sample was determined by both theoretical sampling principles and access. Using constructivist grounded theory for this project, the point of saturation, or theoretical sampling, was reached when no new themes emerged from the data (Charmaz 2006). In the beginning, I anticipated recruitment would be one of the more difficult parts of the study. Gaining access to the ex-Amish for research interests, I thought, would prove to be a challenge. After all, there is not a list of the Amish and ex-Amish; most do not even participate in the census.

Through Elizabeth (my first ex-Amish contact) and the Internet, I quickly found that there were various avenues to contact participants. I posted a call for research on ex-Amish social media pages, after getting the approval of the administrators, which lead to quite a bit of interest. After messaging with many people and verifying my intentions, I was able to conduct nine interviews with this type of recruiting. Another avenue that I used to find participants was to contact authors of autobiographical books on Amish/ex-Amish life. This lead to another seven interviews. Through word of mouth, I was able to interview an additional nine people. While there were many messages that went unanswered by potential participants or consent forms that were never sent back, overall the sampling and data collection processes seemed quite successful, only taking seven months to complete.

Data Collection

As previously described, I conducted semi-structured qualitative interviews with 25 individuals. These occurred in-person, by telephone, through video-conferencing (depending on location and each participant's preference), and via email. In total, I conducted 5 in-person interviews, 14 telephone interviews (2 of these were with the 2 married couples), 3 Skype

interviews, and 1 email interaction. Allowing for the flow of natural conversation, the interview guide (found in Appendix A and described above) was used as a loose framework for the interviews as each participant's story was different and was treated as such. The flexibility of the guide sanctioned delving further into areas that were more salient for particular participants based on the natural flow of conversations. Alternatively, moving quickly through those questions which were not necessary or as important as others was particularly helpful. For example, a few of the participants were not baptized in the Amish church; they left before doing so. For these participants, some of the questions relating to baptism were not relevant. Because each person's narrative is unique, semi-structured interviews offered the basic structure needed to keep the interactions organized and easy to follow, while still allowing for varying circumstances and the opportunity to delve further whenever relevant.

Interviewing procedure. With participants located across the country, taking advantage of technology programs, like video-conferencing, was logical and useful. Using telephone and video-conferencing, in addition to face-to-face settings for qualitative interviews, allowed many geographic restrictions to disappear and provided greater diversity in the sample. Indeed, video technology, if available and preferable to the participants, enables qualitative researchers to interview geographically dispersed participants while still having visual contact without the expense and hassle of traveling (Sullivan 2012). While there are still criticisms about using technology programs for qualitative research (mostly relating to being unfamiliar with what is available, participants' lack of technological knowledge, or technological issues), the popularity of such programs is rising (Hanna 2012; Long 2013; Seitz 2015). Bourdon (2002) notes that technology in qualitative research is almost a double-edged sword—it must first be accepted for its usefulness before technology can be used to the fullest potential.

Relating to research on more sensitive or personal topics, Trier-Bieniek (2012) recommends combining semi-structured interviewing and feminist methodology for telephone interviews. This allows participants to freely speak about emotional or traumatic subjects in an environment where they feel the safest. For the ex-Amish, creating safe spaces for the interviews was especially important, as they come from a culture that does not openly speak about such personal matters. In-person interviews certainly have their advantages, including being able to delve into topics more thoroughly, a greater understanding of body language and facial expressions, and the intimate contact and dedication that is understood with the commitment of a face-to-face interaction. However, I found that for in-person interviews, the participants seemed much more distracted by the recorder, microphone, and the environment than in the interviews I conducted by Skype or telephone. Additionally, the conversations during Skype and telephone interviews seemed to become comfortable more quickly (based on the participants' reactions and their ease with answering difficult questions), perhaps due to the relative "distance" such means provided to participants as compared to face-to-face interviews.

Interviewing process. Conducting research in-person, over the telephone, or by video-conference opens many doors for research possibilities, but with this comes challenges for the consent process. Face-to-face interviews create a more straightforward context for explaining the consent process and having individuals sign the informed consent form before beginning the interview. In conducting interviews over the telephone, Trier-Bieniek (2012) proposes conversing before the interview takes place, not only to build rapport with the participants, but to also discuss the consent process. Following such preliminaries, a researcher may then mail or email consent forms for potential participants to review, sign, and return. The same process was used for both telephone and Skype interviews. Consent forms were either completed in person

(face-to-face interviews) or returned via a scanned email attachment, mail (an addressed and stamped envelope was provided), or faxed document. In the case of couples being interviewed together, both participants signed separate consent forms.

The interviews lasted from an hour to three hours, depending on the time available and how much the participant had to say. In-person interviews took place in quiet restaurants of the participants' choosing and took place between traditional meal times so as to increase the chances of a quiet atmosphere. By mentioning the purpose (for an interview) to a restaurant host(ess), I was always able to find a quiet corner with few interruptions, which allowed for as much privacy and confidentiality as possible. For telephone and Skype interviews, I suggested participants choose times and places where they would feel comfortable and have greater privacy. For my part, I conducted all such interviews from my home office as it was quiet and private. The interviews were audio-recorded regardless of the context/setting, and I tested my recording equipment at the beginning of each of the interviews to make sure everything worked properly. In addition to audio recording, I also took notes during the interviews, noting my thoughts and to track progress and record field notes.

Interviews began by gathering simple demographic information as a way of getting a conversation going and then moved on to some of the easier material about each participant's Amish community (e.g., size, liberal or conservative, Ordnung, boundaries with the English world). I would then move on to discuss the participant's Amish families including their parents and siblings. From here I would move towards what was often more difficult material to discuss—the factors involved in the decision to leave and what life was like after leaving. To conclude the interviews, I would ask each person how they felt about their decision today, including any misconceptions about the Amish and ex-Amish they wanted to clarify, and in

many cases, I would ask what would have helped them during the defecting process. Some of the questions on the guide ended up being repetitive (e.g., they would talk about what their parents' occupations were before I got to that part on the interview guide), and in these cases, I made adjustments in the moment regarding the ordering and phrasing of questions. As explained earlier, this is a distinct advantage of semi-structured interviewing.

The interview process was finished in May 2015. Each interview was fully transcribed verbatim using HyperTRANSCRIBE and then transferred to a qualitative data analysis program, ATLAS TI, for coding. Transcription was completed by two trusted colleagues (fellow graduate students) and myself. As graduate students, both of my transcribers knew the importance of maintaining confidentiality and their assistance helped complete the process in a timely fashion. They were also helpful in addressing validity (discussed below). All paper, electronic documents, and data, including consent forms, were stored in a locked file cabinet in accordance to HSIRB guidelines.

Data Analysis

Full transcriptions of the interviews were coded using ATLAS TI for qualitative analysis. I used this software for inductive coding of the transcripts, following the principles of constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz 2014). Starting with initial coding, I addressed the research questions listed above. Allowing the data to guide the coding, themes emerged in the participants' own words. In fact, starting very early on with the coding process allowed for additional questions to be asked of participants in order to add to the understanding or to explore emergent patterns (e.g., changing definitions of family or an increased focus on the Amish belief of the ex-Amish not going to Heaven).

The codes for each transcript, along with the master codebook, were contained within the software program. Additional coding and recoding took place as data collection and analysis progressed, supplementing the individual transcripts and master codebook. These were also stored within the software program. Indeed, what seemed important (or unimportant) in the beginning of the project evolved over time, as expected. Stated differently, the process was continuous and iterative, following Charmaz's (2014) guidance. The process allowed for greater exploration into how codes presented themselves in different interviews, which were tracked through memo writing. As such, note taking (during the interviews) and memo writing (during analysis) were both crucial to my efforts. These forms of journaling are often necessary in qualitative research as a means of recording ideas, thoughts, suggestions, concerns, and the like. Their objective is often related to either development of larger themes or recognition of various avenues that ought to be expanded upon in future interviews.

While the codebook developed with the coding process, I did begin with some preliminary codes that existing literature suggested may be relevant. These included: difficulties (emotional, employment, and religious), current status and demographics (age, marital status, children, religion, occupation, and education), Amish community (type and location, relationship with English, Ordnung, shunning status, Rumspringa experience), Amish family (family size, parents' occupations, siblings, birth order, locations, and any switching of communities), and factors involved in the decision to leave (age they left, how many times they tried, why they did, changes in social status, etc.) as well as the process of leaving (pros/cons, support networks, religious concerns, contact with the outside world, shunning/excommunication, emotional difficulties, spiritual difficulties, and financial difficulties). As analysis continued, all of these codes remained important although some of them became more nuanced. For example, just

coding for emotional difficulties after the first few interviews was not enough when stories of abuse (physical, emotional, and sexual) became more prevalent. Additionally, the participant's shunning status was most often linked to whether or not they had been baptized in the church, in addition to how long they have been away and whether or not they have children or a spouse. I also learned that Rumspringa is not a given in each community (especially to the degree that is presented on television) so I had to change how I viewed and analyzed it, which required recoding. To do this, I kept track of the interviews where I started using each new code so I could go back and recode previous interviews accordingly. I later teased out larger analytical codes if that was a possibility. I never went back to do a second interview of the participants, even though at times it seemed tempting, as coding evolved.

Validity, reliability, and believability. Validity, or the credibility of data and results, can sometimes be difficult to establish but none-the-less it can be a strength of qualitative research. Used to determine whether the findings are accurate from the perspectives of the participants, the researcher, and the readers, Creswell (2003) proposes eight strategies to check the accuracy of findings, including: triangulation, member-checking, rich and thick descriptions, clarification of biases, presenting negative or discrepant information, spending prolonged time understanding the phenomenon, peer debriefing, and having an external auditor review the project. While I did not incorporate all of these strategies, the six that were included are discussed below with respect to how they were specifically addressed in my study.

The first strategy of using triangulation of knowledge (rather than methods), to address validity was important. It was my duty to become as informed as possible about the Amish and ex-Amish cultures. While for many of the participants it was not possible to verify their narratives, I was knowledgeable about what others had gone through and with other details about

Amish culture. That said, if there would have been discrepancies in their narratives or details that seemed unrealistic, I would have needed to delve deeper to be sure I understood what they were intending to share, perhaps by either asking them to explain further or cross-referencing different parts of their interview narrative. Fortunately, this was not necessary.

One additional factor to explore relating to the accuracy of the findings is the believability of the participants' narratives. From my perspective, as a researcher incorporating grounded constructivist and standpoint theory, questions about whether or not the information from each participant was accurate was essentially a non-issue. Per standpoint theory, in particular, it was not for me to judge whether someone was telling me the truth. (Unless of course I was presented with very clearly preposterous and intentional storytelling or an inconsistency in their narrative, which was never the case.) I was interested in their narratives and what they meant to the participant, as they communicated them to me. How and what they chose to share was up to their own discretion, which I trusted.

Related to triangulation above, reliability for qualitative research accounts for the consistency and stability of the responses (Creswell 2003). By comparing the participants to each other in the analysis sections, reliability was explored by carefully thinking about how the participants described similar situations. Generalizability, or the ability to apply the findings to other situations, was not a primary goal of this research and is difficult to establish in a traditional way with qualitative research, often due to sampling issues. For this project, one of my primary goals was to contribute to existing theory that help make sense of the process of defecting and the experience of becoming an ex within a religious-cultural context.

For the analysis chapters, I also provide rich and thick descriptions of the situations and backstories. It is also important to provide the participants' own words so the readers can make decisions for themselves about what is being said and in general the relative validity of the findings. Another strategy that Creswell (2003) proposes, which relates to providing detailed descriptions, is to clarify the biases the researcher might hold. While I am not aware of any significant personal bias that I have that impacted this study, it is imperative to discuss objectivity and my interest in relation to this topic. While I have no connection to the Amish through my family history, I did grow up in communities where the Midwest Amish were never far away. For as long as I can remember, I have been interested in how they lived, what their lives were like, and what kept them living that way. After watching a few documentaries about the Amish and ex-Amish, my fascination soon turned to the ex-Amish and related factors described in chapter two. As a person whose parents both come from very large families who are quite close, I could not imagine a situation where I would give up contact with my relatives, my home, and all that I know. However, as will be seen, the ex-Amish do this for many different reasons. It takes much strength and courage to do what the participants in my research have done. I was (and remain) fascinated and wanted to hear their stories first-hand. With this in mind, it was essential to keep my perspective in check and constantly remind myself of the goal of this research—to realistically and accurately account on their narratives of defection.

Another primary strategy, according to Creswell (2003), is to present not only the positive and affirming information, but also the negative information that might not be what was expected or agreeable. Presenting the full picture is imperative to all types of research and only adds to the validity of a qualitative research project. For example, when discussing abuse, some of the participants were sure to not only talk about their traumatic experiences, but also spent a

significant portion of time rationalizing what went on and sometimes even defending their abusers and trauma they suffered. While this may be difficult to understand, it is still important to present, especially in contrast to those who did not experience the abuse.

Spending a great deal of time with the subject matter is also an essential strategy. According to Creswell (2003), knowing about one's research topic and being familiar with participants helps gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Prior to interviewing, the participants and I spent a good deal of time corresponding over the telephone, via email, or through instant messaging. This was done for a variety of reasons, but most importantly, so the participants would become comfortable with me, recognize that my intentions were genuine, and so they could truly give informed consent. Also, entering into research with all the available knowledge allows a researcher to focus on the research questions at hand. For example, rather than each participant having to explain what each aspect of Amish culture is like because it is so uncommon, they could focus on which aspects made their community different. During each of the semi-structured interviews, time was devoted primarily to the aspects of their exits that they found important, with a little guidance and direction on my part.

The final strategy that I used to ensure validity was peer debriefing. This was made easier by having two colleagues help with the transcriptions. Both were familiar with my research, the interviews, and were fantastic sounding boards during the analysis stage. As they became familiar with the research (the interview guide, my interviewing style, and informed consent process), both of these other transcriptionists willingly discussed many aspects of the research.

Methodological Issues

As with any type of research, there are methodological issues that need to be considered before, during, and after the project. This research is no different. In fact, with various formats of interviewing (in-person, telephone, and via video-conferencing), these issues became a little bit more complicated. Issues regarding use of pseudonyms and confidentiality, technical issues, and ethical issues are discussed below.

Pseudonyms and confidentiality. There is no question that informed consent for a project and a promise of confidentiality, through the use of pseudonyms for names, locations, occupations, and any other identifying information, are essential to projects such as this one. Especially with such a small population and the repercussions for speaking about the ills of growing up Amish, some of the participants were concerned with what would be shared. To begin with, each participant was allowed to choose his or her own pseudonym. If they did not have one in mind, I later assigned them one from a list of Amish names found in a simple Google search. All other family members and friends mentioned during the interviews were also given pseudonyms and used throughout the research.

One issue with interviewing the ex-Amish is that it appears to be a small demographic/community; many of whom know each other it seems. In an effort to avoid “outing” my participants to each other and the larger audience, the specific details about where my participants are from and the types of communities they were raised in are not provided on an individual basis. Doing so could have easily threatened the participants’ confidentiality. Relatedly, another issue is connected to the occupations of the participants. Some jobs are common occupations so providing that information on an individual basis was not

compromising. However this was not possible for everyone, and so decisions about how to share in relation to each individual's background was determined carefully on a case-by-case basis.

Additionally, it was important to stress that the participants retained the right at any time to end the interview. While this did not occur with any of the participants, one person did disclose some information "off the record." He did not want the information shared during this time to be a part of the dissertation but did feel comfortable talking about it after the interview. Respondents were also offered access to their transcripts and any publications forthcoming from this project (9 out of the 25 desired access to the dissertation and transcripts when complete).

Technical issues. Some technological problems could have plagued my various interview formats, including issues with sound quality; dead zones of cell phone coverage; recorder, microphone, and webcam malfunctioning; lags in live feed; poor internet connections; lower quality equipment (dated telephones or computers); and operator errors (battery issues and forgetting to hit the 'record' button). It was important that I be prepared for these types of issues and so I created a checklist to be sure that all was prepared and tested ahead of time.

Stories about this sort of problem abound, but fortunately there were only two instances where there were any issues related to technology. During one telephone interview, the participant's cellphone coverage was best outside in a farm building, which only became an issue when he walked towards his home. Another participant wanted to conduct the interview over Skype, but did not have Internet that was fast enough to keep up with the technology. In the end, we ended up speaking over the telephone, which worked out well. All in all, having a checklist and back up plans were helpful and most often not needed.

Ethical issues. Ethical issues exist in all research projects, and they are important to address before, during, and after data collection. For this project, some of the concerns included the insider/outsider relationship and possibility of participants being suspicious of my motives and/or fearful of exploitation (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, and Lofland 2005). There were also emotional risks to the participants, including the uncomfortable nature of discussing potentially sensitive topics, especially past experiences that are difficult to talk about (Lofland et. al 2005). While studying the ex-Amish, it was impossible for me to become an insider; I am not Amish and have never worshipped in a similar vein as the Anabaptists. However, I do hope I was viewed as an ally. Over the last several years, I have spent a considerable amount of time socializing with Amish and ex-Amish in an attempt to build relationships with them—and simply because I enjoy their company. As a result, I have had the opportunity to attend ex-Amish events that might otherwise be off limits, like the wedding of Elizabeth (my key informant). This was important because for all of the participants that I interviewed, I needed to provide enough information for them to trust my intentions. While I was able to overcome this with all of the participants, there were a few others who did not agree to participate. It seemed clear from our preliminary interactions, that they were not convinced my interest was in understanding their lives and experiences, rather than exploiting them (e.g., getting a salacious story).

Some of the participants' experiences were not pleasant to discuss. When asking individuals about relationships with their families and why they left the Amish faith, old feelings were often stirred up. When this happened, it was important that I was supportive without necessarily taking sides, and not pushing participants into talking about something that they clearly did not want to address. I will say, however, that such issues were often revisited once rapport was built during the interview. In such instances, I only revisited the topic if the

participant brought it back up. As an example, one participant discussed abuse that took place during his childhood. After we had talked for quite a while about several other things, the participant eventually went back (of his own volition) to give more detail about the abuse he had experienced.

Another fear for a few of the participants was disclosure of information that seemed outside the scope of the study and/or could potentially identify others (who had obviously not given their consent to be part of the project). This often related to more personal stories about abuse, the participants' parents, and their children. For example, one woman was hesitant to discuss her daughter because she was not a part of the research and had not given her (the daughter) consent. With this in mind, there is very little included about her child. Because the ex-Amish are raised in a community of silence, where problems or issues are often not discussed, some were leery to share their experiences. Maintaining their confidentiality was critical, and each participant was reassured of my commitment to their privacy. I made sure they understood that I would be removing any identifying information from their transcript and therefore the project. Even the transcriptionists were only provided the recordings labeled with pseudonyms for their protection.

Thankfully, very few participants were concerned with the potential repercussions of their participation generally, and although some were initially a bit concerned about confidentiality they seemed to be satisfied by the tactics I built into the study design regarding privacy. It is also worth noting that all of the participants have been out of the Amish community for at least nine years at the time of the interviews. This seemed to mediate their concerns regarding repercussions by their families and/or former Amish communities.

Chapter Summary and Conclusion

This chapter began with a discussion of the theoretical positioning for collecting and analyzing data. Specifically standpoint and constructivist grounded theory guide this research on the ex-Amish. Using snowball sampling, the participants of this study were recruited relatively easily through word of mouth and social media, with the endorsement of my key informant, Elizabeth. Through 25 semi-structured interviews, the data was collected, fully transcribed, and then analyzed. The development of themes through this process relating to the journeys of these participants in becoming ex-Amish serve as the basis for the analysis chapters that follow. This chapter concluded with discussions of validity, reliability, and believability as they relate to qualitative research in general and this project specifically. Finally, methodological issues were explored. This included a discussion about pseudonyms and confidentiality, technological issues, and ethical issues that were present and addressed throughout the research process.

The three following chapters present the findings of my data analysis. Chapter four examines specific demographic information more thoroughly (i.e., birth order, location, gender, education, baptism status, family, age they left, and years out) and traditional retention factors found in this sample in comparison to previous, although possibly very dated, influences. Chapter five discusses the participants' decisions to leave and the factors that surrounded their defection from the faith. Chapter six continues with a discussion of the difficulties of becoming/being ex-Amish, including: leaving, shunning, navigating a new world, and finding support networks, to name a few. Chapter seven will conclude the dissertation with a summary of these findings, their implications for theory and contributions to the current literature, as well as suggestions for future scholarship.

CHAPTER FOUR

DO THEY STILL MATTER? TRADITIONAL RETENTION FACTORS APPLIED TO EX-AMISH TODAY

Being Amish and becoming an ex were unique experiences for each of the participants of this research. However, there were several common threads, or themes, that wove their stories together. What follows is the beginning of several chapters devoted to the analysis of my interview data. I begin in this chapter by examining some of the traditional retention factors that Amish and religious scholars have deemed important. As discussed in chapter one, these include: birth order, relationships and boundaries with the outside world, gender and education differences, and baptism. While historically Amish scholars have found these aspects important for retention in the faith, as will be seen, it seems to have become a bit more complicated in the last 25 to 30 years. Acknowledging the intersectionality of each of the participants' circumstances, the narratives provided here both confirm and refute the patterns of the past. When available, comparisons to other strict churches, including Orthodox and American Jews, Jehovah's Witnesses, Hutterites, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) Mormons, are provided to highlight differences and similarities with the Amish.

A few additional factors also held meaningful influences for the participants but have not been addressed as clearly in previous research. These include: family support, age at the time of leaving, and time "out" in regards to whether or not they will return to the Amish faith. By the end of the chapter, it should become clear why leaving the Amish culture is in fact a rare occurrence, as well as an exceptional opportunity to learn from the journeys of those who have done so. Chapter five looks into the participants' rationales for defecting from the Amish, including intellectual, social, emotional, and spiritual reasons for leaving their ways of life

(Mauss 1969). Up first, though, are the traditional retention factors addressed with qualitative data from this sample.

Traditional Retention Factors Revisited

As noted, there are several factors that have been seen as contributing to retention, according to Amish and religious scholars, who have looked at why strict churches, like the Amish, continue to grow and flourish. For example, younger siblings tend to remain Amish when compared to their older siblings. According to Meyers (1994), this is perhaps due to a deeper understanding of the life ahead of them vis-à-vis their heightened domestic and familial expectations of their older siblings. Those communities that are further from English areas (or tourism, as this research suggests) are believed to have greater retention, whereas those closer to English communities (and/or tourism) face greater difficulties preserving their families with other life possibilities so close (Hostetler and Huntington 1992). Additionally, more conservative communities are seen as better at keeping greater boundaries from the English world which bolsters retention, as compared with liberal communities with more open-minded Ordnung (possibly allowing youth a little more freedom with more lenient rules and regulations) (Stevick 2007). There are also differences in gender (i.e., where girls are believed to be more easily retained), as well as education (i.e., those who have the typical eighth grade Amish education are more likely to stay in the faith compared to those who have received more education and/or some English education), and between those who have been baptized in the Amish faith (greater retention) and those that have not (Meyers 1994; Stevick 2007).

These, in combination with the additional influences discussed further below, will be explored in relation to my interview data beginning with birth order. What will become apparent

throughout this chapter is that while some of the participants fall under patterns from previous research (which would suggest that they would in fact remain Amish), there are many complicating caveats. These factors are not mutually exclusive as a result. In short, while these factors have traditionally been helpful in maintaining the Amish faith, it appears they were not influential enough to keep the participants of this research in the culture, pointing to other forces more powerful than these retention factors.

Birth order reconsidered. As Meyers (1994) describes, birth order can be an important factor in decisions to leave an Amish community, with the oldest in the family more likely to leave. Out of 25 participants, 1 was the oldest in the family, 2 became the oldest due to sibling deaths at very young ages, and 3 were the oldest of their gender. 2 out of the 25 were only children, 4 were the youngest in the family, and the remaining 13 had siblings and were somewhere in the middle of the birth order. As this demographic information suggests, birth order, and more specifically being one of the oldest, may have been a factor for one-fifth of the sample, but for the rest of participants there was something else at work. Below are three examples of participants who should fit the mold of the oldest child leaving—but not entirely due to other key contributing factors. The first is Daniel.

As the oldest of 12 children, Daniel (pseudonyms will be used throughout the dissertation to protect the privacy of the participants) is a 39-year-old man from a strict community (a range from very strict to most lenient on the Amish-Mennonite continuum will be used to describe their communities' Ordnung, rather than New versus Old Order as this did not prove descriptive enough for the participants) in the Midwest (only general descriptions of the participants' communities are used to further protect the privacy of the participants) and eastern U.S. in his later teens. He was the first and only member of his family to leave and did so at age 24 after

baptism in the Church. As will be seen below, Daniel was a bit atypical in terms of leaving after baptism.

Well, it [his leaving] was a little hard on my parents... Yeah, my dad was, I mean he cried a little bit there. And made me feel real bad. But, you know, I didn't get excommunicated right away. It was quite a while. See, the reason I decided to leave... Well, the reason I hadn't left before, I was already thinking of leaving when I was around 18 in [the Midwest]. But then I decided not to because my, you know, my parents were wanting to move, and they were wanting to change some things... I finally decided to leave because they were wanting to go back to a stricter version, you know. And they were wanting to kind of go back to what I felt like, I felt like... Well, we're just going back to what we were before. So I was like, there's no point hanging around anymore. So, that's kind of why I left.

What was unique about Daniel's situation was his parents' willingness to initially work with him and move to a more liberal community in hopes of keeping him in the Amish faith. Actually, Amish families do not often move far from their original communities even after marriage (Faulkner and Dinger 2014). When things did not work out for the family and they returned to the East coast, Daniel made the decision to leave and begin his life in the English world. Despite worries amongst the Amish that older siblings will influence younger ones to leave the faith, after 15 years Daniel is still the only one in his family to leave. Previous research suggests that while Daniel was a likely candidate for leaving the Amish because he is the oldest, he is also less likely to leave because he is from a strict community and was baptized, making his journey to defection all the more complicated (to be discussed further below and in chapter five) (Kraybill 1993; Stevick 2007).

Adam also grew up as the oldest boy. He had an older brother who died before Adam was born, an older sister, three younger sisters (one who passed away), and a younger brother. Adam is 33 years old and was baptized in a strict church in the Midwest. He left the Amish church when he was 19 and is still the only one in his family to have left, other than an uncle and a

couple of cousins. Again, according to previous research, these are two factors that would likely serve to prevent him from leaving the faith. These inconsistencies with previous findings on baptism and the type of community Adam was raised in (both discussed below), much like Daniel, point to these retention factors, or maybe even barriers, being much more complex when applying them to specific individuals. It is not simply enough to add up how many factors lead to retention and subtract those that point towards defection; it seems that there are other complications when these factors intersect.

Unlike Daniel and Adam, Sadie, a 26 year old from a strict community in the Midwest, was never baptized. She is the second oldest out of 13 children and the oldest girl in the family. While Meyers (1994) implies that the older children are more likely to leave the faith, women are also less likely to leave because of their submissive roles in the family and community (discussed below). Sadie's narrative points to the complication of multiple factors (much like Daniel and Adam) and how intertwined and inconsistent they can be. As a woman, according to previous research, she is more likely to stay in her Amish community (Stevick 2007). However, as the oldest daughter, Sadie felt the pressures of Amish life, much like the literature suggests:

I was a momma's helper at very young age. Babysitting, cooking, cleaning, and helping with the gardens in the summertime, etc. My chores increased as I grew with age, and everything was passed down to the next sibling.

