

**PRESERVING THE SIMPLE LIFE**

PRESERVING THE SIMPLE LIFE:  
SOCIAL CHANGE AND BOUNDARY MAINTENANCE  
AMONG THE OLD ORDER MENNONITES

By

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## ABSTRACT

In contrast to the fast-paced changes and lifestyle that are endemic to modern, secular society, the Old Order Mennonites live a simple, religious life and aim to keep it that way by mediating change. How they are actively able to preserve their culture is the focus of this dissertation. The Old Order Mennonite community of Waterloo Region in southwestern Ontario, Canada served as the case study for understanding the minded aspects of social change and continuity. Fourteen in-depth, qualitative interviews were held with current and former Old Order Mennonites. A further five interviews were conducted with public school teachers and principals. Two interviews with health care providers and four interviews with members of more liberal Mennonite churches were also carried out. These additional interviews offered perspectives on the dynamics of Old Order Mennonite to non-Mennonite interaction and provided general background data on the Old Order way of life. Participant-observation in participants' homes, workplaces, schools, and churches was also undertaken.

Building on Barth's (1969) notion of social boundary maintenance and working from an interactionist perspective on social change, I argue that the key ways in which the Old Order manage change revolve around: (a) social distancing through isolation (e.g., farming, separate schooling) and insulation (e.g., technological barriers such as the continued use of the horse and buggy, distinct language, and conservative dress); (b) taking a "prescribed" approach to change such that the group's leaders control and dictate change through the *Ordnung* (church rules) and manage both internal issues (e.g., problems with youth) and external threats to continuity (e.g., a turbulent farm industry); and, (c) constructing and maintaining an ideology which reinforces the Old Order way of life as sacred and worthy of preservation.

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## PROLOGUE

### COMING HOME: THE SIMPLE LIFE IN CONTRAST

*It's a blustery winter day in Wellesley Township. I'm driving down a snow-slicked regional road seventeen from Hafner's Corner to Linwood to visit my parents. The Old Order Mennonite churches that dot the countryside have recently finished their services. I'm driving just over the speed limit and figuring that I'll be there on time, for once, when I notice a silver Honda Accord driving slowly ahead of me. I slow down and think to myself, "The roads aren't that bad, are they?" I continue to slow to forty kilometres an hour, coming close to the shiny bumper ahead of me. "Okay, this is a joke, what's this old fogey doing? If he's worried about the ice, the least he could do is pull over." And then I see it. A conga line of well over forty black, horse-drawn, Mennonite buggies is winding its way out of a church parking lot and onto the road just ahead of us. The procession stands in stark contrast against the snow-covered road and glistening white fields. Some of the buggies are enclosed carriages, others are open to the elements; some are on sleigh runners, but most have metal-bound wooden and spoke wheels. Each of the wooden transports is pulled by one or two dark-coloured horses—some with coats, others bare—drawing their passengers home or to an afternoon visit with friends and family. Steamy puffs of breath billow from the horses'*



*nostrils as they trot. The buggies' passengers are dressed head-to-toe in sombre black and white winter attire, and their faces are flushed red by the cold; the men holding the reins wear wide-brim hats and the women sitting next to them are in black bonnets. They look stoically forward as the wind and snow whip about them. Young children sit huddled at the back of the open buggies, each of them looking cold but smiling despite the weather.*

*The car ahead of me has nearly come to a stop as we approach the procession. The sun glints off the chrome of the newer model, two-door Accord. All-season radials, capped with factory issued brushed-steel hubcaps grip the icy surface of the road. Puffs of exhaust sputter out of the car's tailpipe. I'm close enough now to the vehicle that I can see its two passengers – both middle-aged Caucasians. Warmed by the car's heating, they've removed their colourful polar fleece coats and have piled them in the back seat. Through the defrosted rear window I notice that the driver, a male, with a moustache and a receding black and grey-speckled hairline, is wearing a bluish-grey sweater and white-collared shirt. He has his eyes fixed on the caravan of horse and buggies that are now no more than fifty feet ahead us. Excitement and awe in his eyes, he's saying something and frantically motioning to the lady beside him. He's seemingly oblivious to the fact that I've brought my Sunfire within a couple feet of them. His own vehicle comes to an abrupt stop. I now see the woman reaching under the coats in the backseat. She is adorned in a navy blue sweater with multi-coloured snowmen cascading across her shirt. An oversized snowflake broach has been pinned neatly to her shirt and a gold necklace dangles from her neck.*