Sadie is the only one to have left in her family as well, and she did so at the young age of 17, with no paperwork and an eighth grade education (discussed below). While Sadie's place in the birth order may have been a contributing factor to why she left, as will become evident, there are many other issues at play. Indicators that make her more likely to stay include: gender, education, being from a strict community, and her age; while being the oldest daughter is the only factor which should lead to her defection.

While Daniel, Adam, and Sadie seem to fit the pattern suggested by previous research (i.e., oldest children are—or at least were—more likely to leave the Amish church and community) it is already evident just how complicated these traditional retention factors have become. Greksa and Korbin (2002), looking at one community in Indiana, found that if the oldest child leaves an Old Order Amish church, their younger siblings are four times more likely to leave when compared to those with oldest siblings that have stayed. Further, if an older sibling has successfully adapted to the English world, seeing the transition was possible could influence a younger sibling. Another alternative, however, could point to more than one sibling responding to the same family environment (Greksa and Korbin 2002). With 80 percent of the sample not being the oldest in their families and the other 20 percent being the only ones to leave, there are definitely other influences to consider.

Reexamining connections to the outside world—differing communities. Contact with the outside world is something that is often very controlled for Amish youth. The same may be true for other faiths as well, but the Amish seem to be quite extreme comparatively. As indicated, this is done to maintain their purposed seclusion and avoid influences from the English world. Specifically, in this study there was a difference between stricter and more lenient Amish communities and their experiences with the outside world. While all Amish groups practice seclusion, when a community is more liberal on the Amish-Mennonite continuum, there are greater possibilities of contact with people outside of the faith. Out of the 25 participants, 13 were from strict or Old Order communities (or at least started out there), while the remaining 12 were from more liberal communities (maybe New Order but no one phrased it as such).

There also seems to be a connection with how close a group is with the English as tourists, although this theme emerged from my data rather than being found in previous research.

Some common places for Amish tourism in the Midwest include: Goshen, Middlebury, and Shipshewana in Indiana; Lancaster County in Pennsylvania; Berlin and Holmes Counties in Ohio; Cashton, Wisconsin; Arcola, Illinois; and St. Joseph and Branch Counties in Michigan (as described by participants). These are areas where visits by English people are common too, allowing a regular source of potential mingling with the Amish. Some of the Amish, in Middlebury and Shipshewana, Indiana, for example (based on my personal trips to the area), work in the myriad restaurants, shops, and bulk stores in the area. Some even work as buggy drivers for one of the larger resort-type establishments in town. Most businesses have a share of parking spots in their lots for cars, trucks, and buses, as well as hitching posts for those traveling by horse and buggy. While this is definitely not a common occurrence, in communities that rely on tourism to survive there is a greater chance for interaction with the English world. These same communities also seem to be a little more liberal on the continuum and seem most commonly to be the homes of young Amish who are thinking about leaving the faith or on Rumspringa. Below are some examples of relationships my participants had with the outside world, starting with those who have the least amount of contact and ending with those with the greatest amount of contact.

Isabelle, a 41-year-old woman from a strict community in the Midwest, discussed what contact with the English world was like when she was growing up in a small Amish community with little to no Amish tourism:

You didn't have a whole lot of interaction with the outside world. If you had interaction with the outside world it was usually, you had a mailman, you had a feed man... They would actually deliver out to your farm and put it in your grain bin. And then you also had the milkman. He would come two or three times a week and collect the milk from the bulk tank, and so you did have some interaction with the outside world. Not too much, it was pretty limited. And there was an older man in town that was not Amish, and he was retired. And he didn't

have anything to do, really, and so he'd come out to the farm sometimes and just sit and visit before he'd move on to the next place... It seemed like it was okay for them to come to our house, and we were very sociable as far as hosting them at our house and having them eat dinner with us and everything. And everybody enjoyed it. But, if they would have invited us to go to their house, that would not have been okay. You don't mingle in that direction, but my father didn't care about being friends with them and having them in for dinner and all that. That didn't bother him one bit, but if they'd invited us to come to their house, that would not have been okay. We couldn't have gone to their church or anything like that.

Isabelle, who left at the age of 22, was 1 of 9 children and really lived a pretty secluded life, even by Amish standards. Consequently, she would be optimal for retention—except she did not stay. She was a baptized Amish woman from a conservative community with little contact to the outside world. While she would see these few English people occasionally at her family's farm, she noted later that it really was not her place to speak with them. Her only glimpse of the outside world would come when her family would rent a van and driver to take them places, like to a wedding or funeral. (It is typical for Amish families to hire someone with a large van to drive to destinations that are a good distance away, where taking a horse and buggy is neither safe nor feasible.) Her family's favorite driver, Joe, was one who would tell stories and act a little rambunctious. He would later come to be her husband and the main reason she left the Amish church, discussed further in chapter five. As obvious from her participation in this project and contrary to previous predictions, her very limited interaction with the outside world, her gender, and the fact that she was baptized was not enough to keep her Amish.

Jonas, a 44 year old, also from a strict community in the Midwest, discusses a little more contact with the English world in relation to his father's business:

So, of course, you have limited interaction with anybody English, back at that time, especially. Things have changed a little bit. They have a little more interaction with the English world. And you know, dad actually has had a store for the last 15 years where he dealt with the English on a daily basis. He had a

phone in his office. You know, things have changed somewhat... But, back when I was, when I was growing up, 16, 17 years old, we had very little interaction with the English. The one person that I did know, we had talked once, you know. I probably knew him three, four years, knew he was the son of the business owner across the street. And he had said one time, "If you ever, you know, get in a pinch or get in a bind, or need a place to go, just give me a call." He said, "I'm willing to help out." And that was the one person that I knew out of, you know, all of the English interactions, one person that I could call or speak to.

Jonas was from a little bigger community, which is in an area where there was some contact with the English world, at least a bit more than Isabelle's. Although minimal and contrary to previous research, Jonas still found his way out of the Amish faith, maybe because he was never baptized.

Marie, a 41 year old, grew up in a community that was more accepting of tourists in the Midwest, although her contact was quite controlled despite being from a little more liberal of a church. When talking about her community growing up and contact with the English world, she says:

Oh, that [tourism] has a lot to do with it. They're a lot more in tune with the outside world. When I was growing up, I mean, I had a job. I graduated [from eighth grade] when I was 14, and I started a job the following Monday. I worked at a place where my mom and dad okayed it. And now the kids work everywhere and anywhere... I worked at a duck farm. My dad worked there too, and he was the manager so I was, you know, we were watched. We weren't free to do what we wanted to do, everything we did we got watched...

(Me: You said that your family and your dad kept a good eye on you when you were working and things like that. Other than that did you have relatively strong boundaries with the outside world? Did you mingle with the English much?) Somewhat. My mom and dad had friends who came over. I have memories as far back as I remember that there were always English people that came over but that was... I mean we had contact with them and their kids but it was usually at our house, not at their house. A few times we went to their house, and we were just fascinated because it was like "Oh my goodness, they have this box, and there are people in it!" This was the TV [laughs], and it was just, even after that, ha ha, it's kind of funny like tattling on myself. Even after I graduated and was working outside in the world, we had a radio at work. And I could *never* understand how they could get, you know, how they could sound the same every time. They would sing the same song and sound exactly the same every time! You know, I had no clue! I thought it was somebody singing right there, you know? I didn't

realize for a long time that there was like records and tapes and stuff like that. I laugh at it now. I used to think there were little people in the TV too [laughs]. Oh... ha ha. I can laugh at it now but for a while it was like...

For Marie, while she may have been in close contact with those from the outside, it did not seem like she interacted with the English much until she was an older teenager. Again, things are more complicated than they appear. Though Marie lived in an area where contact could have been abundant, she was restricted in her interaction with others due to the limitations her parents put on her, while others in the community were not. Even her older sister was living with a divorced English man with children while Marie was a teenager. Despite the constraints, when dating in the Amish culture was not working for Marie, she found a way around the restrictions and eventually found her way out. Like many of the ex-Amish participants discussed so far, Marie's circumstances growing up were filled with conflicting dynamics for defection. As a woman, she should be less likely to leave. Moreover, her family tightly controlled her contact with the outside world. Nonetheless, Marie was from a more lenient community and remained unbaptized, much like Hannah.

Hannah, a 31 year old from the Midwest, compared the contact she had with the English world while growing up in a more liberal community (similar to Marie's) to after her family moved to a stricter community in a different state. It was a bit different for her when I asked her about contact with the English growing up:

Not as much as some might have but there was always some with neighbors. My parents had some neighbors or friends that would sometimes come by. Me and my cousin, one that's older than I am, by the time I was 12 or 13, we loved walking around town. We were quite discontent. We were so envious of everyone and so intrigued by the English. And by the time I was 13, we would sneak out at night and hang out with these kids. And as you can imagine young people who are 13 or 14, and out late at night, they probably don't have very structured lives. So looking back now at the crowd we were in, they probably weren't the best people

for us to be hanging out with... So that was like 13 and older where I started more contact, but before that it was just arms lengths really.

(Me: When you moved [to a stricter community]... was that more of the same?) That was a really, really hard time in my life. Ask any teenager how it is when they move away... Part of the reason we moved was because I was getting in trouble, and my brother was too. So it was a very difficult time because my mother didn't want to go. Her family all lived [there], and I could just feel the blame from her and my family. And it felt like it was all my fault. Nobody was happy; it was a mess. Then, when we got there, I didn't have any friends. Obviously I could have had friends in the church, but it was a very strict and sheltered lifestyle there—even more than what I was used to. So it was kind of hard to relate to some of the young people there. I just really wanted to make other friends and sneak out, but I didn't have that channel there. I was very lonely.

As evident from this passage, Hannah did have a taste of the English world through her late night meanderings with her cousin and through friendships in later years. Trying to remove these temptations from Hannah's and her siblings' world, her parents moved to a stricter community, with more distance from the English world. While this may have worked for some of Hannah's siblings (out of 12, 3 sisters are now Mennonites, 1 brother is ex-Amish, and 8 have remained Amish), she left at the age of 16 with her parents' acceptance, but not their blessing.

Hannah's experience was quite different than Isabelle's, Jonah's, and Marie's (despite the similarities in their community types), but she is also at least ten years younger than they are which could also account for some of the differences. As with the others though, the traditional retention factors that may have held true in the past were much more complicated for Hannah. While she was from a more liberal community, her place in the birth order (in the middle) and her gender should have been retention factors, but these were apparently not overriding factors.

Lazerwitz (1995), in his analysis of American Jews, finds denomination retention is influenced by increased amounts of religious practices in a synagogue, at home, with primary groups with those of the same faith, and religious education—much like the Amish with their

traditional education and practiced seclusion. What is different, however, is leaving the Jewish faith: “In today’s Jewish world, becoming an apostate requires joining some other religion; only in that way is ‘the line’ crossed” (Lazerwitz 1995: 500). For Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) members, seclusion is also practiced through religious and social activities, but education often takes place in public schools allowing for contact with non-Mormons (Griffiths, Esplin, and Randall 2016). Once outside of social encapsulation, the religious rules and cultural markers that point to religious identity are more likely to be shed. While this is similar to other faiths, the Amish border with the outside world make it much more difficult leave.

Gender differences revisited. Aforementioned, the Amish culture is a patriarchal one, where men are often the head of the family and church, and women have a submissive role (Stevick 2007). Gender differentiation begins at a young age in the home, the community, and at church. Boys and girls are taught to interact in same-sex groups for play, during church, and at work. Such rigid segregation is based on gender role expectations that are defined and clarified in the Amish interpretation of the Martin Luther Bible, German version (Kraybill 2001). These differences were accountable for more men leaving Amish communities than women in prior research (Stevick 2007). This sample, with 14 men and 11 women, might perhaps point to it being more difficult for women to exit, or might suggest how complicated these traditional retention factors have become notwithstanding a patriarchal society, much like the others have indicated thus far.

Isabelle discusses how gender roles in the Amish church make it more difficult for women to leave than men, although this alone was not enough to retain her:

Most of the time, I mean you have, you have very specific roles in the Amish. Women are the subservient ones. The men are the ones that do all the talking.

Like if somebody comes to the farm, most of the time, you see all the men do all the talking. And, the business end of the deal. The women are just the ones that go along with everything. And so women are raised to be very subservient and submissive to their husbands. And so it would definitely be very difficult for somebody to go from the outside world to the Amish because of the role of the women that's expected... It's more difficult for women, just because of the role that the women are expected to play. And then, also, if you have women that want to leave the Amish, it's much more difficult for them than it is the men because of the trade. The men can adjust. The boys that leave can adjust much better financially because they've been trained for working, like woodworking, carpentry. They can go out and get a job out in the world. But, a woman, she has such limited skills that most of them will perhaps work in a bakery or a restaurant or something like that, because that's what they're accustomed to. And a lot of them do become nurses because they are caregivers, you know. Helping raise the child, the younger children and that just comes natural to them and so that tends to be their occupation. But it is more difficult for girls to leave than it is the boys.

Indeed, it was rare for gender roles to change, as Adam shared with regard to his sister sometimes stepping outside of her “momma’s helper” role to help him with outside work, primarily because he was the only older boy:

Girls work in the house. For the most part, I always had more sisters than brothers so once in a while my oldest sister would come outside and help me work. But for the most part I worked outside, and my sisters worked in the house. If I needed help mowing the lawn, then they would help. But my older sister is tougher than nails. She's a little smaller than I am, and she can split wood with the guys. My other two sisters never got to do that stuff, so they aren't quite as physically fit as my other sister...

Living with and learning from these gender roles, as they are engrained in Amish culture, it is something that the participants struggle with regularly.

The lasting effects of being raised in this type of closed society have lifelong consequences on the women who have left. Elizabeth, a 30 year old from a more liberal community in the Midwest, who left the Amish to become a nurse, recently married a strict Mennonite man who was raised Amish until he was 16 (his entire family left for reasons related to his father's employment). She talks about how she was perceived before she left the church,

how her parents came to terms with her husband, and how she feels about a wife being submissive to her husband:

Yeah, at the time to the rest of the world I would have been thought of as a good kid. And then I went off to college, and I was a nurse, but to my culture I didn't look like that. I was a bad kid and that bothered me for a long time. It was hard to find peace knowing that. It doesn't matter. I'm a child of God, and what he thinks is the most important. It was a big difference getting married too, because they are big on being submissive to your husband. So to my parents, that's where they kind of gave in and are okay with it because they are really big on being submissive. Now I'm looked at as under his authority of the house. (Me: Is that accurate?) What I think of it... I think I believe in, like, what my covering [lace head covering for the Mennonite church that she belongs to] signifies is, like, where I believe it's God, then man, then the woman. But I think women should be respected. I don't think they should boss them around but I feel like [her husband] is really respectful. He loves me, but I still want him to be the one that makes decisions for our house and our children. I believe yeah, that in the scripture God says that's how... (Me: Would that be the same if you were back home?) Hmm. I don't know. I don't think in a lot of marriages, Amish or not, I don't know if there are a lot that are very respectful and still have that relationship where the husband makes the choices and the wife respects him. But then there are a lot of maybe stricter communities where maybe the men like rule with an iron fist. But no, it's not really communicated. I think there are a lot more women than I would care to know about that live in an abusive relationship, because they believe it is so engrained in the man that he is going to rule. But I don't know any places where I wouldn't be shocked it was like that...

Because Elizabeth is now a practicing Mennonite (more on the conservative side), in addition to her Amish upbringing and despite (maybe) being in the English world for the last ten years, her relationship with her husband centers on this three tiered submissive arrangement where God is first, then her husband, and finally herself.

Such an arrangement may point to the level of indoctrination that happens in the Amish culture or how heavily they rely on the German Martin Luther Bible. Out of the 11 women in the sample, 4 would probably look at their relationships in a similar way. Two additional women would probably say that they have been in submissive relationships in the past, but are on more equal ground today. The remaining five women have either steered clear of relationships since

they have left or have sought out ones that ensure more equality. Being involved in relationships with more gender equality and greater freedom are also something that provided a challenge for some of the women when they left their closed communities. When asked if it was difficult to deal with the freedom once she was out, Isabelle perhaps put it best:

It was liberating to a certain degree. It was sort of, you sort of have mixed emotions, because it was like, “Is it really okay? Or are you going to Hell for it?” But on the other hand, it was very liberating because life is so much easier with the conveniences that you had now that you don’t have in the Amish.

On the flipside, Hannah points out that she was once in a position where she felt like she needed to defend, or maybe explain, her parents’ relationship:

From a feminist angle, the women are very over worked and disrespected to a certain extent. And I don't approve of the relationship between males and females, but I would say it's not as bad as people think. The women want to wear those clothes, believe it or not. If you told my mom to take off that head covering she would be devastated. The men work very hard as well, so they both work very hard. Yes, in a lot of households the men aren't as likely to help wash dishes or cook dinner, but it’s not because he's sitting around playing video games. They both work very hard... I felt like I wanted to defend my father because he works every bit as hard as my mom.

It is also important to point out that, right or wrong, this is how the Amish culture is and how individuals who are Amish are raised. Often these men and women are not offered other narratives or other ways to live, especially with very limited contact to the outside world. The Amish are slow to change and believe, similar to the sentiment Abe (another participant discussed below) shared from his dad, that what has worked for their ancestors will work for them—that is their way of life and their culture. It is no wonder that sentiment (having difficulty with gender differences) is something that the ex-Amish women in my study consistently point out as a key part of the process of leaving.

The Amish are not alone with predictions of greater numbers of men leaving than women. Vargas (2012) found, using the Portraits of American Life Study (PALS) data from 2006, that men are more likely to consider leaving when compared to women across various faiths with varying degrees of patriarchy in hierarchy. Similarly, Sherkat and Wilson (1995) say women are less likely to leave because they are more socialized into their religious roles versus their counterparts. While gender differences alone do not seem to have an overriding influence on whether or not someone will leave (for this sample at least), this idea of being submissive and of the lesser gender is something that the women have had to work through. The ex-Amish men have had to become accustomed to these differences in the English world, much like differences in education, discussed next.

Education differences reevaluated. Education in the Amish church is most often considered complete after eighth grade, as discussed previously, and as Meyers (1994) pointed out, Amish children who attend public schools are twice as likely to leave than those who go to Amish schools. It is subsequently seen as beneficial for retention to keep Amish students close to home. As illustration, Elizabeth reflects on the Amish culture's intent with limiting the extent and context of education:

The teachers [in Amish schools] don't have any more education than that [eighth grade] either. It's kind of scary. With a little more education, I'm more open-minded than I used to be. Like with my kids, I don't care if they go to college, that's their choice. But I do want, I don't know, I hope their teachers have more of an education. They [Amish] just do what they need, and I think that's why they do it. You don't need more than that to provide for a family or make a living. When I went to [an event with other ex-Amish/Mennonites], they were asking all these questions, and one lady seemed angry that we didn't get more of an education. She kept like asking me these hard questions in front of all these people about education. One thing that she asked was, "Don't you feel like that is their way to keep you in the culture? Just give you enough to make a living but not enough to..." At first I was kind of like upset, like "Hey, easy there." But the more I think of it, the more I think it's true, because they get scared when... Like I remember

being a part of the culture, and when you heard someone got into college, that was awful. That was huge and scary, and I think that's the whole mindset. Usually, if you do get more of an education, you aren't going to stay in the culture, so maybe it is their way to keep you.

As described here and previously, the Amish approach to education seems quite intentional—give the children what they need to be successful in their limited world. Given that it has worked for several previous generations, there seems little need to change especially if it helps keep members in the community.

This type of schooling still goes on today in many small communities. All but three participants went to one-room schoolhouses that were taught by Amish teachers (with an eighth grade education themselves) through the eighth grade. However, there was a trend of leaving the Amish church explicitly for the opportunity of more education for some of the participants. If this is true, the presumption that limited education within the community heightens retention may be backfiring. Out of this sample of 25, 15 went on to either earn G.E.D.s, some college, college degrees, and even some advanced degrees. What follows is a discussion of how the desire for greater education impacted decisions to defect from the Amish faith.

Samuel, a 78 year old from a little more liberal community in the Midwest, had a very interesting childhood. His grandmother, May, was a force to be reckoned with and wielded more power than most, as a midwife for the local doctor. She often threatened to no longer help with healthcare and deliveries in the community if they forced her hand. Not wanting to rely solely on the closest hospital, they left her alone. Samuel and his wife, Martha, discuss his progression through school with the help of Grandma May:

Samuel: The Amish only went as far as the eighth grade or age 14. In [the Midwest] you could quit going to school if you were age 14. And so some of the Amish, depending on their age, if they were 14 before they completed the eighth

grade, they would quit if they were needed on the farm. I finished the eighth grade and then realized suddenly, what am I going to do? Am I going to work on a farm as a hired hand or what?

Martha (Samuel's wife): His parents didn't live on the farm. His dad was a carpenter, and so there wasn't a family farm to work on. He'd have to go work for his uncle down the road.

Samuel: That summer I worked for my uncle... My grandma talked to me that summer and told me that she would like me to go on to high school. I said, "Well, should I?" and she said, "Yes, Dr. Dan [the obstetrician that Grandma May worked with] thinks that you need to go on." Then I really started thinking about my life, and whether I was going to be Amish, or if I was going to be someone that goes on and gets a high school education or maybe even college! So I talked to my parents, and they said absolutely not.

Martha: His older sister had already stopped going [to school].

Samuel: Yeah, she was two years older, and they wouldn't let her go to high school. So Grandma convinced my parents. She said, "I'm going to send Samuel to work on the farm." It was for my first cousin, and it was in the same school district. So, I went to live with them and went to school there. I was their hired hand. I milked ten cows every night, worked really hard, and went to school so whatever they paid me went to my mom and dad. Grandma was really resentful of that, but that was how they grew up with their Amish heritage and that was accepted. So, when I got through the 11th grade as a junior, my parents said, "You will absolutely not graduate in a public school." My grandmother contacted [a Mennonite high school out East] and one of their registrars came and enrolled me, and Grandma paid for my education as a senior at that high school.

Samuel's experience of going to public high school is quite unique and probably would not have happened if not for Grandma May. Samuel described himself after eighth grade as "an insolent, insubordinate, and recalcitrant teenager who did not want to honor his parent's wishes." These traits, along with his grandmother's financial and emotional support, allowed Samuel to pursue his dream of continuing with school, eventually getting a bachelor's and master's degree. Ultimately, this led to his baptism and marriage in the Mennonite church, distancing himself from his Amish roots even further.

Elizabeth and Hannah were also determined to get their education. As described above, Elizabeth left her Amish community in pursuit of a nursing degree:

(Me: Did you always want to be a nurse?) Yeah. (Me: Why did you decide to leave?) I don't really think I ever really had a plan. It wasn't a sudden decision; it was gradual. Like, I did become a nursing assistant before I was a nurse, and that was kind of my first, I guess, education wise. We did like three weeks of training, so that was my first real education. But they teach you stuff, and that's kind of where I was like... Even when I was young, I was fascinated with doctors and nurses but didn't ever really think I could become a nurse until I was an aid. Then I was like, "Hey, I could become a nurse." So, I would say maybe that has influenced a lot of my reason for leaving even though I just told you I kind of thought I always would go back. Just going to college and getting an education...

Elizabeth had previously talked about how for a long time she assumed she would go back to the Amish. She thought she would spend some time in the English world being curious, getting an education, and then decide to return to her community. After a while though, and as evident in the discussion above, Elizabeth continued to question things. When asked if something else was calling her other than the Amish church, she responded:

Yeah, I did, I felt called to do that [be a nurse]. It all started with a curiosity of what's out there, like wondering. I wanted more than my little community. (Me: Did you get that from your parents?) I think so. I remember my mom telling me when I was really young, like I think I've always had a lot of personality where most Amish women are told to be seen not heard. I was always really vocal, and I think that kind of made my parents wonder a little bit. I remember my mom telling me at a young age that I would be good at working with people, and I've always remembered that. Like, she didn't have this in mind, that I would go to nursing school, but I have an uncle that has a store and she was like, "You could be a cashier there. You're good with people," and that was her dream for me. You get your personality from your parents, they are outgoing, but I don't think they meant for me to leave the culture.

For Elizabeth, being called to help and working with others were noble contributions to the world, making it a bit easier to test out the waters and pursue her education. She even hoped, in the beginning, that she would be able to use her nursing skills in her Amish community. She has only returned for visits and will likely not go back.

Hannah also had her heart set on getting an education past eighth grade. In fact, at 13 she tried to run away just so she could go to high school: “Well I ran away and sent a note to them. I brought it up. I don't know how it came out, but my mom was like, ‘What is wrong with you?’ I was like, ‘I want to go to high school!’ And it was just this big dramatic, horrible discussion.” Despite Hannah’s stand, her family moved to a stricter community, as discussed above, although they did come to some agreement about her future. If Hannah could keep out of trouble in the new community until she was 16, her parents would allow her to leave.

While she was miserable in the new community, Hannah stayed out of trouble and was able to leave, although she did not go to school right away. She began working in a more liberal community out of state with a lot of tourism. She also headed south with other ex-Amish friends and continued to work. At one point, Hannah ran into a childhood friend who invited her out West to visit. It became permanent for Hannah:

I was ready for a clean break so I moved to [city out West], and that's where I did my G.E.D.... I got a lot of pressure from the woman who gave me the exam to start college right away. My scores were really high on the reading and writing, and she really wanted me to... She was really in the mindset where it was like “You have to go to college and do this and do that...” Whereas I was just like, “No, I want to just take some classes for fun, this is fun for me, not work.” And she told me about all these grants, and I remember feeling really annoyed because I felt like I was being pressured. All I wanted to do was study Spanish at that time, because I had to work. I told her I couldn't just study all the time. So I did start out with Spanish and took one class. And it was actually a good start because just like learning the words, like what a syllabus is, just learning all the new things. And after that I was a lot more confident.

Hannah continued to take part-time classes and working toward a business degree. Now she has a master’s degree and a career that she never thought she would have. While she did not get to go to high school at the age of 13, she was able to get the education of which she had long dreamed.

Hannah's desire for learning pulled her away from her Amish community and her family, making it impossible to keep her there, much like Samuel and Elizabeth.

Another aspect of having Amish children leave school after eighth grade is that they can start contributing to their families in regards to work and income. As Martha describes,

Once children reach age 14, they go out and they work for Mom and Dad and they give all of that money to them until they reach age 21. That's why [Samuel's] parents told him he had to go and work until he was 21... That's one of the reasons why they didn't want him going to high school because they wanted the money.

Not only is their eighth grade education intentional to keep the children secluded from the English world and closely guard what they are learning, but as the children get older they are also contributing to the survival and prosperity of their family. Without the extra hands and additional income, it would be much more difficult to flourish. This is just one more reason that retention in Amish communities is so important.

Similar to the Amish church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), the more mainstream Mormon church, also tries to insulate their youth from outside, secularizing views by maintaining strict religious schooling, at least in the beginning (Griffiths et al. 2016). While it was their goal at one point to provide a secular and religious education simultaneously, it was quickly deemed unfeasible for monetary reasons. As a result, LDS leadership settled for public education with daily supplemental religious education through high school. By maintaining religious education, the LDS church has been able to maintain retention rates over 80 percent (Smith and Lundquist Denton 2005). Previous research suggests that minimizing their exposure to learning with an eighth grade education and an emphasis on religion should help with retaining members in the Amish community and other strict churches like the LDS. This

just was not the case for Samuel, Elizabeth, Hannah, and all others in this study. Similarly, baptism is also a complex retention factor for this sample.

Reassessing baptism as a retention factor. Baptism in the Amish church signifies joining the church for life. This includes lifelong membership and adherence to the Ordnung of their community. Baptism is considered a point of no return and as such, a predominant factor in retention. As discussed in chapter one, those that leave the culture after being baptized in the church are breaking the promise of being a member for life, which results in shunning and/or excommunication under most circumstances. Those that leave before being baptized have not made or broken that promise, so the penalties for leaving are usually less severe (e.g., informal shunning versus formal excommunication). So for those considering leaving, baptism determines whether or not they will be welcomed back into the community should they return to visit. Out of 25 participants, 15 were baptized in the church, while ten were not baptized prior to leaving (some participants became members of other denominations at later points). Almost all described significant pressure and stress at the time (usually late adolescence and early adulthood) they decided about baptism.

For instance, Adam talks about getting baptized during adolescence and explained that his choice in the matter was largely shaped by coming from a strict, smaller community and already being labeled as a “waffler.” As such, while he technically had a choice, he really did not feel like he had much of an alternative:

(Me: Were you baptized?) Yes, I was. So that makes it a lot more difficult, because when you get baptized you make a promise to never leave the church, and I broke that promise to them. At 17 years old that's a big choice. That was right after I came back from leaving the first time so the pressure was on. (Me: Was that your choice?) There is really no choice. You either get baptized, or you're the black sheep of the family and the community. When you are 17 and a

half, like when you turn 18, you should be baptized. If you are 18 and not baptized yet, there will be a lot of pressure on you because the bishops will start pressuring your parents. It would be like out there in the real world, if the cops want to come and discuss something with a minor, they have to have their parents there. If they want to talk to the child by himself, it better be a really good cause to do so. Well, that's the same way it is when you are not baptized in the community I grew up in. If the Amish bishop comes to talk to you before you are baptized, you just laugh at him and walk the other way. He can't do anything, but they start putting pressure on your parents. They'll start shunning your parents. They'll start, you know, going after your parents to put pressure on you, so it's kind of like a round a bout way. Like when your kid starts skipping school so many times, the cops will come and talk to you. Once you are baptized, then it's all out there on you.

Throughout this study, it was apparent the age and level of choice in baptism varied greatly from community to community. Communities that have baptism at a younger age (later teens) seem to demand it of their young people, while those that have baptism during young adulthood seem to allow the person more of a choice in the matter. Young baptisms seem to counter the intention of baptism as a retention factor, holding members in the community at least for the participants of this research.

Adam knew he would likely break his promise to the church, but he did not feel like he had much choice in the matter. Toby, a 78 year old from a larger community in the Midwest, echoes Adam's sentiment:

Yes, I was a baptized member of the Amish church for about maybe two years. I was never a very good or very faithful member because I was conned into the baptism. The baptism as you know, it involves not only that you commit to God and Christ, but it also means that you make the commitment to the Amish church that you will always be a faithful member. Well, when I was baptized I knew that wouldn't be the case, I knew I would be leaving, and I didn't like that. The commitment to the faith was okay, I was ready for that but I wasn't ready to make a commitment to the church so I had to break that vow. I didn't like that but what choice did I have?

Notable here, both Toby and Adam felt as if they had no other choice but to make the commitment to the church. This points to baptism not being as resilient of a retention factor as

previous research suggests, with 60 percent of this sample being baptized members of the church before defecting. If baptism was still a successful retention factor, one would expect a lower percentage of baptized members, rather than over half of the sample. For those who feel strong enough about their desire to leave the community, it seems as though breaking the promise to their churches, communities, and families is a necessary part of their departure, and they realize this early on.

For those participants who never were baptized, leaving the Amish culture tends to be a little less devastating. Because they had not broken the promise signified through baptism, most are still welcome in their family homes, although not like when they lived in the community. Kaleb talks about the process he went through, thinking about joining the Amish church and then deciding otherwise:

(Me: Do you catch a lot of flak for that [not getting baptized]?) I would say not as much as my siblings because I never broke a promise, you know. I just remember hearing them [parents, grandparents, or church officials] telling my siblings or my parents that, “You promised. On your knees, you promised before God and the church that you wouldn’t leave. You promised this.” And so, breaking the promise is the biggest offense, I think, which I never did. So, I don’t... I didn’t... No, by any means catch as much flack as they [his siblings] did. But, I think I still experienced it personally. I think they maybe pitied me. I think I was pitied because of my dad’s history in the Amish church, like, “Poor Kaleb... You know, his dad was rough, alcoholic, and always in trouble with the church.” And so, I grew up, poor me, like I didn’t have much, you know. I wasn’t taught right, and I didn’t have the right things. So I think I was given a lot of slack in that respect. But my siblings grew up... I don’t know when my dad’s things started... He was shunned when I was two so. Maybe 10, 20 years prior to that, I guess my siblings were in a slightly different world than me.

Kaleb’s father was shunned when Kaleb was two years old for reasons that are not quite clear, but seem related to his father drinking (forbidden in the culture) and other troubles with the church. His grandparents, with whom they shared land, were still members in good standing, however, so Kaleb lived his life as an Amish boy. Because all of his older siblings had been

baptized in the church (two have left and the other two moved to Mennonite churches) and later broke their vows, he was able to avoid the criticism and trouble that they faced by learning from their experiences. Kaleb still has a close relationship with his parents (who still live the Amish lifestyle despite his father's status) today and remained close his grandparents as well (who were Amish) until they passed away. He was able to maintain these relationships even though he is attending college, likely because he was never baptized.

Elizabeth also talks about the differences between those who were baptized and those who were not in terms of leaving. She shares what it is like to maintain contact with families once the person has left the Amish faith:

(Me: And it's a huge deal if you are baptized and then leave?) Yeah, it is because you have to be shunned and so you don't eat at the same table, on the same plate, you don't eat the same food, you can't play games with them, and you can't take their money. (Me: And that's if you are baptized and then leave?) Yep, and I was never baptized. (Me: So you can still eat at the table?) Yeah, and you know my parents would have had to shun me so that made it a little bit easier that I wasn't baptized. (Me: If you were baptized and you wanted to go back, what would you have to do?) You can go back. I've been baptized in the Mennonite church [after leaving the Amish church], but they [the Anabaptists including both Amish and Mennonites] don't believe in rebaptism so they wouldn't re-baptize me. I would have to do like a period of instruction, and yeah, I could always go back if I wanted to but I'm pretty sure that would not happen.

While the repercussions are less severe, the process is still not easy by any measure. One key role baptism plays in defection from the Amish church is the contact that individuals are allowed to have after they leave. Both Toby and Adam knew they would face a difficult road when they committed to the church and culture for a lifetime, despite knowing they would not be staying for that long. On the other hand, Kaleb's and Elizabeth's experiences seem easier because they did not have to give up all connections to their Amish families and friends. Although shunning

for former members is not exclusive to the Amish community, it does seem to be under intense circumstances when compared to other faiths.

Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Hutterites, and Orthodox Jews also distance themselves from outsiders and those who have disaffiliated (Abel 2005; Griffiths et al. 2016; Hookway and Habibis 2015; Peter, Boldt, Whitaker, Roberts 1982; Smith and Lundquist Denton 2005; Stark and Iannaccone 1997). The key difference here is all of these groups typically participate in mainstream culture to a greater degree than the Amish—through work, school, community, and social activities. For instance, Mormons often attend public schools; Jehovah's Witnesses, after becoming baptized "publishers" (i.e., a witness in good standing) spend time proselytizing in the community to bolster membership; and Orthodox Jews may attend public school or spend time in their communities (Abel 2005; Griffiths et al. 2016; Hookway and Habibis 2015; Peter, Boldt, Whitaker, Roberts 1982; Smith and Lundquist Denton 2005; Stark and Iannaccone 1997). As a result, when individuals do decide to leave their communities, they have the benefit of already knowing how things work outside of their faith community and in English society.

Additional Demographic Factors Important for Retention

While the traditional factors discussed above were all found in my data to some extent or another, a few additional factors or barriers arose during the course of the interviews that seemed salient to retention or lack of it. While still complex, these additional factors, including family support, age of leaving, and the time out, point to other reasons that make defection more complicated. These additional influences may in fact help explain retention, or more accurately, the lack of retention as they interact with the factors discussed above. It does seem clear, based on my findings, that retention dynamics have changed in the last few decades.

Family support. Family support can be both a barrier and a retention factor when it comes to leaving an Amish community. As noted previously, the success of Amish families and communities ultimately depends on their ability to retain young members, much like other faiths. Their actions, including procreation, purposed seclusion, gender separation, limited education, and strict adult baptism, effectively serve to increase commitment to the Amish church. While family support can be a way to sustain members and bolster retention, this can also serve as encouragement for exploring the English world.

Marriage, for example, might make it more feasible to leave with a spouse due to the couples' ability to support one another and establish a new life together. This would be especially so for women, given that gender roles are important in Amish culture and thinking outside of the box is not strongly encouraged. Thus, leaving with a male spouse could provide important emotional and financial security to a formerly Amish woman. Conversely, marriage could also be barrier to leaving, when splitting from the Amish faith involves leaving behind a spouse and possibly children, although this phenomenon was not present in my sample. Just as baptism is believed to add an additional safeguard against wayward members leaving (though my sample suggests such a relationship is more complicated), it would seem that family and marriage would serve as strong motivations to stay within the confines of the Amish church. This, however, does not seem to be the case for everyone.

Rachel, a 35-year-old woman from a strict community in the Midwest, was married to her husband in the Amish church before leaving 12 years ago. She describes what finally brought her, her husband, and their baby to leave:

Yeah, we both were married in the church, and afterwards my brother got shunned for leaving. They excommunicated my brother and his wife because they

didn't agree with them. We were supposed to shun him because he was excommunicated, but we didn't shun them... They [the preachers] told us that if we confessed that we did wrong by eating with him, then it wouldn't be a problem. We prayed about it, and we thought if we confess then that means that we don't agree with my brother. We just decided that it's wrong for us to be two sided. And we stood up for my brother. So eventually instead of us confessing in church, they just excommunicated us.

We had no plans on leaving the church. We were still going to church, but as time went on we just started seeing more things. Our eyes opened to the truth. Growing up Amish you are taught that if you ever leave you are going to Hell. But the more we started reading the English bible—we started reading English because we could understand it better than the German—the more we understood, and we decided that it's not true that you go to Hell for leaving because Jesus is the way. It's not about driving a car or having electric or living a different lifestyle of the Amish...

Rachel and her husband were excommunicated because they would not follow the Ordnung of their strict community and shun her brother's family. When they decided that they would not apologize for something that they did not feel was wrong, they signed their fate. While Rachel shares that it was easier for her to leave with her husband and child, she talks about how difficult it was to leave the rest of her family:

That was the hardest thing I've ever done to leave my family. We were very close, and we had a lot of fun together. There were 14 of us... My mother, you know, they came to the house to try and convince us that we were wrong and how hard it is on them... She was like, "If my husband wanted to leave, he could leave, and I could stay Amish." I told her, "Well, as long as he doesn't do anything against the word of God that there was nothing wrong with me leaving with him." So, yeah it was just very difficult. It was a difficult decision but yet rewarding, and we are both very happy where we are at.

Rachel benefited by defecting with her husband—the burden was not hers alone. She did, nonetheless, have to deal with the rest of her family who stayed behind, showing that family support can be a double-edged sword.

Abe and Abigail were also married before leaving the Amish church with the support of their immediate family. They remained in the Amish church until they were 40 years old and

started to become interested in studying the bible in depth. Doing this, however, is not something that is readily accepted or promoted in the Amish church. With nine children, Abe and Abigail talk about how their input was important in making the move to a more “spiritual” Amish church out West, where bible study was not so highly discouraged:

Abigail: Well, they [their children] were still in our home. The oldest was 16, I think, and they seemed to see into it very quickly. Sometimes when we struggle with what is right and wrong, the older ones would chime in and have a quick answer because their minds hadn't been trained or...

Abe: This is something that we try to look at in life—the many lies we have been told that keep us from getting closer to God. Our oldest sons, when we were in the transition, were the ones that came to us and told us that they wanted a relationship with the Lord as well.

Me: Do you think that made it easier?

Abe: Oh, absolutely.

Abigail: For sure.

Abe: The truth will set you free. It's way too hard to leave people like that without the Lord drawing you to do it. I mean, it's similar to the history of the Anabaptists or other sects of people that decided to follow the Lord instead of the world, and they were ostracized for it.

Having their older children reinforce their decisions to “follow the Lord” made the transition easier for Abe and Abigail, pointing out not only the importance of spousal support but also family support. For them, leaving the Amish church did not mean that they had to give up contact with their children, although Abe and Abigail did lose contact with their parents and siblings. They did move out West to join a new Amish settlement and church that was a little more liberal than the one they were in and ultimately left for a closer “relationship with the Lord” (discussed further in chapter five).

There are others, to be sure, unlike Abe and Abigail whose children would not follow them. In fact, other research finds that strong parental support and activity in the church leads to greater retention for children, especially for Orthodox Jews (Abel 2005; Lazerwitz 1995). Further, Abel (2005) points out that offspring generally replicate the religious practices of their parents—both for affiliation and disaffiliation. For the participants of this research, having a spouse and family to leave with provided beneficial support that those who left on their own did not have. They also had the benefit of leaving at an older age, which also seemed helpful.

Age they left. How old Amish individuals are when they leave the culture also seems to have a great impact on whether they leave and stay out. While this sample left their Amish communities at various ages, doing so at a younger age seems to be correlated with returning to the community. For instance, 5 of my participants either ran away or left when they were young (13-16 years old), stayed out for a short amount of time, and came back, either by choice or force. Subsequently they left again. Hannah's story (discussed above) shows how difficult it can be to leave at a young age, for a number of reasons. First, she was not an adult so she could not go to school, work, obtain identification, or travel without her parents' approval. Second, it was against the law for her to leave home at that age without going to court. She needed to be in her parents' custody, or she would be considered a run-away. Third, as she described herself, she was naïve—there was much she did not know about the English, especially as a 13-year-old adolescent.

Andrew, a 37-year-old man from a strict community in the Midwest, first left the Amish when he was 16:

I left once before, but I was only 16, so that didn't work out at all. And I didn't realize that you needed to be 18 before you leave so I sort of ended up in detention center and what not. I had to go through the court system and got sent

home. The police that took me back home were nice, and said, "You can't move away until you're 18." (Me: ...Can you talk a little bit about when you left the first time at 16?) Yeah, like I said, we had some neighbors right across the road because there weren't enough people in the community for a church. It was just us so we'd have to go to a church that was 40 or 50 miles away, every other Sunday. And we'd get a driver. That's where my grandparents lived, in [a different city]. We'd get a driver and go there on Saturdays and stay at my grandparents' place. Then on Mondays come home. But being that we had a farm then we had animals, and there was no other Amish there that you could rely on to come and feed your animals. So me and my brother usually ended up sometimes staying there at my parents' place. So I started sneaking out of my parent's place to my neighbor's house and watching TV. One thing led to another, and I started hanging out with their daughter, and then we got close. And I told her what's going on with the beatings and everything, and she told her dad. He tried to convince me to run off, and I wasn't really having it because I didn't know how that all works. He assured me that if I come down here, they can't make me go back. I'm 16 years old. Okay, all right. It was during the fall. And we always hunted. My dad bought me my first rifle when I was ten years old, and I'd go to the forest and shoot squirrels. It was during archery season, and I told my parents I was going to go archery hunting, which I did almost every evening during the season. I just went back and forth and made a big circle and went to their house. And he, I think called children services, told them I was getting beat up at home, and didn't tell me that he did. And next thing I know they arrive. I'm eating pizza, watching a boxing match on TV, and here come children services to pick me up and take me to a group home. I was very angry, you know. It was almost bear season, and I wanted to go bear hunting. And here I'm stuck in a group home, and they tell you you can't be in there any longer than 30 days, and they're so dishonest. At 30 days they take you right back in and you're stuck for another 30 days.

Now they treated me well, but it was just not a place where I could live... I didn't know what was going on. I'd get pulled out in the mornings and go to court, and I was supposed to testify. I went and tried to hide. My parents were sitting there, my grandparents were there, the bishops were there from [a different city]. Everybody was there. How was I supposed to say what was going on? The judge was nice. He saw what was happening. He took me in a little room and just told me to talk to him. I told him I wanted to go home, but I didn't want my dad to beat me up anymore. I said, "I can't live in the group home." I said, "I'm sorry I run off; I didn't know it was going to be like this," and the neighbor told me this, that, and the other thing, and it wasn't true. So he got my dad and asked him and the deacon from [a different city], which was my grandpa, to a meeting and told them what I wanted, and they consented to it. They said that my dad promised he would never do it again, and he never did. And so they sent me home. And they sent, they were supposed to send out some worker to check on me all of the time, which he used to come out and check on me to make sure that my dad was holding up to his agreement, and he was, so I ended up going back.

While Andrew's experience leaving is a bit unique because his primary reason for leaving was being physically abused by his father (discussed further in chapter five), it shows the complexities that Amish youth face when leaving before the age of 18, even if they have a good reason to do so. Andrew left the Amish for good when he was 26 years old (described further in chapter five).

Adam also tried to leave home at a young age, but ended up coming back:

The first time I tried to leave when I was 17. I was only gone three days, and the second day it was starting to set in because you are a long ways from home. You don't have a job, you don't have money, and you're still just a kid. It just wasn't right. It wasn't the right time, so I just decided to wait 'til I was older.

This is a difficult thing to do, to be sure. Adam, who has since helped others leave the Amish, describes leaving like being in a tunnel:

I explain it like this, when you leave it's like walking into a tunnel because you have nothing—no money, no clothes, no job. You have absolutely nothing. When you leave, even if you know people on the outside, you are still in like your own tunnel. You are still alone. It's hard to get adjusted to that because you just left your family, and the rest of the world just looks like it's closing in on you... You see it takes a mindset. You have to be set. A lot of kids...you don't want them to go through what you went through, so you go pick them up Sunday afternoon at church. They run off. And you go pick them up in your vehicle, and it's done, easy. You find them a job, and you get them clothing, and all of this stuff. You basically lay everything out, and it's all fun for the first week. Then it hits you that everybody else is out here, and you are walking in this tunnel, and it's dark. Your family is all out here; you haven't talked to them. You get homesick as hell right away, because everything you know in life just changed a lot. So, you kind of stand there feeling like you are by yourself and you gotta get past that. A lot of times what happens is after the newness wears off you have to push past it and keep going. And there are a lot of kids that aren't able to do that because of the guilt, the homesickness. All of that overrides their mind because they are so brainwashed. The first thing they think is that they are going to Hell; you gotta get that out of your head. You're not breaking God's rules. You are breaking the Amish homemade rules that they have implemented on you to try and keep you so they can have control over you.

Besides making it out of the tunnel that Adam describes, staying out also contributes to how successful an ex-Amish participant is at becoming financially stable and adapted they become to the English world. Many of the participants talked about going home after a few days or a few months out in the English world the first time. The difference is all of the participants in this sample tried again and stayed out. While much research suggests that young people tend to drift away from religion during college age years, what is taking place here is more than drifting away from religion (Caplovitz and Sherrow 1977; Hoge, Johnson, and Luidens 1993; Uecker, Regnerus, and Vaaler 2007). These ex-Amish participants are leaving their families, communities, ways of life, and their faith. While it is still possible to return later in life, defecting from the Amish church is a major step towards a completely different life. Once exposed to the English world, none of the participants wished to go back permanently.

Time out. Relatedly, the amount of time that an ex-Amish person has been successful at remaining in mainstream society influences whether or not they will remain there. This only makes sense given what Elizabeth and Adam spoke about previously. The average time out for this sample is 18.5 years with a minimum of 9 years, a maximum of 57 years, and a standard deviation of 10.4 years (removing the outlier of 57 years, the average time out is 16.6 years, with a standard deviation of 5.5 years). Elizabeth alludes to feeling more and more like an outsider the longer she was away from the Amish culture, until she did not really feel like she belonged at her family events. Adam refers to the tunnel as a black hole type of construct that a person needs to break out of before he or she will be successful at leaving the Amish way of life behind. Without doing so, they are most likely going to be overcome with homesickness and culture shock. Some of the same sentiments are echoed in the narratives of others who left more than once. A few

stories are discussed above and Daniel's experience is also illustrative. Below he talks about his first time leaving:

I went, actually to visit somebody, and I was there for about eight weeks or so. And then I kind of got cold feet and went back to my parents' house for several months. Then I decided that I indeed wanted to leave for good. So I left, and I never did come back.

This was a common experience for the participants in this sample. Often they tested the waters either during Rumspringa if they were allowed one, or at a later point. Typically they became homesick, went back to their community, and then left for good at a later date when they were more prepared. 7 out of the 25 participants spoke about initially being ill equipped, like Daniel and Adam, returning to their communities, and then leaving when they were older. While anecdotal, these narratives suggest that despite not being prepared the first time around, the participants of this sample have been successful at remaining ex-Amish and have no intention of returning to the Amish culture.

Chapter Summary and Conclusion

While the participants of this research have been successful at leaving their respective Amish communities, there are likely countless others who have not. As Kraybill (2001) estimated, 90 percent of Amish youth become lifelong members of the Amish church. This means that roughly 10 percent leave, either living in a state of limbo (e.g., unbaptized but perhaps still in the community), being excommunicated or shunned, or leaving on their own accord. The retention factors to remain (i.e., barriers to leaving) Amish discussed here include: birth order, relationships with the outside world, gender and education differences, baptism, family support, the age of leaving, and how long they have been out. In relation to the narratives of the participants in this sample, it becomes easier to see why leaving the Amish culture can be so difficult and why it seems that so few people do it and stay out. It also suggests that a much

more nuanced understanding is needed, because the traditional retention factors applied to this sample does not portray an adequate picture of why these participants were resistant to staying Amish.

There seems to be other forces at work, pulling the participants away permanently from the Amish and into the English world. As it will be explored in the next two chapters, the process of moving from the tunnel that Adam discusses, to being an ex, is different for each of the participants. Although, as illustrated here, some patterns exist that may shed light on factors that make leaving the faith and staying out a bit easier or more difficult.

Chapter five will begin by exploring the participants' reasons for leaving the Amish, including the types of defection that occurred as outlined by Mauss (1969). Through his framework, the narratives of the ex-Amish align, showing intellectual, social, emotional, and spiritual reasons for leaving their families, faith, and communities. Chapter six comprises the last of the analysis section of this dissertation, highlighting the participants' lives after leaving the Amish, including difficulties related to being an ex, adjustments to the English world, and where they are now.

CHAPTER FIVE

BECOMING EX-AMISH

As already evident, giving up their Amish lives was not always easy for the participants in this study. Previously held beliefs about what factors encourage and discourage Amish from leaving appear to be dated and do not explain comprehensively what is taking place today. Thus a much more nuanced examination is needed. This chapter analyzes the narratives of the participants relating to their deconversion process using constructivist grounded theory. After initial coding, it became apparent there was more going on than what current and previous literature suggested about becoming an ex.

I begin by reviewing some of the foundational works in disaffiliation, more commonly known today as deconversion, research. These were helpful in providing structure and organization for this chapter. Literature reviewed in chapter two essentially identifies two components of the deconversion or exiting process: 1) the role of the exiter in relationship to the organization they are leaving, and 2) the types of defection that result. Both are helpful in understanding the process of becoming ex-Amish.

First, the role of the exiter is important. Bromley (1998) argues apostasy in fact occurs under particular circumstances and involves a contested exit, where either the exiter or opposed organization are pursuing the split with an allegiant, a contestant, or a subversive organization (Bromley 1998). As primarily allegiant organizations, the Amish's insulated way of life protects against external forces, like those of the English world, influencing their members. Also, while intentionally limiting education (i.e., elementary and religious education only), the church and

clergy remain the legitimate authorities and are generally able to retain their unquestioned position, although not always in the case of whistleblowers.

While all organizations experience a loss of members, Bromley (1998) points out that the exiter's relationship and the amount of contention involved with the organization influence which type of contested exit role they will take—a defector (B1 from an allegiant organization), a whistleblower (B2 from a contestant organization), or an apostate (B3 from a subversive organization) [see Appendix B: Table 1: Bromley's (1998) Contested Roles applied to the ex-Amish]. While not every ex has a contested exit and these categories are not mutually exclusive, these exit roles, in relation to the type of organization the participants left, prove insightful in extending the theoretical understanding of becoming an ex, although they are not useful alone.

The second major component of deconversion relates to Mauss's (1969) breakdown of defection with intellectual, social, and spiritual/emotional dimensions. This provides the analytical structure (and organization for the chapter) needed when looking at why ex-Amish leave their community, church, and culture. Each of the types contains at least one of the three elements that Mauss (1969) found important. These include an intellectual dimension (i.e., a growing doubt in religious doctrine and/or an interest in the secular world), a social dimension (i.e., a change in social interaction, social status, and/or looking outside of the group for relationships), and an emotional or spiritual dimension (i.e., rebellion and/or negative interactions related to emotions or spirituality).

While Mauss (1969) traditionally combines the emotional/spiritual category, for the purposes of this research these types are viewed as distinct given the importance of both emotional and spiritual dimensions, though they are contained under the same heading below.

The first types (i.e., intellectual, social, emotional, and spiritual) fall under these names, and the remainder of the typology is made up of various combinations of these dimensions (cultural, psychological, alienated, total, and circumstantial defectors) [see Appendix D: Table 3: Mauss's (1969) Typology for Defection applied to the ex-Amish]. For example, cultural defectors have intellectual and social dimensions, while total defectors include all three dimensions—intellectual, social, emotional and/or religious. While at first glance, it may appear as though participants could fall into multiple categories, it is important to note that each type is distinctive. For illustration, a participant who falls into the total defector status could also be classified in the intellectual, social, emotional, or spiritual categories separately, but doing so would not account for all of the dimensions that appear to be motivating factors in their exit. As a result, if the participants discussed aspects relating to one or more of these dimensions they were designated as that type of defector.

For the most part, Mauss's (1969) typology adequately distinguished between varying dimensions of apostates (using the traditional definition, rather than Bromley's). This worked well for explaining the process and rationale of becoming ex-Amish, with the exception of emotional and spiritual defectors as well as his catchall category of circumstantial defectors. Bromley's (1998) differentiation between contested exit roles [defectors (B1), whistleblowers (B2), and apostates (B3)] are noted when a participant falls outside of the defector exit role. Other elements from theoretical perspectives are included when appropriate to provide a thorough analysis. Below are illustrations from the ex-Amish, starting with intellectual defectors.

Intellectual Defectors

Intellectual defectors are those that leave as a result of issues with religious doctrine or a growing doubt in God (Mauss 1969). Moreover, these defectors can show an interest in the secular world, or for the ex-Amish, possibly the English world (Mauss 1969). While typically in strict, fundamentalist religions, exposure to the secular world and even the ability to critically think about religious doctrine are largely discouraged (Berger 2010; Finke and Stark 2007; Kaufmann 2010; Kelley 1972). Despite this, those leaving the Amish culture, like Sadie, Adam, Abe, and Abigail, intellectual reasons related to issues with their community's Ordnung were often to blame. As will be shown throughout this chapter, the participants of this research, while often not openly done, still manage to critique their Amish existence to some degree, especially once they have left "for good."