*Her cheeks are tinted with red blush and her hair, short and obviously dyed brown with blonde streaks, springs up in various directions from her head. She pulls out a small silver-chromed camera and begins snapping pictures of the Mennonite caravan. Deciding that they're going to be awhile, I pull into the oncoming lane to pass the car. "City people," I say to myself shaking my head as I zoom by them.*

*I look back in my rear-view mirror, noticing a couple buggies quickly pull out in front of the silver vehicle, while other buggy drivers wait to see if the car is going to proceed. Seemingly overjoyed by this chance opportunity to capture a permanent image of an Old Order Mennonite, the man driving the Accord has put his four-ways on, while his passenger continues to snap pictures. I think to myself, what a peculiar sight: in the middle of the countryside, the seemingly simple life of the Old Order Mennonites is forced to pause as their lives intersect with the modern outside world.*

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Herbert Gans (1979) proposed the concept of *symbolic ethnicity* to capture the new reality of ethnic groups in America. According to Gans (1979), the children of immigrants to the United States are not necessarily interested in living out or reviving their ethnic roots, but rather invoke elements of their cultural heritage when it suits them. According to Gans (1979) symbolic ethnicity is “characterized by a nostalgic allegiance to the culture of the immigrant generation, or that of the old country; a love for and a pride in a tradition that can be felt without having to be incorporated in everyday behaviour” (p. 9). In essence, symbolic ethnicity represents a way of “*acting* ethnic,” but not truly “*being* ethnic.” For many ethnic groups in North America today, the idea of symbolic ethnicity may well be an accurate portrayal. As Boldt (1985) indicates, however, there are certain groups for whom “real” or “old” ethnicity is alive. The Old Order Mennonites represent one such group for whom, in Boldt’s (1985) words, “a serious, practical commitment to an existing cultural heritage, including all the constraints that this imposed on the individual” (p. 89) is still a reality.

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore the ways in which the Old Order Mennonites of Waterloo Region in Ontario, Canada are able to sustain their culture despite various external and internal pressures to the contrary. I

offer an in-depth, microsociological examination of the varied ways in which Old Orders actively attempt to mediate change. The negotiation of social change as it relates to acculturation and assimilation is the primary focus. I argue that by understanding the Old Order's emphasis on maintaining separation—in all its forms (e.g., geographical, social, psychological)—from the “outside” world is the best way to appreciate how it is that they attempt to preserve their way of life. Previous studies have identified social contact as the primary “cause” of social change (see Teske & Nelson, 1974). Instead of taking a causal approach to understand the relationship between contact and change, I combine Barth's (1969) idea of social boundary maintenance with interactionist theory (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934; Prus, 1996, 1997) and ideas from social constructionism (Loseke, 1999) to explore how insiders view social contact and change, and how they attempt to socially construct and mediate change so as to preserve a desired way of life.

In this chapter I (a) offer a brief overview of the Old Order Mennonites of Waterloo Region, and (b) present an overview of the argument to be made in the chapters that follow. First, though, I build off of recent news headlines to help situate this study, and in particular, point to the Old Order's emphasis on remaining separate from the modern, secular world and their resistance to the “push” to modernize. In this next section I point out the need to recognize the reciprocal relationship subcultures have with one another and their “dominant” culture, as well as argue for the need to consider the minded ways in which individuals, as part of groups, confront social change and maintain cultural continuity.