Sadie, first introduced in chapter four, is an intellectual defector. She started out talking about dating as one of the reasons she decided to leave the Amish church, although as it turned out, she did not see herself as being Amish for life:

I had bad dating experiences, and I didn't like the way the Amish practiced dating [courting or bundling depending on the community]. But the main drawback was me not being able to see myself becoming a member of the church. I didn't understand the Bible, the church, and most of the people in the community were very snobby. They were always trying to find fault with each other. I didn't want a life where I had to tiptoe around just so others would be happy.

Sadie describes here her "first doubts" in remaining Amish, much like Ebaugh (1988) detailed in her research of becoming an ex. Sadie interprets her bad dating experiences as the initial rationale for her wanting to leave the community. Actually, though, she says that she could not see herself becoming Amish and living under the Ordnung. Sadie, much like the other intellectual defectors below, left as a result of not feeling like Amish life was a good fit for her.

She also hints at the hypocrisy in her community without actually saying it. Adam, on the other hand, was not afraid to express such feelings.

As Adam explained in chapter four, he finally left his Amish home for good when he was 18 years old. From the age of 10, he was curious about the outside world and described leaving as something he always wanted to do. At 17, Adam left home for the first time, but was quickly brought back by his father who threatened to call the police since he was not an adult yet. Once he turned 18, he left for good because:

Basically I just couldn't see eye to eye with the Amish rules [Ordnung] and all the people. I always thought there was a lot of misrepresentation of the Amish. When you look into the Amish as an outsider, you are looking into their world. And to a lot of people, it seems like everything is quiet, and everything is well taken care of. They have all their stuff in line. Everyone is honest and just top notch. That's how they represent themselves to the rest of the world in my opinion. When you are there, living that lifestyle, it's a total misrepresentation of who they really are.

I don't go out of my way to get in their way or to do anything to stop them from doing what they are doing. But I also think it's a lot more like a cult because a lot of their stuff is based on the same things as... I don't know how to explain it.

The problem I have is when there is trouble [alluding to a case of abuse that was ignored] that needs to be dealt with. A lot of times the trouble gets dealt with by if the law gets involved, they run and hide. They don't pay for their mistakes that they make, and they know their mistakes. There are bad things that get swept under the rug, and all the people that it affects are told to shut up and deal with it.

This is my dislike of the Amish; they hide behind the fact that the court system doesn't want to override their religion... Their belief is that you have to scare people into staying Amish. But this is where I'm from. This is the belief I grew up with. This isn't a representation of all Amish as a group or a core. This is just what I see. But like in church when they preach, everything is about "If you don't follow these Amish rules, there is no way you are going to heaven." And the people that are preaching it are the ones that are doing the bad stuff.

Adam describes his doubts in the Amish Ordnung and in his community's ability to take care of problems when they arise, especially when they relate to the well being of a child.

Later in the interview, Adam talked about church leaders being hypocrites by telling others in the community to not partake in things, like using a certain piece of machinery, but using it themselves when no one was looking. He describes it as a “Do as I say, not as I do” mentality. As a child, Adam would ask questions about why things were the way they were. His family’s and community’s responses of “Because it’s always been that way,” were inadequate. As such, his issues with Amish Ordnung and the community’s leaders makes Adam an intellectual defector, leaving for unsettled issues with the religious doctrine. While he expresses dissatisfaction in how the church leadership dealt with abuse in the community, Adam is not quite a whistleblower, as he previously has not called attention to this issue. Bringing it up during the interview, however, suggests that it still bothers him several years later. It seems that his experience with the Amish church has left a lasting mark on Adam, who is still not a member of an organized religion despite his wife and children belonging to another church. He says organized religion is just not for him.

Adam’s experience also highlights elements Smith (2011) found important in constructing an atheist identity. While Adam did not share that he was an atheist, the aspects of his leaving and no longer participating in an organized religion demonstrate a similar process, especially in regards to “questioning theism” and “rejecting theism.” In the narratives above, Adam is clearly questioning the religious doctrine and Amish principles he grew up with. Finding fault in how the community was governed and inquiring about why things were the way they were from a young age eventually led to Adam rejecting the principles he was raised under. Moreover, the hypocrisy and lack of morality Adam saw in the Amish became a central reason for defection. This is similar to Smith’s (2011: 224) description of the centrality of morality

(where “specific moral issues progressively drove their questioning of God and religion more intensely”).

Abe and Abigail, both baptized in the Amish church in their younger days, are now in their 60’s with nine adult children. Their stories were introduced in chapter four. They can also be classified as intellectual defectors, although their story is unique. They were married in the Amish church, and their children were born into the culture. It was not until they were both 40 years old that they decided to make the transition to become ex-Amish, though this was not their original intention:

Abe: We were basically following the Lord as he led us, and our first ambitions were that we would be involved with a spiritual Amish church. We moved [out West], away from all the other communities, but that wasn't our goal. The church issue wasn't [a problem] then—it was a little bit but that wasn't our goal. So we came here, and we found the connection with the Lord and our friends in the Amish that knew the Lord. Then there were more things that God wanted us to do. For instance, we felt like he was leading us to prayer meetings and to Bible study. So a few of us in the Amish church here wanted that, but others didn't want it because it was leaving the tradition.

Abigail: It was almost a sign that if you do too much preaching you won't be Amish.

Abe: So we had a choice there. We got together for meetings a couple times, and they actually came and told us we shouldn't be doing that anymore. So now the question for us was do we obey God or men? And it was obvious so we asked what to do instead, and they still didn't want us to do it. So we said we were going to have them with our neighbors who weren't Amish. Again they told us we needed to quit doing that, and we said, "What are you telling us to quit doing it? We can't obey men rather than God." It was like the test came from the Lord. “Are you going to obey traditions or are you doing to do it my way?”

Abe and Abigail decided to continue with their Bible study but sustained their Amish lifestyle, as they had “no grudges against the lifestyle.” After all, this was how they were both raised.

According to Abe:

We wanted to stay Amish, and we wanted to have this life with the Lord. But eventually, even though we had a church [out West] that was Amish, they still

associated with all the other churches [in the Midwest]. If people from there wanted to associate with us or come visit us or the people here, they had to be what they call "in peace" with them.

This meant that the Amish community out West needed to abide by the same standards as the communities in the Midwest to avoid being excommunicated. Abe and Abigail had a decision to make. They could either continue "following the Lord" and start going to an English church, or they could stop what they were doing (i.e., reading the Bible and talking about it with others in a group setting) and go back to the way things used to be.

Abe: God made the decision for us.

Abigail: Oh, it was terribly hard though. It was like you were overstepping a very, very big boundary line to even make that move to go to a different church.

Abe: One of the biggest things I can remember is my dad saying to me, "Why is this not good enough for you when it was good enough for us and all of our ancestors?" Of course, at that point that was a lame excuse for us because we weren't doing it for the people, we were doing it because of God.

As evident here, Abe and Abigail are intellectual defectors, although it was never their intention to leave the Amish church or their simple life. In the beginning, they were searching for a deeper understanding of their faith. That knowledge, however, brought out the negative qualities, in their eyes, of the Amish church, which pushed them in a different direction. As apostates (B3) according to Bromley's (1998) definition, both Abe and Abigail left the church to join another where they could have the freedom to read the Bible and attend Bible study as they pleased. Had they not been faced with this decision to choose, however, they might still be members of the Amish church. As described earlier, this type of questioning or yearning for more knowledge is not really desired or even accepted in Amish communities. Thus, they were almost pushed into Ebaugh's (1988) stage of seeking and weighing alternatives. Once they had,

Abe and Abigail really had no choice but to move on and establish their new roles in the English world.

While Sadie and Adam came to be intellectual defectors as a result of differing opinions on how things should be, Abe's and Abigail's defection was the outcome of a desire for a closer relationship with the Lord. Viewed by the legitimate authority (Amish church and clergy) as departing from the Amish Ordnung and religious doctrine, a choice was made. Little time was spent during the interviews talking about specifics of the Amish lifestyle that they disagreed with, mostly because all four of the participants appreciated being raised Amish (i.e., family life, rural communities, and simple living). In the end, Abe and Abigail moved from one strict church to another, participating in religious switching (Hadaway and Roof 1988; Nelson and Bromley 1988; Phillips and Kelner 2006; Sherkat 2001). While many of their daily practices are the same, they opted for more religious freedom in terms of their personal relationship with the Lord, rather than giving that control to the church as they had in the past. Sadie and Adam, on the other hand, went in a different direction. Going against rational choice theory and the idea that leaving would cost too much in the end, they gave up their ways of life, family, and faith for a completely different way of living in the English world (Phillips and Kelner 2006; Sherkat 2001). When the time came to think about or make choices for themselves in regards to the rules and regulations, however, they all chose to leave the culture, as intellectual defectors, opting for alternatives that better suited what they wanted for their future.

Social Defectors

Unlike an intellectual defector, a social defector, according to Mauss (1969), will leave due to a loss or lack of social interaction with others in the community, sometimes resulting in a change in their social status. Likewise, a social defector may look outside of the community for

other relationships when these prior bonds have been damaged or broken (Mauss 1969). While possible, this method of deconversion really goes against the fundamentalist way of thinking for the Amish (Berger 2010; Kaufmann 2010). Spending their days dedicated to seclusion and insulating their children from the outside world, each community prepares the Amish youth (through practices like ritual dating and adult baptism) against these social temptations. Despite this, 3 (Isabelle, Benjamin, and Kaleb) out of the sample of 25 were social defectors. Isabelle's and Benjamin's experiences are shared below as they illustrate this category of defectors best.

As a social defector, Isabelle left the Amish when she was 22 years old. Before the day she left, she had not given leaving her family and church much thought:

I never entertained the idea. I just, like, "I could never leave." You just don't leave. I'm like, "How can I face the threat of going to Hell? What if they're right?" And, it was just unthought-of for my family [her father is a minister, and her uncle is a bishop]. And so, I can honestly say I just did not entertain the idea of leaving. But I did become dissatisfied with the way the Amish were doing things, because when I joined the church, I got to see how they—the inner workings of the church and how the rules didn't apply to everyone the same.

Isabelle explains that her family was held to higher standards because they were minister's children. When she was 20 or 21, she fell in love with the family driver, an English man named Joe. Their relationship remained a secret for over a year, but then came a crossroad where Isabelle had to make the decision to stay or leave:

I just never thought it would lead to leaving. But, we got to the point where I knew if I wanted to be with him, I had to make the choice of leaving, because he would never be allowed in the community. Because he had been married before, so he was never Amish material, and he said he wouldn't want to anyway. So, if I wanted to be with him, I had to leave. And that's basically what made me decide to eventually make the move—leaving. But like I said, I didn't even know I was leaving until the day of, really. The day that I left, he was telling me he was going to go [down South] to see his father who was having surgery. My grandfather had passed away, like a month or two before, and the Amish were—they were getting more strict about who they used as drivers. [Joe] felt like his days in our community were just about over. He said that he was probably going to leave the community because of the jealousy. There were people in the community that

were jealous of my family because they felt like my family got special rates and special treatment from Joe as a driver. He said he was going to leave, and I could go with him. And I just had to think about it for a few hours, but I made the decision to leave because I knew if I wanted a life with him, I couldn't stay in the Amish community.

It was as simple as that. Isabelle did not spend time questioning the culture she was raised in until after she left. Experiencing this turning point, as Ebaugh (1988) depicts, Isabelle made her decision, left the Amish, moved in with Joe to care for his father, and they were married shortly thereafter. She was quickly excommunicated because of her family's social standing in the Amish community. Not only was she shunned by her family and community, but by other Amish communities as well. Isabelle described a visit to an Amish community store. As a known ex-Amish woman from her participation in documentaries and as a published author, she was denied service when trying to buy a few things, while her friend, an unknown ex-Amish woman, was not. To this day, Isabelle tends to distance herself from communities like this to avoid negative social interactions that result from her being a social defector.

Benjamin's social defector status came about a bit differently. He is a 37 year old from a more liberal community in the Midwest. He is the youngest of seven children, was raised primarily by his father because his mother died when he was young, was never baptized in the Amish church, and left when he was 21. As a homosexual who was still "in the closet" while he was Amish, Benjamin says leaving was ultimately something he would have to do:

I knew it was a decision I was going to have to make eventually. I didn't put a lot of thought into it because I kind of knew I was going to leave. [Me: Would it have been an option to remain Amish and be gay?] Well, not for me. When I was in my teens, I had a fling with another Amish guy. Today he is married with kids and a farm. He has a typical Amish life and all that. That's the decision he made, to join the church and live that lifestyle. I was more comfortable not being Amish. I wanted to be "out" in society.

When Benjamin was in his early twenties and prior to leaving the Amish for good, he spent time in a larger city with the local LGBTQ+ community, his “other family” as he calls them. Here, he felt at home and was able to live his life as he wanted. Benjamin was called back to the farm and Amish community to help care for his father when he became ill and needed more assistance around the homestead. During this time, Benjamin was living a “don’t ask, don’t tell” existence, as he describes it. While he had “come out” to his father vaguely, it was not something they discussed regularly:

Oh yeah, definitely [he knew]. He just came to the understanding that I had my life. And he was my father, and I totally love him. I was his son, he loved me, and I came “out” for that reason. Unfortunately, other Amish don’t experience that and get shunned.

Because Benjamin was never baptized, his father did not shun him, although this is probably not a typical scenario. He referenced others in similar situations that did not have it as “easy” as he did. Once his father died though, Benjamin did leave the community for good. As a social defector, he had found a home elsewhere, in the larger city where he could feel more comfortable to live the life he wanted without the judgment of the Amish community. Finding his “other family” outside of the community before his father’s passing allowed Benjamin contact with different social networks where he could be comfortable being himself and pursue his interest in writing.

While not leaving particularly for strained social interactions, Benjamin was in search of a community where he felt he belonged, something that he did not find in the Amish. Outside of his relationship with his father, his Amish existence seemed quite lonely, being the youngest of his siblings and never quite conforming to community norms and church values. As an avid reader and writer, Benjamin found happiness in the stories that he read and comfort when he stumbled upon queer writers. This provided him with insight on what life might be like outside

of the Amish community, until he was able to experience it for himself. While Benjamin never got to the point of questioning his faith, likely because he knew from a young age that the world he was living in would not accept him as he was, he was able to seek out and find an alternative world that did. Thus, once his father passed (turning point) Benjamin established himself in the English world, “coming out” in the process (Ebaugh 1988; Smith 2011).

Unlike Benjamin, Isabelle never dreamed of leaving her family and community. It was not until she met Joe and fell in love that her world changed, and she became a social defector. Because it was a sudden decision, the implications of her choice on her social world came after her departure, with irrevocable damage to family and community relationships. While both Benjamin and Isabelle found their way out of the strict churches they grew up in, neither ended up in a religious home similar to their Amish upbringing.

Emotional and/or Spiritual Defectors

Another type of deconversion leads to the emotional and/or spiritual defector. Their departure can be the result of rebellion or an instance that results in a negative feeling that can be difficult to overcome (Mauss 1969). As evident below, an emotional or spiritual defector can also be someone who leaves the community for personal reasons relating to their emotional or spiritual well being, rather than a specific instance (Mauss 1969). While traditionally Mauss (1969) combines these into one type of defector, Jonas left the Amish for more emotional reasons, and Daniel could be classified as more of a spiritual defector. Such distinctions indicated a need to separate this classification for this sample at least.

Jonas, an unbaptized man from a strict community, is a clear example of an emotional defector. He has been an ex for 27 years, as described in chapter four, and left his Amish community twice. The first time he was 17—he left the church but stayed in the area and worked

across the street from his family's home. He describes being able to see his mother sleeping at the kitchen table waiting for him. Jonas decided to give Amish life another try three months later:

I kind of decided I really need to make sure, and I did go home. I was home for probably two months. And, during that time it was just, the ministers and kind of the elders in the community figured, "Okay, he came back. Now we need to, you know, go talk to him and lay down the rules. This is the way it's going to be. You're not going to come back and, you know, shed a light of the outside world to the other kids," and you know.

Here Jonas is alluding to the community's desire to protect the other Amish children not only from the outside world, but also from his experiences with the English over those three short months. Jonas is also pointing to the process of seeking and weighing his alternatives before he actually went through the process of leaving, similar to Ebaugh's (1988) participants.

While he is ambiguous about what he was going through, Jonas is very clear that his decision to leave the second time was not about what others thought or said:

I was fighting a personal battle. This wasn't about the community; this wasn't about the other boys there my age or any of that. This was—this was something personal I was going through. But they don't, you know, there was no therapy-related anything. It was just, you know, you accepted the way things were, and that's how you live. There was no place to go talk about it. [Me: When you say it was something personal, what do you mean?] It was just like a personal... Like my older brother... We had a great family life growing up with—you know, it was fun. We worked our butts off. All Amish kids do, but we had a great, great family life. You know, all—we'd have the normal squabbles of your brothers and sisters, but as a family, it was just... If I could have that family now with my family, I'd be a happy man.

And, the personal struggle was me—me knowing that my heart, if I stayed there with all of that, I know I would never completely be happy. Because at least if I didn't go and see if this world or my, you know, my wanting to experience the world, if I always had that, then I would never know what would it be like down the road. As far as I know, I'd end up getting married. And would it be fair to my wife? Would be fair to my kids? When would this battle ever end?

Jonas questions whether or not these thoughts would have ever have gone away had he not left. As an emotional defector, Jonas contemplated his decision to leave for quite awhile, even returning to his Amish home to try again like many others do. In the end, it was the personal struggle he was fighting and his concern over his and his future family's well being that ultimately led to his emotional exit.

Daniel left the Amish when he was 24 years old. As a spiritual defector, his exit from the church was largely based on a personal decision to move on, although his journey to get to that point is distinctive from others in this research. At the age of 18, Daniel expressed discontent with his Amish community in the Midwest and weighed his alternatives (Ebaugh 1988). Luckily for him, this was a sentiment that his parents shared. They were looking for a more "seeker-friendly" community where outsiders (i.e., those who were not born Amish, but wanted to practice their lifestyle and faith), were welcomed. While Daniel was thinking of leaving the Amish faith, he thought that maybe a change in communities and Ordnung would be sufficient. As a result, they joined with other families and built a new settlement out East, along with an established bishop, who had started a similar community elsewhere:

See, originally they weren't even going to call themselves Amish. They were going to have many of the similar things, but they were going to just call themselves a Christian community. And then they wanted to be under the leadership of a certain bishop that had already left and had his group [elsewhere]. This bishop would travel up and visit us. There was another community like that in [another town], and we were back and forth with them. And then the bishop, I guess things weren't going too great, and they weren't getting along. People down there weren't really getting along with each other very well. He decides that "Well, we need to go back to more traditional Amish ways." And people [at the new community] were more than happy to do that too.

But, I didn't really like, you know, I'm not really into that. I'd like to get out of that, you know, so... It was like been there, done that, and it's time for something new. It's time for—for expanding my horizons. I felt he was too fear-based. Everything was: "We have to do this and that because we're fearful of what's

going to happen down the road if we don't hold on to certain traditions." I was like, you know, I don't have time for that.

While Daniel gave the new community a try, when it went back toward the more traditional Amish church, he was faced with a "turning point" and made the decision to leave (Ebaugh 1988). As a baptized member of the church, under ordinary circumstances he would immediately be excommunicated and/or shunned, but because the community had changed their direction to begin with, it took a bit longer. Additionally, Daniel described his parents' feeling bad that things did not work out as planned in their new settlement, although he was still told he was making a mistake. As a spiritual defector, Daniel's choice to leave was about needing a spiritual change that the Amish church could not provide. While he had hoped that the new community out East would do that, in the end Daniel left to live his life in the English world with more spiritual options.

For both Jonas and Daniel, leaving the Amish and becoming defectors were difficult decisions, much like all other study participants. Jonas's experience of becoming an ex centered on whether or not he would be content in the future. Despite not wanting to hurt his parents, he became an emotional defector for personal reasons and because of other struggles he endured—rather than one specific instance. For others struggling with similar choices, Jonas now offers support to those that ask for it, offering "therapy-like" sessions about coming to grips with making the decision to leave.

Daniel, on the other hand, became a spiritual defector after the new Amish settlement that his family started did not work out. Notwithstanding effort on his part to make it work, he remained dissatisfied with the Amish faith in general and left to pursue other spiritual opportunities much like his family tried to do when starting the new community. Like others who

have left the Amish church for more opportunities, Daniel found a home in a Born Again Christian church with strict regulations, although more liberal when compared to the Amish church. As such, he participated in religious switching where his daily life is still heavily influenced by his faith, although not as stringent as it once was (Hadaway and Roof 1988; Nelson and Bromley 1988; Phillips and Kelner 2006; Sherkat 2001).

Cultural Defectors

Cultural defectors, for Mauss (1969), are a combination of both intellectual and social dimensions. Those who leave for cultural reasons indicate a doubt in God or religious doctrine, a growing interest in secular culture, a lack or loss of church interaction, a possible relationship with someone outside the faith, and/or a change in their social status (Mauss 1969). Departing a bit from their fundamentalist and strict church ways, both Elizabeth and Isaac are characteristic cultural defectors (Berger 2010; Finke and Stark 2007; Kaufmann 2010; Kelley 1972).

Elizabeth is a cultural defector for intellectual and social reasons. After leaving her Amish community to pursue her education, Elizabeth began questioning her previous beliefs—not fundamentally but more so as they related to Amish Ordnung. Elizabeth discusses the difficulty she had when she first was out in the English world trying to find a religious home and then again when she started dating her now husband:

When I first left, there were five or six years when I went to a nondenominational church. I wore regular clothes, and I didn't really feel connected. It was like, "How can I pray without my covering?" Then I met [husband] and his parents. They were Mennonite, and that's what he wanted—to go to a conservative Mennonite church. I had a really hard time with that. I was like, "No, I don't feel like that." But I'm really happy now, it all worked out. I love my church, but I wasn't happy about it at first, because I didn't want to wear a covering.

Here, Elizabeth is discussing some of the problems she encountered while transitioning to her new social network and identity as an ex-Amish woman. Eventually, she came to terms with her

religious future with her Mennonite husband. Elizabeth carefully negotiated her exit from the Amish church with her parents and community, making sure not to do something that would make it impossible for her to come back in the future.

To this day, she is mindful of how she presents herself, what she says publicly about the Amish, and whom she helps from that culture to remain respectful of where and how she was raised. As a result, Elizabeth has maintained a positive relationship with her Amish family and community, despite being a cultural defector. Elizabeth talks about going to an Amish family event recently where she was reminded that she is now different and on the outside:

Just the fact that when you leave, you are changed forever. Like, now I'm on the outside looking in at all my loved ones. When I go back for weddings, I see my cousins, and they are all so happy. They are all together, and they are married. And they are very sheltered and seem very safe, not that I don't feel safe, but like I'll never be a part of that again. I will always be different. Just last weekend, one of my cousins got married... So here I am with all these people I grew up with, and I'm about to have a career. They like sang these songs, and I got this lonely feeling. Like I said, I'm happy where I'm at, but it's still something that just like tugs at your heart—just a lonely feeling that you won't ever be a part of that or ever totally fit in.

While Elizabeth is still invited to some of her family events, she now feels like an outsider, speaking to a change in her social relationships. As a member of her husband's conservative Mennonite church, she also remains on the periphery as a religious switcher—moving from her strict Amish community to a more liberal, but still conservative Mennonite church (Hadaway and Roof 1988; Nelson and Bromley 1988; Phillips and Kelner 2006; Sherkat 2001). She does not condemn the Amish way of life; in fact she is living a similar existence in regards to faith and family. However, now she can still work as a nurse, almost filling the void that resulted when she left the Amish. Elizabeth's narratives above also speak to some aspects of Ebaugh's (1988) process of becoming an ex—seeking and weighing alternatives when she first ventured into the English world, her “turning point” when she decided that she would not be

going back, and then establishing herself in her new role as a Mennonite wife and mother who works in the nursing field.

Isaac, a 46 year old from a strict community in the North and then Midwest, is a cultural defector as well, having been baptized in the Amish church when he was young and then leaving almost 30 years ago. While he does not support the church or act as a member, Isaac does not stand in sharp opposition either. He talks about the first few times he left his community starting when he was 12 or 13:

I was going to go out and then come back to settle down and be the man that I knew I should be. But it was at a very young age when I knew in my heart that I wanted to step out [of the Amish community]. (Me: When you decided to leave for the last time, what got you to that point?). Well, there was a gentleman I met who had come from the outside and had joined the Amish, which is almost impossible. His mindset wasn't what anyone else's was, so nobody connected with him. We got to be very close friends, and then he led me to a relationship with the Lord. At that point when I became a Christian, I could see that it was okay if I stayed there. I could have chosen to stay there, but I also saw that it was okay if I left. It was totally a choice that was okay. That was the first time that I could walk away and know that I could never come back. And I've never looked back other than to remember. I've never looked back and thought that I wish I had stayed.

Isaac discusses coming to terms with leaving and realizing that it was a choice he could make—something that he had not come to terms with early on. He talks about his time going back and forth between the English and Amish worlds, essentially seeking and weighing his alternatives (Ebaugh 1988), as being pulled in both directions:

I was simply following a call to the outside, and things were tough out there. You know, you work on the ranch or construction. You do something with your hands, and you never have something to eat. During those times you have fun with your friends, but you miss your family. It was like when I was out here, I wanted to be there, but when I was there, I wanted to get out.

This hesitant, longing for the past is a shared sentiment for many of the ex-Amish participants in this study. In fact, as discussed in chapter four, it is one of the major reasons that the retention

rate has remained so high for the Amish faith and other strict churches that demand much from their members (Berger 2010; Finke and Stark 2007; Kaufmann 2010; Kelley 1972). When there is so much to lose, including your way of life and social networks, it is much harder to leave.

Because Isaac was a baptized member and became a cultural defector, his family and community shunned him. He describes the early days of his leaving as being difficult, mostly because of his father, a man he describes as “a hardcore Amish.” Isaac always made it home for Christmas to see his mother (although he was not allowed to eat at their table or stay in their home), and when his father got into his 80’s, he became more accepting and welcoming of the visits. Today, Isaac lives in an area where there are many Amish communities that are more lenient than where he grew up. He says he cannot live Amish, but he likes to be around them and call them friends:

(Me: Is that a bit of a comfort thing for you?) Well, I don't know. I think it's just a natural thing to circle back to your culture once you make peace with the way that you left it, which took me a number of years to do that. But it wasn't planned, it just kind of happened. Once I figured out where I wanted to live, I realized I really wanted to live here... I have tremendous respect for the culture, and I defend those who choose to live the way they live.

While Isaac was shunned by his own community, he has made himself at home living near other Amish.

As a cultural defector, he has gone through the processes of leaving the church, becoming a Christian (according to Isaac, although the Amish faith is also a Christian one), finding new social groups to align with, and locating his place in the English world, all while maintaining respect for the culture he was raised in. His leaving was about personal choices relating to wanting something more for his life, much like Elizabeth, rather than any issues with the Amish church itself. As cultural defectors, they both looked to the English world to fill their spiritual

and social voids after pulling away from the fundamentalist religion of their childhoods. While it appears as though they did not have much to lose, as they still have some contact with their families and Amish communities, going through deconversion has had a lasting cultural impact for both Elizabeth and Isaac.

Psychological Defectors

Similar to cultural defectors, those who leave for psychological reasons also do so as a result of a doubt in the religious doctrine or an interest in secular culture. Furthermore, these exs have an emotional and/or spiritual aspect to their departures. Often there are negative feelings resulting from a poignant encounter or general feelings of discontent for personal reasons relating to their emotional or spiritual well being (Mauss 1969). For these reasons, Toby, Harley, and Eli are all psychological defectors.

As Toby described in chapter four, he left the church at the age of 21 after being “conned into the baptism,” because he did not feel as though he had a choice. For Toby, the Amish community never felt like a good fit:

I just didn't feel like I belonged. I was with the Amish young people for a while, but I didn't feel quite fully accepted. When I was 19 or maybe 20, I just withdrew, and I didn't associate with the Amish anymore—the young people—because of Rumspringa [a lot of people were extremely deviant in his eyes]. I just couldn't go along with a lot of the stuff that was going on there, so I just quit going.

While Toby was ready to accept the promise to the Amish church that came with baptism, he was not content with his commitment to the community, especially to his peers. He did not reject the religious aspects of his upbringing, but instead was seeking alternatives community-wise (Ebaugh 1988; Smith 2011). He talks about his leaving as not a matter of if he would leave the Amish community, but when and how:

Well, as I grew up I always knew I wanted to leave, but I didn't know how or when. When I was right about 21 years old, I was still living at home with my parents, and I was wondering how I was going to get out of the community. There was just about no way to get out, and then I learned of a house in [a city] about ten miles from where we lived. I went there and rented a room for the summer. I lived there, and then I was away from my parents. And I could leave. When I was home it would have been almost impossible to leave, but living away I could go visit non-Amish churches and do things I couldn't at home. That's when I made the first [and only] break.

His newly found freedom that resulted from living on his own provided Toby with the ability to explore other options that would not have been possible if he were still under his parents' roof and watchful eyes. This lack of supervision and his entrance into the English world gave Toby just enough space to navigate his exit from the strict, fundamentalist church he was raised in. As a psychological defector, Toby's reasons for leaving were both intellectual (issues with the Ordnung in regards to Rumspringa) and emotional (a long-held general feeling of discontent related to not belonging), much like Harley.

Harley, a 25 year old originally from a strict community in the Midwest, is also a psychological defector for intellectual and emotional reasons. When he was younger, his family left their community for a more liberal one down South, similar to other religious switchers (Hadaway and Roof 1988; Nelson and Bromley 1988; Phillips and Kelner 2006; Sherkat 2001). After a slump in the economy and dwindling work in the construction business, his family moved back to the Midwest and into an area that did not have an Amish church. As a result, they ended up going to a Mennonite church which pleased Harley's father, but not his mother, who wanted to remain a part of the Amish community (the differences between these churches was discussed in chapter one). At the age of 16, Harley began attending a more liberal Mennonite church, searching for more opportunity and distancing himself even further from his Amish childhood:

There was just more opportunity in my mind than what I was being boxed in as and what I had. (Me: Did you always know you wanted to do something else?) I would say I did. I'm a dreamer so I always knew if I set my mind to something I could accomplish it. That's not a well-liked mindset in that culture. It's a negative thing to some people.

Harley's experience is unique. He describes himself as a bit like his father, unsettled and discontent with the simple life. Harley explains that if it were just up to his father, they would have left the Amish church long ago. Knowing this likely opened the door for Harley to seek out and weigh alternatives in the English world (Ebaugh 1988).

When Harley first left, much like Elizabeth, he says he did not plan on staying out. He talks about wanting to explore the English world and the opportunities it provides and then returning:

I had full intentions of going back until I met [wife, who is English]. And then I thought there was no reason. There was an Amish girl before [wife]. I said if it worked out I would go back, but thank God it didn't work out! [Laughs] Oh my God, I would have never been content as an Amish person.

Because Harley left while the family was already going to a Mennonite church, he did not face a typical battle. His father signed the paperwork allowing him to get a driver's license. After a few days, his mother handed over his birth certificate and Social Security card remarking, "Well, it's your life." For much of Harley's adolescence, he saw his father questioning and sometimes ignoring the Ordnung of their Amish communities. It is no surprise that he too ended up leaving for more opportunities than were not allowed under the Ordnung.

Additionally, for Harley, there were emotional reasons that steered him away. As a child, Harley did not feel protected by his family or community. While he did not go into much detail, he discusses being a victim of sexual abuse from around the time he was four years old. The perpetrator was a relative. Harley was not alone:

I know they would say that, “Yes, that can happen anywhere to anybody.” And that's true, but it's also overlooked and kept quiet. It happened to probably 5 or 6 of my siblings [out of 12], and it's a common thing... I remember being asked to do sexual favors at four years old—that was my first memory. It was so common. That was just a part of life.

As a result, he talks about not wanting to raise his five children in a community like that.

Furthermore, he along with his older siblings are fighting to keep his younger siblings out of the Amish community, as his mother remarried an Amish man after Harley's father passed away. He explains, “It's not something I'm willing to let my sisters go into.” As a psychological defector, both the structure of the Amish church as well as the negative feelings Harley has as a consequence of his abuse and unprotected childhood led him to opt for a life in the English world and reject the doctrine that allowed this behavior to go on (Smith 2011).

Eli, a 29 year old from a strict community in the Midwest, left his Amish community for the second and last time 11 years ago as a psychological defector. He first ran away at 15 to distance himself from his difficult childhood (physical and verbal abuse although not discussed in detail). Eli describes the reason he left the first time:

It was a very sudden decision. I just got a wild hair and said I was going to run off. And now honestly and truly when I was a little boy, I was thinking about running away. I always wanted to run away. I always had that idea in my head that I wanted to drive a truck... I guess it was an ongoing thing for a long time, but I had been thinking about it. What they say is I was just rebellious.

When he was threatened with juvenile boot camp if he did not return home, Eli went back to his Amish community until he turned 18. He now says that he probably would have preferred going to boot camp rather than succumb to the strict supervision and discipline. Eli explains, “I feel like I was picked on a lot as far as being in trouble. I could do the same things my siblings did. They wouldn't get it trouble for it, and I would.” As a result, he rebelled even more and became angry when they (his parents and the community) would react, creating a strong motive for an emotional exit.

As Eli was leaving the Amish church, he studied “the scriptures.” “Even though I was rebelling, I still wanted to follow the scriptures. I wanted to obey my parents and what they were talking about. If I don't obey my parents, you know, I'm going to Hell.” He says that while he struggled with this, the scriptures Eli was reading provided him with the confidence and knowledge he needed to accept his future. He realized that the behavior of his parents and community were not congruent with what he was learning:

I knew it wasn't right, and I didn't want to be a part of it. So I was like, “What do I do?” I was very confused, and I literally thought I was going to die and go to Hell... I was like, “I don't have any hope, and I started praying to God, ‘Please don't let me die and go to Hell.’” I'd just pray that prayer. Then I heard all about these religions, and these people telling me “What you got to do... You'll change your ways if you're saved. You won't want to do the things you used to do,” and all that stuff... [Ultimately] God's grace is sufficient for us. I don't have to worry about that, because grace is sufficient. I want to live for him; I still want to do what is right, but I still stumble.

It is evident that Eli also had intellectual aspects of defection (issues with the way the community and his parents handled discipline along with spiritual issues with the Ordnung) in addition to the emotional aspects above. Taken together, these made him a psychological defector from his strict Amish culture. Like other ex-Amish participants, Eli also ended up switching to another fundamentalist faith, becoming a Born Again Christian, which held strong religious doctrine minus the lifestyle demands. Like other participants, Eli questioned the doctrine of the Amish church and later rejected portions of it, given his newly found support in the scriptures he read (Smith 2011).

Toby, Harley, and Eli became defectors of the Amish church for psychological reasons. The intellectual aspect of their exits relate to issues with the Ordnung and feeling limited by the restricted opportunities available to them. Additionally, emotional aspects of their upbringing led to feelings of dissatisfaction and discontentment, bringing about questions about their faith and

eventually coming to their psychological defector status. This is no surprise given their difficult childhoods in a strict, fundamentalist faith where living an Amish existence was of utmost importance (Berger 2010; Finke and Stark 2007; Kaufmann 2010; Kelley 1972). These participants deconverted and entered a world where they could find more satisfaction and contentment, rather than succumb to the collective.

Alienated Defectors

Alienated defectors are those who do not have issues with the Amish on intellectual grounds, but they are concerned with emotional, spiritual, and social aspects of the Amish church. Such defectors lack social interaction with others in their community and may develop relationships with others outside the faith which results in negative feelings for the community (Mauss 1969). Twenty percent of the sample went through deconversion as alienated defectors for these reasons. Samuel, Savannah, Andrew, and Louisa's stories are explored here in greater detail, as they are the most prominent. David is also an alienated defector although his narrative is similar to the others included here and is briefly discussed at the end of this section.

Samuel, first discussed in chapter four, is an alienated defector who left for emotional, spiritual, and social reasons. He and his wife, Martha (who was born Amish, later raised in a strict Mennonite church, and classified as a circumstantial defector below), both in their 70's, talk about his childhood experience with physical and verbal abuse at the hands of his mentally ill mother:

Samuel: She was in and out of [a psychiatric] hospital in [the Midwest] back in the 40's, 50's, and 60's. Electric shock treatment was commonly used on mental patients, and she'd be in there for two or three weeks and have these shock treatments. She'd come home, and her short-term memory was essentially erased, and then she would have to rebuild her short-term memory again... She had become so violent, and she would beat us children. She was like superhuman

strong. She could wrestle my dad down. And there were times we were upstairs as kids sleeping, and he would be yelling, “Help! Help!” We’d go down, and she’d have him on the floor and have a knife trying to stab him and stuff like that. So one of us would run over and get Grandma [May] to come over, and we would call the police and the ambulance. And they would take her in to [the psychiatric] hospital. Two or three weeks later she would come home and have no recollection of what she had done before she went in. It was...

Martha: It was an unusual childhood and not an easy one, but also not normal either for an Amish or Mennonite family.

Samuel: Mental illness is something that has a real fascination among the Amish. Somehow they feel that mental illness is caused by something bad you have done, and this is God’s way of punishing you. And in the case of my mother, it was because she left the Amish church. She was baptized in the Amish church and unless she would come back and restore her faith that was what she had to deal with... Every time that I would need to go back [home] to meet with some of the family friends or relatives or wherever I went it was always, “How’s your mom?” It was like they were kind of proud of the fact that they didn’t have this plague, or whatever it was, on them. It was something that I really resented because to me it was like they were saying, “Your mother has a defect because she left the Amish church,” and that always kind of hung over me. It made me very angry and upset that people would blame the fact that she had a mental illness and was bi-polar simply because she left the Amish and was shunned.

As Samuel describes, his childhood was plagued with turmoil, not only from the abuse he suffered at the hands of his mother, but also from stigma his family faced within their community. As discussed in chapter four, while his parents were shunned from the community, they still lived in one, and Samuel lived his young life as an Amish boy. Because of his mother’s mental illness (and possibly due to his parents being shunned), Samuel felt alienated from others in the community. Besides the help his grandma and father offered, he felt alone in dealing with the struggle and (essentially) punishment for something that they could not change. This impacted not only his interactions with those in the community, but also fostered negative feelings that Samuel still holds today.

Savannah, a 57 year old from a little more liberal community in the Midwest, is also an alienated defector for many of the same reasons as Samuel. Savannah's father suffered from mental illness, although it went undiagnosed for many years. His difficulties in keeping employment and helping out the family impacted their social standing in the community. Also suffering at the hands of several abusers, Savannah spent her young life being blamed for what happened to her. Here she describes her reasons for leaving the Amish church the first time (when she was 20 years old):

The first time was basically to get away from the abuse. I left because I wanted to escape the life that I felt was unbearable. And, you know the part of the story where I say to myself, "Okay, it's either this or suicide," because I saw no other way out. If you ever get to the point where the life you know is scarier than the unknown, you go to the unknown, and that is what it was like. The first time was clearly to get out of the abusive situation.

Savannah spent much of her childhood hiding from her abusers, including her father, siblings, and others in the community. In one instance that she describes, Savannah's mother offers her up to a family friend:

One of them is that my mother stood by and was an accomplice in what I consider sexual abuse when I was 12 or 13. And it was with a man that used to come and visit us—a man who was accused of making my sister pregnant. Basically, what happened is I was home from school sick, and I'm talking really sick, like fever to the point that I was having hallucinations. And my mother always asked us to come down and sleep in her bed during the days that we were sick because our upstairs was so cold, and there was basically no heat up there, and this was in the winter. I was lying in her bed in a delirious sleep and I heard... I'll call him Jerry. I heard Jerry out in the living room talking to my mother, but I wasn't paying much attention, but she said, "Savannah, come on out here." And I thought she had to be joking because there was no reason, and I didn't even think I could get out of that bed. My mother said, "Savannah, wake up, you need to come out in the living room." And I finally picked up my head from the pillow, and I said, "But Jerry is out there." She said, "Oh, that's okay, just come on out. He's just like one of the family." And I go out to the living room, and they have put a jar cap of Vicks on the wood stove and melted it. And this was something we used to do when we were sick, and we would get our chest rubbed with Vicks. So it was melted Vicks, and she insisted that I take down my nightgown so that Jerry could

rub my chest with it. I just had budding breasts at the time, and I was so sick and so confused. My mother pretty much pulled my nightgown down around my waist. Then he started rubbing me, and all of the sudden I felt so violated. I pulled up my nightgown, and I ran up the stairs in the cold, got under the covers and curled into a fetal position where I stayed for three days.

Recalling this episode, Savannah saw her mother as an accomplice in her abuse. It was not until she left the first time that she actually felt safe. When her family came to get her, she had one condition for her return to the Amish community—she would not go back to her parents' home. Instead, she was put up in a “grandfather house” (i.e., a home attached to a family homestead intended for aging parents) near the schoolhouse where she began teaching.

After only a few years back in the Amish community, Savannah was finally ready to leave for good. She had a man, George, waiting for her in the English world, whom she had met the first time she left. With his support, Savannah was ready to make the move:

The second time I left, it was much more about choosing my own life path, realizing that I have the power of choice. I can choose to go the way of freedom, or I can try to continue to fit myself into this community, which I'm not doing a very good job of anyway... So the second time I left it was clearly more about personal freedom and also the relationship with George that I had at the time, and knowing that his hand was outstretched and ready for me to grab on and say, “Yes, this is the life I want.” He represented the freedom that I had experienced [out East when I first left] and also the courtship that we had, the romance that we had started there.

Savannah weighed her alternatives, eventually becoming set with her decision to leave (Ebaugh 1988). Today, Savannah is a published writer and is working on a college degree. She married George after leaving the second time, and they have two sons together. She has relatively little contact with the Amish, except for helping those who contact her for help when leaving. As an alienated defector, both the social and emotional aspects were important in her leaving. Not only was she unprotected as a child from her abusers, but she also suffered the repercussions of the

isolation that stemmed from her father's mental illness. In the end, it was her feelings of alienation from her family and community that led to her exit.

Andrew, now 37 years old, married his first wife in the Amish church and then left as a family with their 2 children 11 years ago. Andrew's story is complex, to say the least. As an alienated defector, there are social, emotional, and spiritual reasons why he left his Amish community, starting with the abuse he suffered as a child. When asked if he had a difficult childhood, Andrew's response was:

Let's just say when I left [ran away to a neighbor's house] when I was 16, I ended up in the court system, not because of me but because of my dad. He beat me up pretty bad. And that was something that happened all through my childhood life. He actually went to prison [for sexually abusing his sister] so it was hard in many ways. However, looking back, I don't regret it [leaving]. I left my parents, I still stayed Amish, and I didn't have hardly any money. [Later] I went to a university, and I got my master's degree. In my own opinion, I came a long ways, and I think it was because of the work ethic, and maybe because some of the hard childhood times that I went through. You just man up and survive or else... It's the only thing you can do, which enabled me to or prepared me to do quite well.

When Andrew's father went to prison, Andrew and his wife moved out East to a new Amish community that promised to be a little more liberal in their Ordnung.

Life in the new community did not work out, however, and Andrew and his family ended up attending a Charity Church. The Charity Church has a similar doctrine to the Amish and Mennonite churches, but it is not as strict about modern technology and education (e.g., it is okay if education is acquired for the purpose of helping others). It was referred to as a "diet Amish church" by another participant. After going overseas for a mission trip as a family, his wife wanted to move back to the Midwest so they joined a Charity Church there. They lived there happily for six years, according to Andrew, until:

My wife became more and more religious...and I became more and more not religious. One day she left me and my two boys, went to a different church—a more conservative church—and things sort of spiraled out of control. Then it was

just me and my two boys. Then her pastor got ahold of me and wanted to see the boys so I said okay. We made an agreement, and the third day after I dropped the boys off with her, she disappeared with them—didn't bring them back and went into hiding. I was devastated. I didn't know what to do. They [his wife and church counselors] wanted to make a deal with me that if I moved out [of their apartment] I could see the boys... That we could work something out, and so I agreed to it. As soon as I moved out, she moved in and still wouldn't let me see the boys.

I was still halfway religious. I didn't feel like I could get a divorce. I didn't know what to do. I didn't know what to do at all. I was going to church, but I wasn't really there. I wasn't really connecting with anybody. I was just doing my own thing with my studies and stuff.

After this, Andrew's wife found a new church that was even stricter, and Andrew left the faith altogether.

As an alienated defector, emotional and spiritual aspects were important to Andrew's story as they related to his childhood abuse and issues with religion. Furthermore, social factors like feeling alienated from and neglected by the community as well as belonging to a church that "steal[s] all the women," according to Andrew, provided the rationale for his deconversion. Unlike Samuel and Savannah, the trauma and alienation that Andrew experienced as a child continued into adulthood after joining the Charity church. It was not until he broke away from that church and divorced his first wife that he felt like he was free from the bonds of his religious upbringing. Unfortunately, he became alienated from his children in the process, who were and still are part of the stricter community that their mother joined. Andrew also experienced a long period (when compared to others) of questioning religious doctrine and eventually rejecting religion altogether, similar to those in Smith's (2011) research.

Louisa, a 43-year-old woman from a somewhat liberal community in the Midwest, left her home 22 years ago for a more lenient one, before leaving for the English world. As an

alienated defector, she points to both emotional and social factors as her reason for leaving. Like Samuel, Savannah, and Andrew, Louisa was also abused as a child until she left at age 21:

He [her father] was pretty messed up. Removing myself from that and stepping back after all these years and kind of looking from the outside in, I see him having a lot of questions, having a lot of anger and taking that out on... Not really having an outlet... I think he was trying to figure a lot of life out, and he was doing what was modeled to him and was pretty abusive to us kids growing up. It was physical, emotional, spiritual. Um, yeah, I have a hard time... And he was also sexual. It's really hard whenever we talk about my dad in that regard, you know, discussing that. I mean, I was abused all my life by multiple men [and women] in the community. It was just part of my life growing up. My dad was not as extensive as what most of my abuse was sexually. Physically, he was abusive. He was very abusive, physically, to my oldest brother. But, yeah... I started questioning a lot of things [at 13 or 14]. You know, I questioned everything, and so all of this time, there was all this abuse going on in my life—as far back as I have memory.

Louisa continues that she was not just betrayed by one person but by the entire community because of their attempts to keep the abuse quiet:

That community protected each other. And it was just sick. I grew up seeing my sisters abused and molested. I saw my cousins being molested. I knew some of my friends that were molested... I was like as a woman, this is... I have no rights to my body. This is my role as a woman. And, they as the men dominated and controlled everything. If they wanted something, it was our job to serve them. And they prepped us with these verses—like a woman should be meek and submissive and that was just pounded into my head from the day that I was young. And “a meek and quiet Louisa will not despise”—my dad would say that to me over and over.

As an alienated defector, Louisa indicates feeling isolated from her community and being left without any help to deal with the trauma she suffered. Not only did this affect the social aspects of her interactions with those around her, but also her emotional and spiritual bonds with her family and those she trusted in the community. As Louisa notes, other people knew what was going on and did not do or say anything to stop the abuse. While Louisa does not reject the religion she was raised with, she does rebuff the community that allowed the abuse to continue.

David's existence in his Amish community was also an alienating experience, for many of the same reasons described above. He is 34 years old, the youngest of 11 siblings, and grew up in the Midwest in a strict community. Suffering abuse at the hands of a mentally ill brother who broke both of his legs at one point, David first tried to leave at 13. He returned three days later, terrified of the outside world. Since leaving for good at the age of 17 due to continued difficulties at home, he has found himself in and out of trouble starting with getting into a moped accident without a license or insurance. David and his English wife have also faced some difficulties with their four children, two of whom are being raised by his aunt after they lost custody. David also participated in religious switching, meeting his wife during Bible study classes. Through this, he found solace in his relationship with God and his new partner in the English world.

As alienated defectors, Samuel, Savannah, Andrew, Louisa, and David deconverted due to feelings of isolation with social, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. Coming from strict, fundamentalist cultures where faith is the cornerstone and little emphasis is placed on individuals, they all left feeling neglected in some way. As one can start to see, abuse is not unique to one category of defectors and is experienced in various Amish communities. This is something that total defectors express as well.

Total Defectors

Total defectors are those who leave for intellectual, social, emotional, and/or spiritual dimensions (Mauss 1969). Some indicators include: a disbelief in religious doctrine or in God, an interest in secular culture rather than their religious culture, a lack or loss of interaction with the church and community, a personal relationship with someone outside of the faith, a change of social status, and some sort of negative feeling towards or rebellion to the community or church

(Mauss 1969). Both Jacob and Sylvia left the Amish church as total defectors and whistleblowers. Hannah is also a total defector, but not a whistleblower. Her experiences are explored in chapter four, but the factors relevant to her defection are briefly discussed at the end of this section.

Jacob, a 35 year old, left the Amish over a period of a few years and for reasons that make him a total defector. His father died when he was 12 years old, and as a rebellious teen, other male members in the community tried to step in and discipline Jacob and his brothers. Here, he describes his first attempt at leaving at 16 from his Midwestern community:

Things were coming to a head. I was the first one in the community to have a radio... So they found out and decided to make an example out of me to the rest of the kids in the community that might want to possibly do anything that horrible. I didn't want to be made an example of, and shamefully enough, I kind of ran.

Jacob made his way to an English farmer's place where he could find work, moved in, and stayed there hiding out from his family who he had no doubt would come looking for him. He talks about not wanting to be found:

It didn't matter how bitter or rebellious you are at 16 years old—all you have are those people. That entire community comes at you with the Bible, the book, the law, and everything else. And they did have an Amber Alert on me at that time. I still remember the shock when I put the milking machine on the cow—I had the radio on, and I heard the Amber Alert come over for myself, and I was like “Oh, I'm way too close to home!”

After testing out the waters for five months, Jacob went back to the Amish church, largely due to homesickness. He was then baptized, taught school, and moved to more liberal communities hoping he would find happiness. He never did find happiness though. The Ordnung of Amish life never sat well with Jacob. Here he describes the rules and regulations in the community he was raised in:

They enforce the manmade rules so hard it takes the point out of it, because if you go to church and you stand in front of the bishop and the preacher and you start worrying about them [the leadership rather than God]. It's like the dealership I work at. You have owners who are almost never there, and then you have sales managers. So I answer to those guys, not the owners I almost never see. And it's kind of the same thing. If you have a set of mandated rules—don't bend your hat in a cowboy shape, don't buy suspenders at a store, crap like that. After a while you start focusing on the people giving you those rules, and it's much easier to focus on that guy than the invisible guy you never see anyway. Especially when their rules aren't connected to his rules, they contradict each other.

Jacob, much like Adam above, was referring to the hypocrisy in the Amish church where there is a strong focus on the Ordnung passed down by the bishops and preachers rather than a focus on God. Furthermore, he talks about how members of the church are discouraged from reading even the Bible:

They discourage you from reading it, because if you start they are afraid you'll start to question what they teach you, and they'll start interfering. I remember my dad getting on my butt big time. I liked to read everything in sight so he would spank me if he caught me reading a book, because he had a feeling that I was going that direction in life. Pretty soon all the books were banished from our house except the Bible, and I started reading that and got in trouble big time.

Seeking out knowledge is largely discouraged in the Amish culture, as Jacob describes. His quest for happiness led Jacob to question his faith and community in search for other opportunities. While so far, Jacob has hinted at leaving for social and intellectual reasons, there are also emotional aspects that made him want to leave.

Like several other participants discussed so far, Jacob was also abused as a child:

That was a lot of the reason why at 16 I finally ran. I was like, “You call yourself a Christian and all that?”... I remember the day I got strong enough to fight back, and the looks of surprise on people's faces. Then it became a mental and emotional thing, and that's almost worse when your family turns on you.

Jacob did not go into much detail about his abuse, but he did share another story from someone in his community, which sheds light on how some communities deal with the problem.

Additionally, this also suggests why some of those that have been victims of abuse want to defect:

When I was growing up, I saw a man who raped his oldest three daughters for years until they got old enough to where... I don't know... It wasn't until the oldest was getting married that it came out. And what happened to the dad was he got excommunicated for two weeks and a little slap on the wrist. And then everything was good again. He is an upstanding member of the church. No big deal, sweep it under the rug, and don't talk about it. The law never found out. One of those girls never got married, the other committed suicide, and the third one I've had conversations with. [She] says that she's never enjoyed sex in her life, and you look at that story and you realize... It's hard for me to look at it like... Well, you probably see it in your head. I see them say how wholesome and nice they [the Amish] are. It's hard for me to look into the Amish community with eyes like that because when I look at the community where I grew up... Yeah.

As Jacob shares, the sexual abuse of these three women was barely discussed, let alone dealt with through the legal system. The perpetrator received a slap on the wrist, while the victims suffer lifelong consequences. For Jacob, as well as a few of the other participants, being abused by those who were supposed to protect them was enough to emotionally and spiritually impact their lives. These became the main catalysts of their defection. Jacob is a total defector with not only significant emotional and spiritual reasons for leaving, but also serious social (issues with the community) and intellectual (issues with Ordnung) aspects as well, much like Sylvia.

Sylvia also spent her childhood being victimized. She is a 31 year old from a strict community out East, although her family moved to a more liberal Amish community in the Midwest when her mother remarried. Sylvia's father passed away when she was five years old at which point, as she attests, her childhood also ended. Sylvia talks about the abuse she suffered at the hands of her stepfather, mother, brothers, and other community members as well as what happened after her father passed away:

It didn't really need to happen. But when you are growing up and your mom is telling you that she just wishes you were a boy. "Boys are better"—can you imagine the self-hatred a child will put their self through? We desire love from our parents and we crave that... (Me: Did you suffer abuse your entire life?) Pretty much, until I left the Amish. (Me: Was that normal?) I don't know. I do know that the Amish view children and women as lesser beings... Yeah, so then we moved from there [her home with her father] up to my other grandpa's... We moved up there, and that's where horrors happened for me. It's really fucking awful. I don't really feel like going into detail right now because it's just going to upset me. I don't want to go there because it was terrible [the abuse].

After a house fire that left one of her brothers with burns, the family moved to a community where Sylvia's mother would have more control over her life, rather than have other men in the community managing her money. Her mother soon met and married another widower in the Midwest, and Sylvia's family moved to her new step-dad's community. It was here that the sexual, physical, and verbal abuse continued and even worsened:

At home was just as bad, if not worse. (Me: It's hard to ask you this question because I can only imagine, but I ask others: "What circumstances led to your decision or solidified your choice to leave," and I can only guess. Just abuse, abuse, abuse.) Oh Lord, abuse of me and my sister. (Me: You had an inkling that your younger brother was abusing your sister and so you decided to come forward and press charges against your brothers?) Right. (Me: Did you leave and then press charges?) Yes, and got a restraining order against all of them. (Me: Better for your safety?) Right. Because I wanted to do it in a way that would be safe, and ultimately you can't be safe if you are in an environment where they just send people to church and pray for them. And they come back and swear to never do it again, and it's okay. And that's really not okay.

Sylvia's experience is a bit unique in that she engaged the legal system as a means of protecting herself, her younger sister, and others in the community. By doing so she became a whistleblower, publically shedding light on abuse in the Amish culture by pressing charges against her brothers for sexually assaulting her. As she alluded to above, and as Andrew and Jacob also shared, when things like this are dealt with in the church the victimizer is expected to confess and repent. After being prayed for and upon promising not to do it again, they are generally welcomed back into the community. This was not enough for Sylvia and her sister so

she went through the English court system. As she explains below, she did not see this response as adequate either.

This is the problem with the American justice system: you take people and lock them up for five years? That's just what they do. The perpetrator of this shit admitted in front of a judge that he raped someone close to 75 times, and the judge throws him in the county jail with a work release. How is that justice? They trotted out all these fucking Amish people! They all showed up in court, cried for him, and said he was such a good person. But you violate somebody, and you take away their right to control their body. That's not a kind and generous person! They are hiding under a facade of bullshit... While I've made my peace with those types of things, I've come to realize that I was never really accepted, and my mother did not love me. And she did not care about me, she never has, and she never will. That's essentially it... I am who I am and it made me who I am today...

The culmination of her experiences with abuse in the Amish church, along with the handling of her case by the criminal justice system, confirmed Sylvia's decision to leave her community for good. As a total defector, she left for social, intellectual, and emotional reasons. Sylvia never felt safe as a child once her father passed. Her community and the family that should have protected her and kept her safe, instead made her life a living hell. She lost faith in both of them and found no reassurance in the English world in regards to the criminal justice system. While Sylvia did not really seek out other alternatives to her Amish life, believing her sister was being abused was the turning point she needed to leave the community and her family and begin protecting herself.

While Jacob and Sylvia left their Amish communities as total defectors and also whistleblowers (shedding light on the ills of Amish life and the abuse that takes place in the criminal justice system for Sylvia and in the media for Jacob), Hannah left her Amish community as a total defector. As described in chapter four, Hannah went through a period of rebellion where she was defiant, wanted to attend high school, and further her education. Her only option was to seek alternatives in the English world. Additionally, she was struggling with

what seemed like arbitrary Ordnung that were not enforced consistently for everyone in the community. After coming to a resolution with her parents about behaving in the new community, Hannah withdrew from those around her just waiting for the day she turned 16 and could leave.

For Jacob, Sylvia, and Hannah, there came a point as total defectors where their Amish lives were no longer adequate. Whether they were running from abuse or limited education, these defectors sought opportunities in the English world after leaving for intellectual, social, emotional, and/or spiritual reasons. After questioning how they were raised, all three found ways to eventually reject their upbringing and lead productive lives away from the Amish.

Circumstantial Defectors

This final category of defectors includes those who are disinvolved from their church, but not for any particular reason listed above. Mauss (1969) describes these defectors as those who are not upset or rebelling against the community, but who have been removed from church activities for some other reason like military service (unlikely for the Amish/ex-Amish due to their pacifist views). For Mauss (1969), this seems to be the catchall category to include those who did not fit into other parts of the typology. As such, I use the circumstantial defector status for those who left the Amish after a push towards that decision, or due to circumstances somewhat outside of the individual's control. Examples might be those who have been excommunicated or shunned for reasons like disobeying Ordnung or not following orders from the church clergy. While the above dimensions might have aspects of circumstantial defection, the participants described previously possess other elements in which they were active agents.

Under this category, Marie, Rachel, and Martha's deconversion stories largely began due to a situation outside of their control. While they still had a choice in the matter after the fact, their hands were tied by the Ordnung of their respective communities prior to making the final

decision to leave. Only Marie's and Rachel's narratives are explored here. While Martha (discussed above and in chapter four) is a circumstantial defector due to her parents leaving the Amish community when she was a child—a factor outside of her control—she did not provide enough detail during the interview to be discussed further here.

Marie, whose story was also discussed in chapter four, was from the Midwest. She was never baptized in the Amish church. After a bad relationship with an Amish boyfriend who drank too much and then got rough with her, Marie started pulling away from her strict community and vigilant family. She says:

I just kind of shut down. I didn't want to go to church anymore. I mentally eased away from it. Every once in a while, if church was at somebody's house that I was closer to, I would go, but most of the time I just quit going to church. Dad tried talking to me, and I just didn't want to. I think Dad knew what was going on in my mind before I did, because I think he saw it coming.

As Marie describes, she did not feel like being a part of church services, although she was unaware of why to begin with. Distancing herself from her Amish life, Marie, at the age of 20 or 21, began hanging around with the people she worked with at a nearby farm, inadvertently seeking out alternatives. She describes the circumstances that lead to her decision to leave the Amish for good:

One of the guys that I worked with—I'm just one of those girls that has "stupid" written across her forehead—I just totally would fall for anything. He was Mexican. And, yeah, I got pregnant, and that was my out. I thought, "I'm not Amish anymore. I'm not going to do this." Then Dad invited the church, the ministers, and the bishop. I remember I was at work, and if somebody would come tell me there was a buggy in the driveway, I would go hide, because I knew who it was. I will never forget the one time when the bishop was standing there in front of me saying how I was going to go to Hell if I didn't come back to church and that they knew I was pregnant. Everything could be fixed and that I would be accepted back, and everything was going to be okay. One of the ministers walked up to me and said, "Marie, being Amish or not Amish will not make you go to Hell." And that kind of opened my eyes because I was just so scared. I would

have nightmares. That kind of opened my eyes, and I thought, “Well, wait a minute. Okay.” So that was another step I took away and then I moved out of my mom and dad’s house...

After finding out she was pregnant and making the decision to leave the church, Marie moved in with her sister, who at the time was living with her boyfriend—a divorced man with two children. She had her son without the support of his father and quickly began working so she could get a place of her own.

As a circumstantial defector, Marie was put in difficult positions by her Amish ex-boyfriend, her son’s father when she got pregnant, and then her community. Marie was familiar with what her fate would be if she stayed in the community as an unmarried mother. She would likely be married off quickly to someone who she did not really care for so the baby would not be born out of wedlock, or she would give the child up for adoption. She went with the only other option she could think of given her circumstances. Marie left her community at this turning point to have and raise her child as a single mother with an eighth grade education.

Rachel, also discussed in chapter four, is a 35-year-old defector who left her Midwest community with her husband and young daughter 12 years ago after being excommunicated. Rachel had no intentions of leaving the Amish church prior to the circumstances that led to her family being shunned. She says:

I always had the thought of what it would be to drive a car, but I never thought that I would ever have the guts to do it. The hardest thing I could have done was to leave my family and know that they were so heartbroken. They even made the comment that they would go to their graves sorrowfully if we were to leave. Just knowing how much it hurts them is something I didn’t think I could ever do to them.

Once Rachel and her husband were married though, her situation was a bit different. They had each other to lean on. As described in chapter four, it was not until Rachel’s brother was shunned

for not agreeing with how the community dealt with shunning that any issues for her family occurred. With no desire to leave the church until they were asked to make a choice about repenting for accepting her excommunicated brother in their home, Rachel and her husband became victims of their circumstances. Once they were excommunicated though, they became aware of other things that they did not agree with. The opportunity to question these other things largely came about because of being ousted in the first place. Like many other ex-Amish, Rachel's other family tried to convince them that they were wrong.

Despite being forced into a position where they had to choose between leaving and standing up for what they believed, or staying and expressing remorse for something they were not ashamed of [their turning point, as Ebaugh (1988) describes], Rachel is content with their decision to stick by her brother. Rachel is actually relieved that her four daughters will be raised in the English world without the restrictions that she had as a young girl: "That made it easier to leave because we didn't want our family to grow up that way."

While Marie and Rachel originally had no desires to leave their Amish cultures, circumstances in their lives led them down a path to deconversion. These situations, largely outside of their control, left Marie, Rachel, and even Martha as circumstantial defectors. Interesting to note, these women would not change what happened as a result. In fact, none of the participants in this study spoke about wanting to take back their decisions to deconvert, although some of them would have done things differently if they had to do it over again. This will be explored further in chapter six.

Chapter Summary and Conclusion

As is now evident, the participants of this research provide different reasons for leaving the strict, fundamentalist faith they were raised in. One specific application of existing theories or typologies do not adequately explain their rationales for giving up so much in terms of community, culture, family, faith, and friends. Most (20 out of 25) of the participants left as defectors from allegiant organizations, but a few took a more complicated path as whistleblowers (3 out of 25) or apostates (2 out of 25), in accordance to Bromley's (1998) categorizations. This makes sense given that leaving such a closed society and joining mainstream culture is likely difficult enough without the added pressures of shedding light on the ills of the community, as would be required for the designation of whistleblower. Furthermore, because the Amish communities are separated from the English world, contact with oppositional groups is limited, making the designation of apostate also more difficult. Moreover, coming from strict, fundamentalist enclaves or institutionalized sects like Amish communities, additional barriers to the outside world make these transitions more difficult and costly in terms of the perceived losses (Appleby 2011; Beckford 2003; Berger 1999, 2010; Dawson 2009; Finke and Stark 2007; Johnson 1963; Karpov 2010; Kaufmann 2010; Kelley 1972; Phillips and Kelner 2006; Sherkat 2001, 2014; Troeltsch 1931; Weber 1958, 1963).

Mauss's (1969) dimensions of religious defection—intellectual, social, emotional, and spiritual—help explain why such a perceived loss could be worth it through the eyes of those that have gone through it. Adjusting the emotional, spiritual, and circumstantial defector categories, in addition to Mauss's (1969) existing ones (i.e., intellectual, social, cultural, psychological, alienated, and total defectors), a theoretical framework is provided for understanding Amish deconversion. Further, by applying useful aspects of Ebaugh's (1988) process of becoming an ex

and Smith's (2011) elements for constructing an atheist identity where relevant, a picture emerges of what is taking place and why the ex-Amish's experiences are unique. It is through the integration of these perspectives that an ample examination is provided.

Chapter six continues this discussion with a focus on what happened to the participants after leaving the Amish church. Here I address some of the difficulties with being an ex, including religious concerns as well as navigating the English world, establishing support networks, and dealing with issues such as substance abuse, legal troubles, and relationships with others (including family, partners, and other community member or friends). Also important is how the participants feel about their decisions today (e.g., would they do it again, common misconceptions about being Amish/ex-Amish, and how they are dealing/have dealt with stigma). Chapter six ends with a discussion of what would have been helpful for the participants when they were leaving and what advice they would offer to others like them.

CHAPTER SIX

BEING EX-AMISH: ADJUSTING TO A NEW WORLD

For the participants of this study, becoming an ex was a difficult process with many ups and downs. After defecting, many of them still experienced turmoil and continue to do so. As discussed throughout this dissertation, leaving the Amish culture is often a drastic and life-altering decision with extreme repercussions.

Many of the participants discussed struggles in leaving the Amish church, but they also faced difficulties in adjusting to and navigating their lives in the English world. With limited exposure to the English world, assimilating was a convoluted process for some. In fact, there seems to be a distinction between those who move past their ex role and those who remain ex-Amish, becoming almost stuck in their role transition and never quite adjusting to being English. While the participants of this study have all successfully moved into the English world, there are many others who have attempted to become an ex but end up going back, as previous literature suggests. To this end, the ex-Amish in this sample point to the idea that it is how they handle obstacles during the process of exiting and adjusting that determine whether or not they are successful.

What the participants described as the most troublesome when navigating the English world are organized by how salient the themes were and based primarily on specific interview questions about their difficulties. These difficulties include: relationship issues (i.e., being too trusting, rejecting authority, dating, a lack of support, and/or those who had an easier time with support), financial difficulties (i.e., education, employment, paperwork, and/or a lack of

resources), religious difficulties (i.e., getting past the idea of needing to be Amish to go to Heaven), and cultural issues (i.e., technology, language, and/or identity). While many of the participants experienced negative phases after their departure, there were some positives as well.

Important to note here is that while the participants discussed struggles throughout their interviews, the analysis involved in this chapter is based on what each classified as the most difficult part of their adjustment to the English world. This final analysis chapter mostly focuses on what each participant saw as most troubling upon their entry in the English world, rather than general difficulties the majority of the sample projected. Some of the issues were quite prominent and therefore specifically asked about during the interview process like their relationships with others.

Relationships with Others

Many of the participants were aided in their exiting processes through their relationships with others. However, establishing and maintaining relationships were also hurdles for some. One piece of adjusting that each of the participants discussed had to do with the support they had while and after leaving (this was also a specific question during the interviews). For the most part, those who left and had a supportive person to rely on had an easier time. Others were not so fortunate. Toby, Hannah, and Louisa all had problems with finding a support network to help with their transitions, while Benjamin, Harley, Isabelle, Kaleb, Samuel, Martha, and Savannah had or found help. Overall, 2 participants spoke about not having any support while leaving, 1 barely had any support, and the remaining 22 participants spoke of some support from their family or partner, or knowing others who had left before them. Below are some of the complications of not having support network when leaving, as well as the benefits others experienced when they did have an encouraging relationship.

Those lacking support. Toby had difficulties relating to others when he left because he did not fit into the Amish or English culture and lacked support when he left.

I was alienated by my parents, and I couldn't go home [while in college]. When Christmas vacation used to come around, I had no family to go to, and I used to get so jealous of the other students. They could go back their communities and families, and what was I supposed to do? That was rough. That was the roughest, most difficult part of my life... I had nobody to talk to—nobody at all. I pulled myself up by my own bootstraps. I think I wrote somewhere that, of course, I did that figuratively, because no real bootstraps would have been strong enough. But you know, I seriously considered. I was so depressed. I couldn't move or do anything. I couldn't live a life. I really thought I was dropping out of college. I started thinking if I dropped out it would be even worse, so that's when I realized that I had to get my body moving and do things. Get out there, get back in school, and do my academic work... That was really the most difficult part of my life so far.

As described previously, Toby knew that Amish life was not for him at a young age. Once he left though, he still struggled with the depression and loneliness that resulted from leaving his family and community behind. While this is not a unique experience, none of the other participants spoke about this experience with such desperation or urgency, especially given that his journey began almost 60 years ago. Toby eventually earned his bachelor's degree and went on to get his Ph.D. He is now retired, but spent many years teaching in various college settings. He has been married for close to 50 years to an ex-Amish woman who he met after leaving, and together they have a daughter and a few grandchildren. It took a few years for Toby to pull himself out of the lonely state he was in and find a supportive person—his wife—who knew what his previous life was like. At this point, he was finally able to move on in the English world.

Hannah left her community with her parents' permission, but found relationships with the English challenging in the beginning. She describes her connections as “very difficult” because:

I didn't understand the pop culture; everything would be going over my head. American young people... I don't want to generalize, but a lot of them do this

thing where they go "You don't know this?" Just this idea that there is only one world, and it's there. It would just make me feel so stupid. I was quite sensitive anyway, because it was so hard for me to pretend I was never Amish... As a teenager you are so impressionable, that was always really hard. In that way, it was nice for me to be with my ex-Amish friends. Sometimes even today, it is still nice to be with people who get it. On the other hand, I've now changed so much, and I've been gone so long, it's sometimes hard to relate to them as well. Anyways, that was tough. Meeting young people I always felt self-conscious. I really just started making friends older than myself, because they didn't have that type of attitude—you didn't have to be cool. I was never cool [laughs].

I think I definitely also felt a loss of community. You don't realize that the rest of the world doesn't have community until you are out in it. I'm not saying there is none, but you have to put in an effort to build that... I love having people around. That was hard at first, knowing you just don't have that support. I felt very alone, I would say, and very misunderstood as well from both worlds. I wasn't fitting in to my new world; I could tell I didn't fit in. I had friends, but I wasn't like them.

Not having a support network that got where she was coming from and not understanding all of the cultural aspects of her new world, Hannah felt very alone. It was not until she began taking college courses and built a community of her own that she felt secure. Today, Hannah is working on a graduate degree while living and working overseas. She says she is getting closer to her dream job of working in non-profit financing, although she points out that it is her "English dream job." Hannah never imagined she would be where she is today when she dreamed of attending high school as an Amish girl. She has continued to push herself and the boundaries she was raised under. Today, Hannah helps fund other Amish students' dreams through a scholarship program she helped start and serves as a mentor to those in need.

Louisa also had trouble building relationships in the English world. As she describes, she married the first man she met in order to get out of the situation she found herself in after first leaving.

I say that the experience [of leaving her family and becoming English] was like jumping from the fire into the frying pan. It was a little bit better, but it was just... I mean, when I came here I was really—I had no idea who I was, or what I

wanted. I knew what I wanted, but I was terrified and broken. So I moved in with this Mennonite minister and his wife. And it didn't last real long. I wanted some freedom. I wanted to spread my wings a little, and they wanted to hold me, kind of under their control. So my escape was I met somebody—kind of the first person I met I married. And we were actually married for 17 years. And, he was very, very patient with me. I mean, I just had gone through all of this trauma. He was a very passive, very silent kind of guy, and he rescued me from a bad situation. I had a roof over my head. We, I mean, we have three kids together, but there's a lot of things that... I don't know, like I put him through a lot. He had never really dealt with anybody who had been through a lot of abuse and didn't really know how to handle it. I was—I wasn't easy.

Louisa's first husband was her way out of the Mennonite home and community that she was staying at after leaving, although for many years she was not able to address the trauma she had gone through. After 17 years of marriage, 3 children, some therapy, and life changes, they divorced and she continued on with her life. Today, she is remarried to an ex-Amish man who she says has a better understanding of what she has been through, and they have a son together. Louisa has earned her G.E.D., has taken some classes at the local community college, and now owns her own small business.

Benjamin probably describes fewer difficulties related to leaving his Amish community behind, because as a queer man, he knew from a young age that he would need to leave to live his life. He described how he feels about the anti-gay views in the Amish church:

I understand, you know, the limited outlook. I understand the factors that lead into it. I'm hoping that they will stop maybe shunning their kids for coming out, or stop turning their backs on gay people. The Mennonites are more liberal than the Amish, and they are amazing. They have completely embraced, or you know, there was a lot of controversy within the Mennonites about gay issues. But they are a lot more accepting, and there are support groups and stuff. I'm hoping down the road the Amish will reach that point. I have faith so...

While he does not hold these views against the Amish, he does find these attitudes within his family to be problematic. His parents are both deceased, and he has almost no contact with his older siblings or their families because they do not really support him despite their leaving the

Amish years before Benjamin. On his first trip away from home, he was welcomed into the local queer community, and to this day he still refers to them as his family. Benjamin is currently writing and working in customer service to pay his bills. He lives in a bigger city where he feels a bit more comfortable being “out” and never really interacts with the Amish. While Benjamin did not have the support of his family or Amish community, he sought out a place to feel comfortable in his own skin and ended up finding another family to encourage him.

Most of the participants spoke of being warned about all of the “evildoers” in the outside world, which made them skeptical of relationships with the English. Daniel, on the other hand, was a little too trusting of new friends when he first took a job out of state. He ran into some trouble after not paying his taxes and was looking for an opportunity to make some money when a neighbor offered him a job.

So, I went down there to [a southern state] to work on his project. While I was down there I was—this neighbor girl comes over, and, you know, needs a ride to go somewhere, and, you know, she needs—she needed a little help, too—a little money. And I was... my problem was I was too naïve to realize what was up with these kind of people. She was—she ended up—I finally figured out that she was on drugs. I was too weak to say no to her, and every time she asked for help I would give her something, you know. I kept doing that and kept doing that. And, even after I went back [home], I still stayed in contact, and she still got me to send her Western Union money. That really was my downfall, because I went way downhill financial-wise. Then I went back to try to figure out what was going on, and I got a job there. To make a long story short, I ended up homeless myself because of this. You know, because I couldn't say no to these—these crack heads, and I didn't realize that's what they were doing.

Once Daniel realized what was happening, he cut off ties with anyone who asked for money. Luckily, he never got involved with drugs himself and eventually moved to start over again. After leaving the Amish, Daniel spent some time working as a truck driver, doing factory work, and is now trying his hand at hypnotherapy after a lifelong interest in alternative health. He has remained single and still has some contact with his Amish family via letters.

Unlike Daniel, Eli's issues related to obedience to authority rather than finding quality companionship in the English world, especially after a lifetime of conformity and submission in the Amish church. Despite this, he has not had troubles gaining and maintaining employment, although working under supervisors was something Eli struggled with in the beginning.

I stayed [around home] for a while after I left and worked around there for a little—pouring concrete. It was a good job, but I wasn't willing to work under somebody at that time. I had just gotten out of that. And he was pretty strict on that. I was like, "I'm not putting up with this. I quit." And I got into the horse business. Then I realized... I worked for the same man for 10 years. It was not a very pleasant 10 years. I had a lot of good times but all in all, if you put it all together, it was not... it was a long ways from the best days of my life. But I believe that 10 years of my life was a start. It taught me a lot about giving myself to authority. It helped me a lot with that.

His strict upbringing and his authoritative father made it difficult for Eli to accept direction, orders, and criticism from others. It was not until he started working with horses for an unpleasant man that he was able to move on. While he describes his time there as horrible, Eli says he learned a lot. He went back to his Amish ways of respecting others and had an easier time, although he still prefers being self-employed. Eli eventually became a Born Again Christian and has mostly come to terms with his future in Heaven. As one of the younger participants, Eli is unmarried and now works in construction in the southern United States.

Entering the dating scene was sometimes complicated for the ex-Amish participants due to lacking a cultural understanding of the English world. Four of the participants discussed difficulties with meeting partners, however Jacob's experience highlights just how "out of touch" some of the participants are in terms of dating. Jacob spent his first few days out in the English world watching CMT (Country Music Television) to catch up on the latest styles. As one might imagine, his first attempts at "snagging a girl" failed miserably. Dressed like Dwight Yoakum, a

decade after he was popular, at the local fair's demolition derby, Jacob was flabbergasted and frustrated when women ignored him.

So I thought I had to be him [Dwight Yoakum], so I got me some skin tight jeans, and I was decked out as close to him as possible. I got a big belt buckle you could see from a mile away, and I was ready to rock and roll... When you're 23 years old, and you've never been around the block, you can't just walk in and start dancing with this girl. I just didn't have the nuts to do it, frankly speaking. So we go to this fair and I think this costume is going to do it, because it was the only image I had of what women might like. We go into the demolition derby and go into the stands. I think they are going to see me, and they'll come running... I was just like "What am I doing wrong?" I thought it was because they were watching the show, and I was in the wrong place at the wrong time!

Jacob then decided he needed to put himself in front of the spectators if he wanted to get any attention, so he propped himself up against the concession stand/port-a-potty. After an unsuccessful evening, he realized the error of his ways after watching what the rest of the fair-goers were dressed like and how they were acting. Jacob went back to his cousin's house ready to give up and go back to the Amish. It was not long before he found his way in the world and met his wife at a local bar.

After years of participating in different media projects shedding light on Amish and ex-Amish life, he is currently taking some time for himself and his family. After a career switch, Jacob now spends his time traveling the country as a truck driver, leaving little time to help other ex-Amish. While he misses it, the other relationships in his life were suffering as a result. He maintains some contact with more liberal Amish communities but his Amish family still remains distant. Although Jacob's experience is not typical, or at least not discussed by many of the participants, it does highlight the contradictions between how the Amish were taught and what they know about English society versus what real culture is like.

The above participants all had difficulties transitioning to their new lives due to a lack of supportive relationships with others in the English world. Others, however, had an easier time moving through their new culture with the assistance of others.

Those who had a helping hand. Unlike the participants who left their communities with no aid, Samuel was one of the lucky ones who had support when leaving. In fact, as discussed previously, he had support before leaving through his grandmother. He found additional support through his wife, Martha. Finding a religious home in the Mennonite church and school that they both attended was also helpful in learning to adjust in the English world. Additionally, Samuel explains:

You can't choose who you are born to, but you have to come to peace with your upbringing and where you are. Sometimes I think that Amish people have difficulty in doing that. They are fighting between two different worlds. Until they can come to peace with their heritage and say, "Okay I didn't have a choice. I was born into that. I have made my own choice, I think I can be peaceful and at rest with a choice that I've made, and I can live with it," it become much easier to associate with the people that you grew up with. For example, the picture that I sent you of my graduation—I had worn neckties long before that, but my parents never approved of that. My mom and dad were embarrassed to show people that picture, because it showed what they call a "lay down suit." Grandma, on the other hand, was very proud! She would brag to anybody that would listen to her about how great—and she was the force that pushed me to where I am today. If it wouldn't have been for her, I'd be driving a horse and buggy somewhere, I suppose!

After coming to terms with his choice, he was prepared to engage in the English world. After leaving, he found additional support in his classmates at the Mennonite College he attended, and then had the reassurance of Martha, who was raised under similar circumstances. All of this allowed for an easier transition than most. After earning an M.B.A. and moving back to the Midwest, Samuel and Martha adopted two children. Today, Martha still works in a field related

to her bachelor's degree, while Samuel spends his retirement working for a local school district and doing community service.

Isabelle also had an easier time transitioning in her new world, largely because of her English husband. For her, it was important to cast off the Amish cultural identity although she took things slowly to begin with. Her first purchase after leaving was a pair of white tennis shoes because she had only been allowed to wear black shoes, and a wristwatch that was also forbidden because it was considered jewelry in the Amish community. She describes these as easy purchases.

I think it's because the Mennonites in the community could have those things, and so it was kind of like, "Now that's okay." You know, because they were sort of—if you made the step past Mennonite [in terms of change], it was like you fell off the cliff. But if you went Mennonite, you were still halfway good. I could not get rid of the head covering right away. Because, I mean, I had been taught that you have to pray with head covering on... But it took me a while to get—to understand that and get past that. But the first things I did, I guess, was go shopping for clothes. And I got—bought me some dresses, but they were still pretty plain. And then, of course, I started driving—well, practicing to drive. I went and got my permit pretty quickly, and then I had my driver's license—probably within a year after leaving I had my driver's license.

After that, Isabelle felt she was free from her former life. She felt liberated in the English world, going where she wanted when she wanted. As discussed previously, Isabelle left her community primarily to be with her husband, Joe. The cultural changes and freedom she felt in the English world were added benefits of her departure. Isabelle and Joe are still married, and she hopes to eventually get back into college to finish her nursing degree. In the meantime, she spends her time caring for him and writing about her life as a young Amish woman. While she still has some contact with the ex-Amish, she largely avoids Amish communities where she might be recognized and then ostracized.

Savannah also had a supportive relationship in the English world when she left for the second and final time. As described earlier, she met her current husband, George, when she left the Amish the first time. When she went back, he waited for her.

... Maybe I had to settle some part of myself before I could leave and feel that I was no longer going to go back. George and I have often talked about this. He thinks that our relationship would not have continued if I had not gone back to the Amish... I wanted to know whether he was the person for me by dating other people and figuring out if he was for me. If you want to date other people because you want to figure it out from there, maybe that person isn't for you at that time. So I think that George is saying, "I was ready for a relationship, and you were not. You would have pushed me away, and it would not have happened." So him waiting in the wings while I was trying out my Amish life again is what drew us together the second time. And you know, there are literally... There were nights when I would stand at my window, and I would look out at the moon shadows and feel such a deep longing to be with somebody. There were a couple times when I literally felt like I wanted him to stand at the window with me and put his arm around me. On one of those nights, we had figured it out that he had drove past my house and was trying to get up the courage to knock on my door, but he couldn't do it. So the longing on his part to see me was so strong, and the longing on my part to see him was also strong, yet we were missing each other. I mean that's how close we came to missing each other completely, and all of that served to bring us closer together when we finally did.

One of the things that I am so grateful for is not just that George waited for me all those years that I was back in the community, but I have such deep gratitude for George for standing by me in the first part of our marriage when I was feeling such deep grief. Not just the loss of my community, and the fact that I left, and, you know, basically lost my whole way of life. It was also that I was now in a safe environment with counseling where I was dealing with the abuse issues and literally the loss of my innocence as a child. George sometimes really didn't know what to do with me when I was in the deepest part of my grief, but he stood by me, and he put up with a lot of emotional baggage that I was carrying. There are all of these reasons why George and I are—I think we are meant to be together. He was the kind of person that could help me heal and I am really grateful for that.

For Savannah, this made all of the difference. Once she decided she was ready to leave for good, she called George, and they reunited. Savannah now has a college degree and enjoys writing about her Amish life and heritage. She and George have two sons and live in the eastern United

States. She is also on a mission to present an accurate picture of the Amish to mainstream society in spite of the reality shows, which could use a touch more of reality in Savannah's opinion.

Harley, on the other hand, says that he maintains contact with the Amish by living in areas where they are in close proximity. Because his family moved away from their Amish community and he was never baptized, Harley still has access to the Amish from his past. His previous employment has also revolved around the Amish. Harley learned how to work construction at an early age and is currently part of the family business, alongside his other ex-Amish brothers. On the side he aspires to be an entertainer. Clashing with the ideology he was raised with, Harley explains:

When I went to audition that was a big step for me. That was way out of my comfort zone. I was taught in the Amish church, verbal or whatever, that you are humble. To go in there and have them tell me I was the right height and everything, and they wanted to train me as a run way model... To hear that was way out of my comfort zone. So yes, it was totally uncomfortable, and it took a lot.

Harley found the courage to overcome this discomfort, because he has remained close to his Amish roots.

I have friends and family. I would say today I try and push myself out of my comfort zone, and I try to pursue things. At one time, the acting was just a distant dream I knew would never happen. And today I push myself where I really believe it could be a reality. I do have to say there is comfort. I know that, because of where I come from, I can move to [an Amish community] and not worry about a place to stay or a job. I can call people and get a job all from where I come from, so I have come to enjoy pushing myself away to achieve more. I know it's there. I don't think I've burned that many bridges. The fact that I can speak the language—it sounds odd—but it makes a huge difference in being accepted.

As evident here, while Harley has not had much difficulty staying employed and supporting his growing family (with six children), largely due to his family business, the comfort of his lasting Amish connections have allowed him to follow his dreams of acting and modeling. The support that Harley has in both the English and Amish worlds is certainly unique amongst the sample.

Kaleb also benefited from a support network with his experiences in the English world. As the youngest in his family and one of the few to attend public school until eighth grade, he already had some experience with the new world. Additionally, some of Kaleb's older siblings had already left the Amish church for either a Mennonite church or the Charity Church, which aided in his transition. He began attending the local Charity Church with his older brother, who was a member in good standing and able to introduce him to others. After a mission trip, Kaleb committed to the church and community. Within a few years though, he began noticing similarities between the Charity and Amish churches and distanced himself by moving to another state for a brief time. There he lived with a family he had known for quite awhile and began processing what he had been going through.

The mother, who was like my mom away from home, she, I think, could tell [that he was going through a rough patch]. Like, she knew I wasn't doing well and just their support, even though they didn't even know all the details, just helped me—saved me tremendously. I just remember, so many times during the day, I'd be working—I had a little job. And I would just find myself many times a day just thinking about this. I was so depressed, so dark—so dark and depressed—just like, my mind was a war zone. Just constantly spinning... So I think the family that I lived with helped me believe in myself. I'm—I'm not crazy, and I can think for myself. If I believe in a God and if I believe there is a God, then he's big enough to show me what's right or to show me what's wrong. I don't have to live in a miserable, depressed nightmare of confusion and think about ending my life.

While he never specifically spoke about what he was going through or what led to his breaking from the Charity Church, it was clear that he was deeply troubled during this period and that he still struggles with it. Eventually Kaleb returned home and tried to help a friend through a similar situation, although the church responded by trying to control and then shun him. Kaleb made the decision to leave the church for good as he did not agree with how they were handling the situation with his friend and no longer felt supported by the community. At that point, he enrolled in college and has since spent time traveling the world through study abroad courses. He

plans on being an engineer and is thinking about attending graduate school in the near future.

While Kaleb is no longer in contact with his Amish community, he does keep in touch with his family and a few people he met through the Charity Church. It is interesting to note that Kaleb seemed to also have an easier time adjusting to the culture and lifestyle of the English world, likely due to his public school days, although his departure from the Charity Church left him feeling alone and hesitant to join another faith.

Financial Reasons

With an eighth grade education, many of the ex-Amish participants felt ill equipped to compete in the working world after leaving their communities. As discussed previously, most of the participants went back to further their education by completing their G.E.D. and/or taking college courses. To get to this point though, some struggled to find employment or had to work several jobs to pay their bills. Many of the participants struggled with education, employment, a lack of paperwork, and not having resources to start out their new lives.

Education and employment. After leaving the Amish church, David struggled to adjust and find a way to support himself. He described why it was difficult for him to find a job after leaving.

Well, for one thing, I didn't have an education, which is essential. I was good at computers. I was probably the first Amish guy to start a YouTube channel and start posting. I actually won an industry award... I wasn't smart, but just the fact that if you don't have a certificate. Again, there's kind of a twist of fate, you know. The Amish have eight grades, but I only got to finish four grades. And yes, I didn't try to go, or I didn't try homeschooling because my concentration is pretty bad. So I didn't finish. Without a G.E.D. or anything like that, nobody wanted you. They don't want to hire someone that is uneducated in their opinion. It's just how it is. They need to be able to see a certificate of some sort.

Anyway, I got a few jobs that paid a little bit more, but they were short lived. The one three day job I had was working for a guy who built those little storage sheds people put outside their houses. The guy paid from the time you left the house to

the time you got dropped off. But again it was a three-day job, so you can't really work like that and make a decent living. Some of those things I did do that paid well was I learned computers and just my YouTube channel. In a two-year period, I made \$6,000 just from YouTube videos. I made some deals with some people to do various Internet stuff, and they are still paying me today.

Eventually, David went back to get his G.E.D. and is now working on a college degree. He still has some difficulties with employment after a few work-related incidents, but has found some success being self-employed. David is trying to make enough money to pay for an attorney to get visitation with his two older children, who are in the custody of his ex-Amish aunt.

Hannah also discusses how it was challenging to find a job that paid her enough when she first left.

So I got a job [at a nearby restaurant], but it was tough because I didn't have a car or a license or much of anything. I got a job there and they provided me a room—I think they still do for Amish people. Anyways, at the same time I met my relatives there who said I could stay with them, which was really nice. But to be honest, I didn't really want to because I didn't want to stay in an Amish home. I wanted to be completely free, but I didn't have anywhere else to go. I stayed with them, I worked in the kitchen, and then six months later I went [down South]. I knew other former Amish or Mennonite people who were going, and I worked at a restaurant there. To be honest, it was really hard to support myself because I was getting paid minimum wage, and rent was more expensive there so that was hard. I got some house cleaning jobs, which actually paid really well. I remember being so thrilled getting \$15 an hour cash. Anyway, then I was fine and found another job two days a week being a nanny and that paid \$12 an hour. I ended up quitting [at the restaurant], and I did fine then. That was just a scary part. There were a few points in my life when I was just broke. My sister helped me out sometimes, but mostly I just worked.

While she still had to deal with minimum wage jobs to begin with, most likely due to her lack of education, it was not long before Hannah found a way to support herself. As mentioned previously, she was lucky because she left with her paperwork (i.e., birth certificate and social security card), unlike others (discussed below). Unlike most of the participants though, Hannah did leave before she was 18 so she struggled to find housing, adequate employment, and continue her education without her parents' approval.

Andrew also had some troubles navigating the working world when he left, but these were largely due to the Amish customs with which he was raised. When he left his community (but not the Amish) at 19, he explains:

I didn't have any money. I worked for a guy—my grandpa also worked for him. I was running the log skinner, and my grandpa was cutting it. The guy had a little old logging operation and never had any money, but he said that he'd pay me. I'd work all summer, and he gave me \$20 or \$30 every now and then. I was staying at another Amish person's place, where I paid \$50 per month just for a room. I found out my boss was sending my money to my parents because they didn't think that I should have it. He was lying to me. When I found out, I left. I quit working for him, and then I sort of fell off the radar from the Amish community.

Andrew moved and began working with another young man, cutting and selling timber. He eventually made enough money to live on. Andrew then got married to his Amish girlfriend and bought a place to live. After leaving the Amish church and joining the Charity Church, he went back to school to get his G.E.D. and eventually his bachelor's and master's degrees. Today, Andrew teaches English in another country and is happily remarried to a woman from there. He still has very little contact with his boys and the rest of his Amish family.

Elizabeth also struggled financially when she first left the Amish. Paying for college was a big obstacle because:

My parents didn't sign my FAFSA, so until I was 23 I didn't get any government help. Even though I told them my parents didn't support me, I had to pay in so all my summer savings would go to classes. I had no money left. I worked as a waitress and didn't have money for food. If I weren't a waitress, I would have died of starvation. They would send food home with me every night, and that's what I ate. My sister lived with me, and she was poor too so we just ate soup—it was horrible. Once in a while my mom would send a \$100 bill because she felt bad. But at the same time, I didn't want to make my parents feel guilty so I didn't tell them what we were dealing with. My mom would have been horrified. Even though I know they wouldn't have helped with the classes, they would have given more money for food and stuff, but it was my pride. It was like, "I'm making the choice." I didn't want to drag my parents into it.

Paying for school is a common problem for the ex-Amish. Without parental support or even their signature on college forms, most are ineligible for grants or student loans until they reach the age of 23 when they are considered independent. Elizabeth was not willing to put her education on hold so she struggled to feed herself while paying her tuition. Today, Elizabeth is a nurse with two children. In her free time, she helps other ex-Amish students pay for college through a scholarship fund that she and other ex-Amish support.

No paperwork. As previously discussed, when someone leaves their Amish community it is often done quickly and without essential documents like birth certificates and social security cards. If the person is underage, they face further complications because laws are in place that make working or going to school difficult without parental approval. Despite these obstacles, many ex-Amish are determined to make a life for themselves and accept the struggle it takes to participate in our society. As Sylvia described:

Not existing on paper, not having a driver's license, being unfamiliar with the public education system, not having clothes. I didn't have fucking clothes! I was literally at the mercy of my friend. My friend gave me some clothes, and then once I got my first paycheck at this job where I made all of \$4.63 an hour, I went to the Goodwill Store. Also, not having a bank account, being taught that you can't make adult decisions until you are 21, having to make decisions on a regular basis when you are taught that your opinion doesn't matter, and that you can't make good decisions. That is one of the single biggest challenges I encountered. I do always tend to ask other people their opinion before I make a move on something, because I feel so different from the rest of society. I don't feel like I fit in with the rest of society. I'm different.

Eventually, Sylvia found her way in the English world and is living a life today that she never expected. After spending a few years in the military, getting pregnant with her daughter, and marrying/divorcing her daughter's father, Sylvia is now living as a queer woman. Her world revolves around her daughter, her partner, and her fight for equality. She still checks on the status of her Amish family, to be sure of her sister's safety due to her own abuse. Sylvia has little

contact with other exs outside of social media, limiting her interaction as a result of the bullying that comes with being “out.”

Adam too had difficulties adapting. He says the hardest part was getting his paperwork in line, because his parents had his social security card and birth certificate under lock and key. The rationale for this, as Adam describes, is:

To make it harder for you to leave, because how are you going to get all of that stuff? You have to jump through a lot of hoops to get that. The first thing I did was I left and two days later I found a job. When I left I just walked out the door while my parents were eating supper with the rest of the family. They had no clue. I just walked out the door and started walking.

On his way out the door, Adam took \$10 out of his father’s wallet, and that was all he had. A non-Amish neighbor kid, John, drove by and asked what was happening. When Adam told him he was leaving, John offered to give him a ride. He describes being terrified of leaving without knowing what was ahead of him.

You don't know where you are going, or where you are going to sleep. John picked me up and took me to another buddy's Randy's house that was ex-Amish. John took me there, because we both knew him. He dropped me off and called Randy to say I was there. He kind of figured out what was going on so Randy said I could stay there for one night. "You got one night to sleep there, and then you are out." I said, "Okay," because that was better than going back... He asked me what I was going to do, and I said I didn't know. Randy knew a farmer that might need help so he called another ex-Amish buddy that was working for the farmer and asked if they needed help... I went out there, and he gave me a house to live in. This was in March so it wasn't cold. The guy had heat in the house, but I just kept it turned down because I didn't have money or anything. I didn't have food, clothes—I had one pair of clothes—not anything, no ride, no phone. I stayed there, and I milked cows for him for two days. The third day I didn't show up for work, and he found me lying on the floor because I hadn't eaten in so long. I almost died on the floor. He picked me up, took me in, and got me all situated again.

It was not long before a friend of the family found out Adam had left and began bringing him food from the bar he was working at. Needless to say, it was a huge relief for Adam. He quickly moved to another farm to work, where the farmer was willing to help him get his driver's

license. Life was better for Adam after that. Today, Adam rarely connects with the Amish, although his parents do call to talk with his English wife and two children over the telephone now and then. He runs his own construction business, a traditional Amish occupation, however Adam happily uses power tools and electricity to speed up his efficiency. He does talk about missing the simple life, however, now that his son and daughter are getting older, and there are more temptations in their worlds than he grew up with.

No resources. Another problem that the ex-Amish face after leaving relates to a lack of resources. For example, Marie's struggles with navigating the English world were financial, but not really related to education or employment. She did not have trouble getting ahold of her paperwork because she knew how to file legal requests for it. While other participants' (i.e., Adam, Sylvia, Elizabeth, and Andrew) journeys also involved a lack of resources, Marie specifically spoke about leaving her community empty-handed.

I was not allowed to take my stuff like my bedroom set, my lamps, and stuff from my ex-boyfriend. My mom gave it to my sisters who I think still have that stuff. I started working when I was 14, and I'm more open with this story now, but for a long time I did not talk about it because it hurt so bad. I didn't want people to think bad about my mom, which is basically what it boils down to. When I started working, my dad explained that 10% of every paycheck goes into a special bank account, and when I turn 21, I get that bank account. I remember when my sister, just older than me, turned 21, she bought a house. I mean, she put a down payment down, but she bought a house with it. So when I turned 21, it was right before I got pregnant. I was all ready going away and not going to church. And when I turned 21, dad told me to ask mom for the bank account, and I was so excited. I'm thinking a couple hundred dollars.... When I think about it, I worked a long time. I went to Mom and was like, "Dad said to ask for my bank book." She was like, "I don't know why you want it," and she handed it over. She just slopped it in front of me and was like, "I don't know why you want it, because there is nothing in it." She had taken every little bit of my money—she had taken everything. I started with nothing. When I look back, I am almost in awe of myself, because I don't know how I did it!

As discussed previously, Marie moved in with her sister when she first left, but found a place of her own after her son was born. Today, Marie is a single mother of two sons. She married and divorced her youngest son's father, but has mostly raised her boys on her own. She works as a waitress and has done her best to support her family. She still has some contact with her Amish family. Her parents became Sarasota Amish (named after Sarasota, Florida, where the Amish Ordnung is more lenient—they are allowed to use electricity, telephones, and sometimes vehicles) before her father passed so they could maintain contact with their non-Amish children.

Religious and Cultural Issues

Besides financial reasons, religious and cultural aspects of the English world were also problematic. As discussed previously, shunning is used in Amish communities as a way to protect the secluded life and hopefully steer wayward members back. As such, a significant amount of pressure is placed on those who decide to leave. Beyond the lack of family and community contact, another factor is their place in Heaven in the afterlife. Isabelle describes how this could play into Amish people staying or returning when something goes wrong in the English world.

I really do [believe people stay] because all your life you're taught that you were born Amish... And if you are raised in the Amish church, you're raised that if you're born that way, you have to die that way in order to get to Heaven. And even though they say the Amish people aren't the only ones going to Heaven, they still think that because you are born this way, that tie that binds you to a whole new... Like, it's almost like a contract with God that if you break that, then you're going straight to Hell. And, so it's—I'd say that, I think they said statistics is like one in five leave the Amish, but over half of them go back. I really believe that's why some of them don't leave. I believe that's why most of them go back, because they may have had a little accident. Maybe they had a car accident where they broke a leg or something, and they're afraid that the next time it'll be fatal...

And so, it's one of those—the Amish are Christian people like everybody else as far as their biblical beliefs go. The only thing that's different, which is the main thing, is that they have incorporated this traditional way of life as part of the spiritual way and so they can't separate the two. The two have to go together for them. And if you separate the two, you can't get to Heaven, you know, if you were born that way. You're held to a whole different standard if you were born that way. Now, if you weren't born that way, then they feel like, you know, you're not held to that standard.

While many other religious faiths practice the same policy, most do not incorporate such a strict way of life as well. About half of the participants discussed having to come to terms with their religious fate after leaving the Amish faith. Those who were baptized in the church expressed more difficulties with this than those who were not, largely due to not actually making a promise to the church to be a member for life and not being officially excommunicated.

Some families and communities take this idea, of needing to be Amish to get into Heaven, to extremes when children leave. Adam describes staying with a friend whose Amish family held a funeral for him after defecting:

I stayed with a kid, and his parent's actually had a funeral for him. He went to his own funeral in the Amish community. It was weird for him, because he didn't believe they would actually do it. But he went back there, and they had a funeral. They actually buried a casket because he left. Those were his parents' wishes because their child was no longer Amish so he might as well be dead. That's how they looked at it.

While not a typical experience to be sure, a few participants mentioned hearing about funerals for those who left. Others also shared stories about people they knew that became sick, got in trouble, or were in an accident and went back to the Amish culture, likely because they were scared and wanted to ensure their place in Heaven. Some of the participants, like Elizabeth, Eli, Abe, Abigail, Samuel, Martha, Kaleb, and Rachel, have found religious homes since leaving, while others have struggled to find a place to worship or remain disinterested in organized

religion all together. Regardless of where they are now, this aspect of Amish life makes transitioning to the English world difficult.

Isaac had difficulties coming to terms with his place in Heaven while he was trying to adjust to his new world. Here, Isaac describes how he dealt with the religious pull he felt.

Yeah, that's a rule that they have. That's one of the reasons I was so traumatized when I left, because the back and forth. The back and forth will drive you crazy. You know, I would go and come back, go and then come back, and join the church. Then I started dating this girl, and it was just never ending. And it was only after I reached that particular point in my mind and my heart and realized Heaven had nothing to do with whether I was Amish or not. But it took a while. I grasped it, but I had to mull over it and eventually that was the choice I wanted. I wanted to go and so I went... It's such a... what I call a survival mechanism of the culture, because if they didn't use that method, kids would just leave. They would feel free to leave so they have to load them down with that burden so they will stay. That's just a fact. In that culture, I've seen many who have chosen to stay and are happy. I'm friends with them, and it's okay. Whatever choice you make is okay, but when you are inside that culture, it's such a hard thing to free yourself from.

Once Isaac moved past this back and forth stage and decided that his place in Heaven was not determined by whether or not he was Amish, he was able to leave with good conscience. Isaac furthered his education after leaving, eventually becoming an attorney, although he found the career too confrontational for his liking. Since then he has been a customer service manager, allowing for more positive interactions with those around him. He did marry once, but is now divorced with no children.

Although not as common as the other themes discussed so far, technological issues, identity struggles, and language barriers were often perplexing for the participants, especially if they did not have someone with more experience to talk to after their initial departure. While

these were not salient for many participants in the sample, it is likely that many experienced similar issues or other hardships.

Elizabeth had little contact with the English world as an Amish woman and started school not long after she left. As a result, Elizabeth faced some technological challenges when she first began college courses.

My first assignment was to email my teacher. She was like, "Hey, I'm going to give you an assignment." This was on the first day of class. "I want you to all email me and tell me something about yourself," and I had never emailed before. I went to the computer lab and had to ask them to help me email [laughs]. They looked at me like "Where in the world did you grow up at?" They could tell I was at the age when I should understand technology so that was kind of crazy.

While she did have to ask for assistance, Elizabeth made it through her first assignment. For other issues she encountered, she asked her advisor or classmates for help and made it through.

Establishing a sense of self in English society was complicated for a couple of the participants. For example, Jonas talks about leaving the Amish and not being prepared for the world he was entering. He describes it as a dangerous situation where he felt he was being "thrown to the wolves."

Just kind of throwing them [ex-Amish] out there, and then, you know, they can kind of go off the deep end in a matter of—before they even know what's going on. And, I know my first two, three, four, five years, were—I mean, they're hazy... It wasn't drugs or alcohol or any of that. It was just, you know, there were a million people wanting me—wanting to show me the world and everything I've been missing. I was never really getting my feet wet and getting off on the right foot. It was just bouncing all over the place, you know... One thing I've learned is to adapt pretty much anywhere, any situation you get into you—you end up having that capability because you had to do it for so long.

Notable here is that while the participants did not talk about personal issues with drugs or alcohol, a few described instances where they knew of others who had troubles, and it often did not end well. For Jonas, the initial adjustment (and coping) had to do more with figuring out who

he was in English society. When asked what was the most difficult thing to overcome when he left, he says:

I think, if I had to place something as the most difficult it was just having no sense of who I am. What does life mean? You know, it's everything. Now, you're stepping outside of that... The hardest thing to me was I didn't belong anywhere. You know, I didn't—I didn't identify with anything. It was just kind of a dark place... The hardest thing was not—I could do without physical things; I could do without pretty much anything. I had no clue what life was even—what was the purpose of life? You know, nothing made sense. There was—there was nothing. You know, where do you start? Do you roll the dice, do you flip a quarter, do you... There was just nothing... Where do you go from here? There's no spot in the puzzle for me. And it's like, you have to create it, but how do you create it?

Jonas ultimately found his way, but he had a difficult time trying to figure out who he was apart from the Amish. Today, he is married to a woman who was raised in another strict church (not Amish or Mennonite), and they have two sons together. After working in sawmills for several years, Jonas now operates heavy machinery for a construction company, and his wife works as a therapist in a nearby hospital. Jonas misses the simple life in relation to raising his sons, much like Adam. He still has some contact with his Amish family, visiting occasionally with his wife and sons. Jonas also enjoys talking with others who have left the Amish and other strict faiths, providing “therapy-like” services when needed.

For a few of the participants, changing into English clothes and removing the markers of their Amish life was taxing, similar to what Isabelle discussed earlier. Eliminating such obvious visual cues of their cultural upbringing was difficult and confusing. As illustration, Rachel had difficulty shedding her Amish clothing when she first left.

Yeah, I don't anymore, but in the beginning I did not cut my hair for, oh boy... I still wore a covering on my head for I want to say a year or two after we left, because I wasn't sure if... I mean, we were taught that God doesn't hear you if you don't wear a covering. I wasn't sure about the scripture that talks about that until later, and I took my covering off and cut some of my hair.

Today, Rachel and her husband are raising four children and are small business owners. Rachel is still very grateful that her children will have all of the opportunities that mainstream culture has to offer, rather than being sequestered by Amish life.

Sadie also struggled with her identity in the English world, but for a different reason than Rachel and Jonas. She says:

I had huge identity issues the first few years after leaving. I had a feeling people could look at me and see I used to be Amish, even though I was wearing modern clothes. And I was not interested in talking to people who took a slight interest in knowing about my past Amish life. I wasn't ready to talk about it. It all just took time to adjust to my new life... I had a small group of people helping me navigate the English world, but for the most part, I did it on my own. I do better by figuring out things on my time... I didn't have a support group to help me deal with the emotional part of leaving. There was no one that could understand what it felt like to be away from family in a complete new atmosphere. There are things that I went through that weren't explainable. It was something I just had to deal with on my own.

While Sadie did not have difficulty changing her clothing or hair, she felt as though people could tell that she did not belong, similar to Sylvia's experience. Rather than talk about where she was from and how she got to where she was, Sadie chose to be around people who did not ask questions about her past. Eventually, she moved past this and even wrote a book about her experience, as have other ex-Amish. Nowadays, Sadie is earning a graduate degree while working full-time doing office work at a hospital. She says she started as a cashier and just kept moving up. She has little contact with the Amish today and is working on her second book.

Language barriers were also problematic for a couple of the participants. As Abe describes below, he and his wife, Abigail, spoke English, but did not know how to "think" English—something Sylvia also mentioned as something to overcome. When asked if they had any language issues or communication barriers, he responded:

We had language issues probably the most. Although we communicate in English a lot with the people around us, they didn't talk our language. We found that the

Amish language and English language—the biggest difference is how you think. The words will come out backwards so you have to start thinking English to properly speak it [Abigail: and we still catch our selves doing that!] Yeah, right [laughs]. I have my brother who is still with the Amish church, but he's been staying with us for two months. He works at a place where he speaks English, and he has no problem, but we still hear a lot of words that are kind of backwards.

As an older couple that has been out for over twenty years, Abe and Abigail spend their days living a relatively simple life, which is not too surprising given their exodus was about religion rather than lifestyle. They own a farm and work with horses out West. Most of their children live in the area and are members of the same church where their son is a minister. Abe and Abigail have very little contact with their Amish family as they were excommunicated years ago, but are very happy that their children chose to “follow the Lord” with them.

Chapter Summary and Conclusion

As evident from this chapter, the process of leaving the Amish faith and acclimating to the English world is often complicated and time-consuming. The participants in my study encountered a variety of challenges as they adjusted to their new lives. Throughout this chapter I have highlighted the issues, concerns, and predicaments that seemed the most salient in their journeys, ranging from relationships with others, to financial concerns, and not surprisingly, religious and cultural issues.

There were those who had trouble forging new relationships, like Daniel, Eli, Jacob, Toby, Hannah, and Louisa, and others who benefitted from the relationships they already had or were building, like Benjamin, Harley, Isabelle, Kaleb, Samuel, Martha, and Savannah. For David, Hannah, Andrew, Elizabeth, Sylvia, Adam, and Marie, financial difficulties seemed most problematic. Paying for their education, acquiring gainful employment, getting ahold of their birth certificates and social security cards, and having resources to survive proved difficult but

not impossible to overcome. Isaac had troubles getting past the idea of needing to be Amish to go to Heaven. For others, like Elizabeth, Jonas, Rachel, Sadie, Abe, and Abigail, cultural issues related to technology, language, and identity were trying when they first left, until they became accustomed to their new surroundings. The next and final chapter will offer concluding remarks, including a summary of findings, their theoretical and empirical implications, as well as suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

As a way of concluding, this chapter will focus on summarizing the research and findings, in addition to a discussion of the methodological issues, theoretical implications, and the contributions/directions for future research. At this point, there should be little doubt that leaving the Amish is a unique, drastic, and life-changing occurrence. This study focused on how and why a sample of ex-Amish chose to leave. I will begin with a summary of the main findings of this research.

Summary of Research

While several themes have been covered at this point, the main topics of interest focused on the three research questions proposed early on (interview guide in Appendix A):

- (1) How does an Amish person make the transition to becoming ex-Amish?
- (2) What factors were involved in the participant's decision to leave Amish culture?
- (3) What has life been like since leaving?

With little academic research on the Amish or ex-Amish, conducting qualitative, semi-structured interviews to address these questions was appropriate. My sample of 25 (11 women and 14 men), ranged in age from 25 to 78 years. They were from various communities across the United States with different levels of Ordnung, ranging from strict to more liberal on the Amish-Mennonite continuum.

The interviews, lasting between one and three hours, took many forms—in-person,

telephone, Skype, and one email interaction—allowing for easier access to participants who lived further away. After each interview, the audio recordings were fully transcribed and coded (using HyperTRANSCRIBE and ATLAS TI) following the principles of constructivist grounded theory. Three overarching themes emerged in relation to the research questions above, which made up each of the three data analysis chapters.

Traditional retention factors. First of all, the traditional retention factors that Amish scholars found over 20 years ago were explored in chapter four. These aspects of daily life were historically seen as helpful in retaining members in Amish communities. After applying these same factors to this sample, it became obvious that things were a bit more complicated than the previous research implied. In the past, factors like birth order (older siblings more likely to leave) (Meyers 1994), relationships and boundaries with the outside world (those with closer contact more likely to leave) (Hostetler and Huntington 1992; Stevick 2007), gender and education differences (men and those with more or public education more likely to leave) (Meyers 1994; Stevick 2007), and baptism (those who are not baptized are more likely to leave) led to retention rates between 80 and 90 percent (Kaufmann 2010; Kraybill 1993; Stevick 2007), which is outstanding for any religion. While these aspects still impact a person who makes the decision to leave, it appears to matter while the ex is adjusting to their new roles, rather than in the decision making process like in the past. Additionally, some reasons for departure far outweigh the traditional retention factors, making the process more complex.

For example, a few participants discussed thinking about how their younger siblings might be influenced by their decision to leave, or their parents specifically spoke about how they were setting a bad example for their siblings. Furthermore, those who had more experience with the English world before they left did not experience the same levels of culture shock as those

who had never left their communities or spoken to the English, much like Jacob demonstrated with his first attempt at dating.

Gender had an effect on the sample as well, although not in the manner that was predicted years ago. As indicated, 14 men and 11 women spoke to me. Maybe falling in line with stereotypical gender roles, the women who left seemed to have an easier time adjusting to their new English world, largely because they were not apprehensive about asking for assistance. Many of the men talked about very lonely and isolating times after leaving, where they did not know how they would go on (Toby's narrative is especially poignant). Most of the women, however, either left with a supportive person or found someone to lean on not long after departing, making the experience less isolating. Savannah, for example, found a room in an all women's boarding house after she left the first time, which provided her both a safe place and a built-in support system.

Public education should have also had an effect on Amish retention (Meyers 1993; Stevick 2007). Three of the participants attended public schooling at least through eighth grade, and the rest of the sample went to the typical one-room Amish schools. While this would suggest that these participants would remain Amish, education actually seemed to be a factor that pulled some away from their communities and families. Hannah's experience of leaving to have a chance to attend high school was atypical, although many of them spoke about wanting to further their education when they left, becoming teachers, nurses, business/finance professionals, etc. Often part of the draw of the outside world was the educational and employment opportunities that were not available in the Amish communities.

Baptism in the church, while not a retention factor for this sample, was a difficult hurdle

to overcome for those who made the promise. With strict shunning and social avoidance as repercussions, the decision to leave the Amish after baptism had drastic consequences for many (Kraybill 2001; Meyers 1994; Stevick 2007). Over half of the sample (15 out of 25) were baptized before deciding to leave which meant they could have very limited to no contact with their Amish families and friends. They knew what they were getting into, but that did not make the shunning any easier. Rachel and her husband were well aware of the penalty for not confessing their sins and re-committing to the Amish church. As a result, they ended up losing contact with their families after they would not change their principles to work with the church's Ordnung. Those who were never baptized were largely exempt from the consequences of shunning because they had technically never made the promise of a life-long commitment to the church. For Kaleb, Benjamin, and Harley, for example, it is possible to go between both worlds without much judgment because none of them made or broke their promise to be Amish faith.

Other factors, including family support and the age of defection, played a more significant role in the participants' ability and success at exiting. For those that left their communities with a significant other or left after to join a significant other had a much easier time leaving and adjusting. Additionally, while most of the participants left for good after they turned 18, for the few who attempted to leave earlier, they faced uphill battles of not being a legal adult or having access to all of the necessary paperwork to function in English society. Leaving at 18 did not guarantee an easy journey by far, but access to employment, housing, and schooling were within their reach.

Becoming ex-Amish. Chapter five explored the participants' rationales for becoming an ex, focusing on Bromley's (1998) contested exits and Mauss's (1969) breakdown of defection for organizational and analytical purposes (see Appendices B and C). Most of the ex-Amish in

this sample are defectors leaving from allegiant organizations (i.e., those that protect against the outside world with legitimate authority), according to Bromley's (1998) types of contested exits. The main elements of Mauss's (1969) breakdown include an intellectual dimension (i.e., a growing doubt in religious doctrine and/or an interest in the secular world), a social dimension (i.e., a change in social interaction, social status, and/or looking outside of the group for relationships), and an emotional or spiritual dimension (i.e., rebellion and/or negative interactions related to emotions or spirituality) (see Appendix D). These elements then combine to form the additional dimensions of cultural (i.e., intellectual and social dimensions), psychological (i.e., intellectual and emotional/spiritual dimensions), alienated (i.e., social and emotional/spiritual dimensions), total (i.e., intellectual, social, and emotional/spiritual dimensions), and circumstantial defectors (i.e., those who leave after a push from inside the community or due to circumstances outside of the person's control for this research) (Mauss 1969).

As a result, there are nine possible dimensions that defectors from the Amish were classified into based on the narratives they provided. While a few of these categories were not very common (i.e., Jonas was an emotional defector, Daniel was a spiritual defector, and Elizabeth and Isaac were cultural defectors), there were five alienated defectors (Samuel, Savannah, Andrew, Louisa, and David), four intellectual defectors (Sadie, Adam, Abe, and Abigail), three social defectors (Isabelle, Benjamin, and Kaleb), three psychological defectors (Toby, Harley, and Eli), three total defectors (Jacob, Sylvia, and Hannah), and three circumstantial defectors (Marie, Rachel, and Martha).

Alienated defectors were those who left as a result of rebellion or negative interactions, in addition to a change in social status or seeking relationships outside of the Amish. In this case,

all of these defectors—Samuel, Savannah, Andrew, Louisa, and David—also suffered at the hands of abusers from their households and communities. While not the only reason these participants left, any type of abuse suffered can lead to spoiled interactions as well as rebellion. Additionally, abuse became a significant reason to reach outside of the community for social support. While on the topic of abuse, 10 out of the 25 participants discussed their abuse as children during interviews. While this may look like abuse is prevalent in Amish society, this research cannot confirm or refute such a statement. Abuse played heavily in the participants' reasons for defecting, and the participants in this study are self-selected which might account for the inflation of instances where abuse occurred. Regardless, abuse was definitely a factor for the participants who discussed it.

Those who had a growing doubt in religious doctrine or a developing interest in the secular world were classified as intellectual defectors. Sadie, Adam, Abe and Abigail all left as a result of critically examining the Ordnung of the Amish church—something that is largely discouraged. While Sadie hints at the hypocrisy in her community as part of her rationale for defecting, Adam outright states that he left because leaders in his community were hypocrites, with a “Do as I say, not as I do” mentality. Abe and Abigail also left as a result of issues with Amish doctrine, although not necessarily the Amish lifestyle or culture. As described, in their later years they sought out a closer relationship with the Lord and wound up reading the Bible and engaging with a Bible study group. When this was not readily accepted by their community, Abe and Abigail made the decision to leave to “follow the Lord,” rejecting the Ordnung they were raised with.

Social defectors, like Isabelle, Benjamin, and Kaleb, left as a result of tension in their relationships, a lack of social interaction, or a desire to forge relationships outside of their

community. Isabelle's chance to leave, as described previously, happened overnight when her boyfriend was getting ready to move away from the community. He asked her to come with, and she said "yes." Her relationships and social status in the Amish community had been deteriorating for a few years, and the only person she found happiness with was her non-Amish boyfriend, Joe, although she had never thought of leaving until that night. Benjamin, on the other hand, knew he would be defecting from a young age. As a queer Amish man, Benjamin sought out relationships in the outside world where he did not have to live a "don't ask, don't tell" existence. For Kaleb, his parents always seemed to be on the outskirts of Amish life. His father never quite fit in, resulting in their shunning from the community when Kaleb was young. They still lived on the family farm with Kaleb's Amish grandparents, though, so he did not know another life. Feeling the pressure from his parents' shunning, in addition to complex feelings resulting from bullying in school (he attended public school as an Amish child), Kaleb always felt like he was on the outside looking in. It was not until he joined the Charity Church (he later distanced himself from this as well) and started college that he felt like he might finally belong.

Toby, Harley, and Eli were psychological defectors, leaving for intellectual and emotional/spiritual reasons. Discontent with his community's Ordnung, Toby assumed he would need to leave the Amish before he was baptized. He says he was "conned" into baptism despite never feeling like he actually fit in with the community. Harley's family had already "jumped the fence," as one ex-Amish man called it, moving from an Amish to Mennonite church, and his father had doubted the Amish Ordnung for a long time before that. It was this doubt that Harley said he inherited from his father, along with the insecurity he felt as child (suffering abuse at the hands of relatives) that steered him away from returning. Eli also felt unprotected from "discipline" (i.e., physical abuse) at home. After searching for answers in "the scriptures," he

started to think about life outside of the Amish and his place in Heaven. Eventually he found the confidence and knowledge he needed to accept his future and made the decision to defect.

As total defectors, Jacob, Sylvia, and Hannah left for intellectual, social, and emotional/spiritual rationales. Not a fan of the hypocrisy or manmade rules of the Amish church, Jacob searched out knowledge where he could find it, often getting into trouble for reading the Bible. Additionally, Jacob suffered abuse at the hands of other church members. It did not take long for Jacob to feel a pull to the outside world as a result of the failings he saw in his upbringing. Sylvia suffered in a similar way, as explored previously. After years of abuse and a failed attempt at prosecution, she left, only turning back to check on the safety of her sister who still lived in the Amish community. Both Sylvia and Jacob have each spent time advocating for those with less power in Amish communities, earning the title of whistleblowers, according to Bromley (1998). Hannah also was a total defector although not a whistleblower. She left due to education restrictions, arbitrary Ordnung, and a lack of social ties with her Amish community. Her motive was to pursue new opportunities in the English world.

Contrary to how Mauss (1969) envisioned circumstantial defectors as a catch-all category, this study found that these defectors—Marie, Rachel and Martha—include those who left based on circumstances largely outside of their control, like being shunned by a community for not obeying Ordnung. Martha's story is clearly that of a circumstantial defector. Her parents left their Amish community when she was a child, raising her in a strict Mennonite community instead. Marie found herself pregnant after breaking up with her Amish boyfriend and meeting an English boy at work. Given the circumstances, Marie was left with few options—marrying an Amish man she did not really know before the baby was born, giving the baby up for adoption, or leaving the Amish life. She made the choice that gave her the most freedom and possibilities

for happiness in the future. Rachel and her husband were left few options as well when they would not openly shun her brother who had left the community. Rather than lie to the church and confess their sins, which they did not believe they had committed, they opted to practice their beliefs outside of the Amish faith.

Being ex-Amish. The first two analysis chapters delved into the period of time when the participants were thinking about leaving, to the point of actually defecting. Chapter six examined the challenges that the participants encountered after the exiting process. This included navigating a new and largely foreign society with problems concerning past and current relationships, financial concerns, religious conflicts, and cultural issues.

Not surprisingly, those participants who had contact with the English world prior to leaving, through either friends or family, had an easier time adjusting to their new lives. Additionally, those who were more familiar with the mainstream society, either because they were from more liberal communities or tourism was a source of income for their community, also had an easier time coming to terms in their new lives. The biggest advantage, it seems, came from those participants who left their communities with a partner or friend, like Abe and Abigail, Rachel and her husband, Isabelle, or Savannah (at least the second time around). Not only did they have someone else to navigate the new culture with, they also benefited from strength in numbers. Conversely, others, like Daniel, Eli, Jacob, Toby, Hannah, and Louisa, struggled to adjust and find lasting friendships and love in the English world.

Financial struggles were prominent for many of the participants, although for different reasons. Depending on how old each participant was, how familiar they were with the English world, what their goals were, and how savvy they were at acquiring the required documentation,

some had an easier time than others. Most of the participants were at least 18 when they left the Amish permanently, making life a little easier. Hannah, as previously discussed, left at 16, which made getting an education, employment, and housing difficult until she became an adult. Even for those who were considered adults faced uphill battles in terms of paying for education, acquiring adequate and permanent employment, gaining access to birth certificates and/or social security cards, and finding enough resources to survive.

In terms of religion and culture, while approximately half of the sample discussed similar issues with worrying about their religious futures, Isaac spoke about needing to come to terms with his place in Heaven as one of the biggest obstacles to overcome. Elizabeth faced issues with technology like learning to use a computer or checking email for school. Language was also a barrier for some, including difficulty communicating or “thinking in English,” as a few mentioned. Lastly, getting rid of the Amish markers of identity, like plain clothing, straw hats, and prayer caps, were difficult for some, while others could not change fast enough. For example, Elizabeth was excited to change out of her Amish dress, but struggled when it came time to take her prayer cap off. She had been taught that it was a necessary part of praying—a way of assuring “God could hear them.” While today she believes that God can still hear those without a prayer cap on, she has gone back to wearing hers as part of the Mennonite church she now belongs to.

Methodological Issues/Limitations of Research

The methodological issues and limitations of this research relate primarily to using a qualitative sample. Traditional generalizability to the larger population of ex-Amish is not possible due to a small convenience sample of participants. Efforts were made to broaden the

sample via snowball sampling (word of mouth) and recruitment via social media. However, for every person that chose to be interviewed, there are likely many more who would never consider talking about their experiences. Coming from such a closed community with little focus on individuals, it is likely that participating in an interview for this type of research was an uncomfortable prospect for many. As a self-selected sample, it is possible that those who decided to participate are in fact different than those that chose not to. Maybe they had something to share (such as narratives of abuse), that others did not. It is not possible to know for sure. Overall, though, it seemed as if the participants were balanced and fair in their reflections on their Amish upbringing. Most spoke highly of at least a portion of their childhood, culture, or community. I thus had a diverse set of narratives, reflecting both positive and negative aspects of Amish life.

While generalizability was not possible in this study, I did reach theoretical saturation while collecting data, which helps in establishing validity in the findings. This occurred when the participants began discussing similar situations and no new themes emerged. While traditional replication for a quantitative study is not desired or appropriate, the findings of this research could be used to analyze how others leave closed communities, where role comparisons [like with Ebaugh (1988) and Smith (2011)] are not feasible. Indeed, the purpose of this research was exploratory in that I sought to find out more about the ex-Amish and how they navigated their departures. While it does not necessarily speak to the larger population, this research does illustrate how this group of ex-Amish defected, and as such, fills a gap in the larger sociology of religion discourse as well as contributing to the theoretical discussion of becoming an ex.

Theoretical Implications

This research extends the current theoretical understanding of what it means to be an ex and just how convoluted the process is. First off, the retention factors discussed in previous Amish literature point to aspects of Amish culture which should insulate their members from the outside world and therefore defection. While some of the links (like connections with the English world, gender, education, and baptism) still appear to be relevant, they make more of a difference during the actual process of adjusting rather than during the decision to leave. For example, for those who were baptized before leaving, the idea that they could not return or have contact with their families played a role in their decision to leave, although not enough to stay. It was more of an issue when trying to move on to their new roles in the English world without the support of their families and communities.

Furthermore, additional factors like family support and how old the participants were when they left seem to have a stronger impact on whether or not an Amish person would be successful at exiting. With technology and social media access, connections to those who have left or are in the process of it are easier than they have ever been, as some of the participants discussed. Maybe even more important is that the participants who have helped others leave noted technology and social media use among some of the Amish, although on the sly. While the most recent exit for this sample was nine years ago, further research on those who have left more recently might point to easier exits with more support from the outside world.

Previous research indicates there are different ways to go about the process of defecting, often including a trial step where new roles are tested out before actually making the move (Caplovitz and Sherrow 1977; Ebaugh 1988; Smith 2011). This research shows, however, that

for some groups, the ex-Amish in particular, this negotiation and comparison of the past and new roles is not feasible under extreme circumstances. Without a test run of their new lives, many of the participants were left to fend for themselves and fumble their way through navigating the relatively unknown. As a result, Mauss's (1969) categories of defection, which illuminate the basic elements involved in the decision to leave (intellectual, social, emotional, and spiritual) do a better job of explaining the nuance and complexity of the role-exiting and defection processes under a most extreme set of circumstances.

Contributions/Directions for Future Research

The process of leaving a group or role with which one has long been affiliated is a common experience, to be sure. However, exiting the Amish faith is quite extreme given all that has been discussed to this point. Through exploratory qualitative research with 25 participants who were willing to share their stories, there is now an academic account with a theoretical analysis of their perspectives about the experiences they went through in their transitions to become ex-Amish. This dissertation, adding to the limited research on the Amish and very limited research on the ex-Amish, also has the potential to add to our theoretical understanding of role exiting when so much is at stake. Additionally, there is a lot to learn from closed cultures like the Amish in terms of socialization and cultural expectations, which could prove useful in exploring similar groups.

Beyond being able to present an academically grounded and realistic portrayal of how things really are for the ex-Amish, this research might also be helpful for those who are thinking about or who have already left. Discussed in chapter five, many of the participants talked about feeling very alone during this experience and wishing they had somewhere to go, someone to

turn to, or even someone to tell them they were not alone in their feelings. At that point in the interviews, we often discussed what they would tell others who were going through the same thing. If feasible, I would like to contribute these narratives to the ex-Amish community for those that have shared so much. While I am unsure what that might look like at this point, to know someone else took a similar journey for similar reasons could make all the difference in the life of an exiter. Future research might include trying to interview people who have left more recently to see if advancements in technology and social media have had a positive effect on defection. Are things a bit easier when there are supportive communities at the touch of a screen? How has this affected retention rates for the Amish? Are Ordnung changing to allow for these developments or do they continue to follow the guidelines of Strict Church Theory?

On a personal level, many of the participants walked away from the interviews thanking me for asking questions about their lives. At least half of them had not previously shared their stories. Moreover, for a particular segment of my sample, it was the first time they had really spoke about the abuse and neglect they suffered. While definitely not easy, for the most part they spoke of feeling a sense of relief after sharing their experiences. Likewise, for those who are already helping other exs with leaving, this research might be beneficial. Knowing about others' experiences, how they dealt with similar issues, and that they made it through to the "other side" might prove valuable for those who are ready to give up. As Toby mentioned, it would have been a "lifesaver" to know other people where going through the same things he was, rather than suffer in isolation.

Additionally, it would be beneficial to use what has been found here about exiting closed communities to examine others. For example, a high school teacher I met from Alaska mentioned exploring Native Alaskans who leave their cultures to further their education. It seems

that many have trouble adjusting to their new environments and often end up coming home or hurting themselves. These are just a few examples of how this research could be useful and applicable to other areas.

In conclusion, one thing is for sure. The participants of this study put a lot on the line, not only in terms of their faith, but also in regard to their sense of self and relationships with others. As a misunderstood and understudied population, the Amish, and by extension the ex-Amish, face a unique set of circumstances in comparison to the rest of American society. Their stories can now be part of the theoretical and academic discourse on what it means to be an ex.

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Appendix A
Ex-Amish Interview Guide

Chosen pseudonym:

Focus: process of becoming an ex, life circumstances, family, support networks, education, gender roles, faith, why and how they left.

Goal: understand the process and experiences of the ex-Amish through interviews. This is a guide for the interview as many of these questions might come up with other responses.

Plan: start with some demographics to develop a conversational setting, then ask about their Amish community, their Amish family, becoming an ex, after leaving, and now.

1) Demographics (for framing and organizing purposes; some may be answered throughout the interview):

Age?	Gender?	Marital status?
Time out?	Education?	Religious ID?
Amish location?	Current Location?	Occupation?
Use of support? Y/N	Other family out? Y/N	

2) Amish community: Location?

- i) Liberal or conservative? Old or New Order? Size? Growth?
- ii) Relationship with English world? Boundaries from the outside world?
- iii) Rumspringa allowed? What did that entail?
- iv) Ordnung (rules and regulations)? Shunning?
- v) Amish education?

3) Amish family:

- i) Parents? Age? Occupation? Switching communities?
- ii) Siblings? How many? Ages? Still in the community? Families?

4) Factors involved with decision to leave? Steps in leaving (first doubts, seeking alternatives, turning point, role of an ex= Ebaugh)?

- i) How long did you think about leaving?
 - a) Suddenly or for a long time? Back and forth on decision?
- ii) How old when left?
 - b) When did it first cross your mind? How long contemplated? How long before actually leaving? How long out? Why?
- iii) Dream of a different life?
- iv) Circumstances that lead to decision or solidified the choice?
- v) Use of weighing your options (pros/cons)?
- vi) Family: Birth order? Any siblings left? Stayed?
 - (a) Pressures to stay?
 - (b) Support networks before and after? Family, friends, others
- vii) Other impacts on decision to leave?
 - (a) Loss of community and faith?
 - (b) Baptism? Marriage?
 - (c) Position and role in family?

- (d) Contact with English world prior? Impact?
- (e) Religious concerns? (Not going to heaven?)
- (f) Shunning?
- (g) Still in touch with Amish family?
- (h) Difficulties (emotional, spiritual)?
- (i) Forgiveness?
- viii) Stigma associated with being Amish? Ex-Amish for you and others?

5) **After leaving:** First thing you did when you left?

- i) Future dreams when first out? Employment dreams, life dreams, educational dreams?
- ii) Identity issues with leaving? Adjustments?
- iii) Navigating the English world? Difficult? Aware of the process? Support networks? Where you decided to move to and why?
- iv) Current church/denomination? Did you attend right away or did it take time to find a religious home? Any switching? Difficulties with this?
- v) Employment? Difficulties?
- vi) Education (now)? Difficulties entering the English world because of education as Amish? Overcame? How?
- vii) Current relationships? Married? Spouse's religion growing up? Children and ages? Friends? Community? Difficulties with this?
- viii) Relationship with Amish family and community? Degree of shunning (if at all)? Emotional impact at the beginning? Now? How you dealt with this? (Support groups, others)

6) **Now:** happy with or regret the decision?

- i) Would you do it again? Why or why not? Was it worth it? Would you go back? What do you miss most? Least?
- ii) How does being ex-Amish impact your life today? Amish impacts?
- iii) Connections with Amish or ex-Amish community?

7) **Closing:**

- i) Misconceptions about being Amish or ex-Amish?
- ii) Anything else to share or like me to know? Any questions for me?

Appendix B

Table 1: Bromley's (1998) Contested Roles Applied to the Ex-Amish

Bromley's Exit Role options:	Ex-Amish participants:
Defector (B1)	Jonas, Eli, Harley, Hannah, David, Savannah, Adam, Benjamin, Elizabeth, Sadie, Samuel, Martha, Toby, Isaac, Louisa, Daniel, Kaleb, Marie, Rachel, Isabelle
Whistleblower (B2)	Andrew, Jacob, Sylvia
Apostate (B3)	Abe and Abigail

Appendix C

Table 2: Bromley's (1998) Contested Roles with Mauss's (1969) Defector Categories

	Defector (B1)	Whistleblower (B2)	Apostate (B3)
Intellectual Defector	Sadie Adam		Abe Abigail
Social Defector	Isabelle Benjamin Kaleb		
Emotional Defector*	Jonas		
Spiritual Defector*	Daniel		
Cultural Defector	Elizabeth Isaac		
Psychological Defector	Toby Harley Eli		
Alienated Defector	Louisa Samuel Savannah David	Andrew	
Total Defector	Hannah	Jacob Sylvia	
Circumstantial Defector	Rachel Marie Martha		

*Separated here for this research, although Mauss (1969) combined these into one category.

Appendix D

Table 3: Mauss's (1969) Typology for Defection Applied to the Ex-Amish

Mauss's Types	Dimensions	Characteristics	Participants
Intellectual Defector	Intellectual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growing doubt in doctrine or God. • Interest in the secular world. 	Sadie Adam Abe Abigail
Social Defector	Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss/lack of social interaction. • Change in social status. • Looking outside of the group for relationships. 	Isabelle Benjamin Kaleb
Emotional Defector*	Emotional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rebellion • Negative interactions related to emotions. 	Jonas
Spiritual Defector*	Spiritual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rebellion • Negative interactions related to emotions 	Daniel
Cultural Defector	Intellectual and Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growing doubt in doctrine or God. • Interest in the secular world. • Loss/lack of social interaction. • Change in social status. • Looking outside of the group for relationships. 	Elizabeth Isaac
Psychological Defector	Intellectual, Emotional, and/or Spiritual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growing doubt in doctrine or God. • Interest in the secular world. • Rebellion. • Negative interactions related to emotions/spirituality. 	Toby Harley Eli
Alienated Defector	Emotional, and/or Spiritual, and Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rebellion. • Negative interactions related to emotions/spirituality. • Loss/lack of social interaction. • Change in social status. • Looking outside of the group for relationships. 	Samuel Savannah Andrew Louisa David
Total Defector	Intellectual, Social, Emotional, and/or Spiritual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growing doubt in doctrine or God. • Interest in the secular world. • Loss/lack of social interaction. • Change in social status. • Looking outside of the group for relationships. • Rebellion. 	Jacob Sylvia Hannah

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Negative interactions related to emotions/spirituality. 	
Circumstantial Defector	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Removed from church activities for a reason not described above. For those that leave due to circumstances outside of their control. 	Marie Rachel Martha

*Separated here for this research, although Mauss (1969) combined these into one category.

Appendix E
Human Subjects Institutional Review Board Letter of Approval

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY



Human Subjects Institutional Review Board

Date: September 11, 2014

To: Angela Moe, Principal Investigator
Jessica Sullivan, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number 14-09-08

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled "A Recipe for Success in the 'English World': An Investigation of the Ex-Amish in Mainstream Society" has been **approved** under the **expedited** category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note: This research may **only** be conducted exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project (e.g., *you must request a post approval change to enroll subjects beyond the number stated in your application under "Number of subjects you want to complete the study."*) Failure to obtain approval for changes will result in a protocol deviation. In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

Reapproval of the project is required if it extends beyond the termination date stated below.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: September 10, 2015

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