**REMAINING SEPARATE AND RESISTING MODERNITY**

A sample of recent headlines from the *Globe and Mail* newspaper read:

“Russian President Vows Crackdown after Deadly Night Club Fire,” “Video Game’s Gay Love Scene Stirs Controversy,” “Ex-Liberal Official Gets Stiff Sentence,” “UN to Probe Climate Email Leak,” and “Tiger’s Alleged Mistress Keeps Quiet.” The underlying stories reflect the concerns and interests of the modern world while pointing to the ever-increasing ways in which our lives are tied to the global community. In certain respects, these interests and concerns are matters affecting us all. For the Old Order Mennonites, though, such issues represent the types of worldly concerns from which they work so hard to distance themselves.

The Old Order Mennonites’ simple dress, horse-drawn transportation, and rejection of many modern amenities may lead one to believe that their community is locked in time. Upon closer inspection, however, one finds that change is very much a part of their lives. Perhaps more so than many other groups, the Old Orders work hard to control change. Local news stories regarding the Old Order Mennonites of Waterloo Region reflect some of the changes they are facing and implementing, and the ways in which their community attempts to preserve their distinct lifestyle. In one article entitled, “Elmira Auction offers Fresh Foods, Fast Patter,” the columnist discusses how the Old Order community has found new ways to market its farm produce in an attempt to make the family farm more viable (D’Amato, 2008). A founding member of the produce auction, Nelson Wideman, indicates, “[The auction] has provided another source of income for some families... Without the auction,

they probably wouldn't be growing produce.” Another story discussing the funding of religious schools points out how the Old Orders would not want to be part of the funding for their own separate schools as they oppose government aid and strive to remain separate from the world (Petricevic, 2007). Yet another article discusses the steadying influence the Old Order community has on the preservation of farmland in the Waterloo Region, noting that the number of farmers in the Region grew while the number of farmers across Ontario decreased (Outhit, 2008). Such stories point to the intricate ways communities, whether they actively attempt to mediate change or not, are impacted by changes in other areas. Old Order Mennonites, while not interested in the specifics of global change per se, do become interested when outside change “trickles down” to their community and becomes an issue for them.

Perhaps of even more interest is how the three preceding stories suggest the ways in which subcultures like that of the Old Order Mennonites impact their larger host cultures. Here a simple, but important, observation can be made. Change should not be assumed to be unidirectional and monolithic, with the dominant culture assimilating and subsuming the subcultures of different groups. Rather, the interplay between cultures, as individuals actively work to negotiate change, needs to be recognized. As minded beings, humans act in ways which direct the course of their own social destinies.

Social structure becomes an important element in studying social change in that it is necessary to examine how people make sense out of the ways in which they are constrained by the very social elements that facilitate their lives. By examining group life at the micro-level we come to understand how it is that we both produce and act within social structure. As a group that is mindful of

preserving a distinct way of life, the Old Order Mennonites serve as an excellent case study of how people actively make sense out of and manage social change. As such, the research for this dissertation reflects the ways in which Old Order Mennonites enter into the social change process, interpret change, and negotiate change as they go about their everyday lives. In this way, we begin to see how change becomes a socially enacted feature of human group life (Prus, 1999).

### **THE OLD ORDER MENNONITES OF ONTARIO**

By outside accounts the Old Order Mennonites lead a “simple” life, as signified by their plain style of dress and horse-drawn transportation. Here we have a faith community that is surrounded by the modern world, but chooses to live according to a strict interpretation of the Bible, emphasizing a rural-based agrarian lifestyle, a clear gendered division of labour, patriarchal family structure, simple modest dress, separate church-funded schooling, and a devotion to a life based on self-sacrifice, community, and non-resistance. The Mennonites’ strict interpretation of religious doctrine becomes the most significant aspect around which they organize their lives. Above all else, they believe in remaining separate and distinct from the secular world. Non-conformity to the outside world is at the heart of the Old Order Mennonite ideology, so much so that they recognize and appreciate that they are a “separate” and “peculiar” people (Horst, 2000).

In the province of Ontario there are over 20 different groups of Mennonites (Epp, 2002). Of these groups, the Old Order Mennonites are one of the most conservative. Some of the other groups of Mennonites that call Waterloo Region home include the Markham Mennonites, David Martin

Mennonites, Old Colony Mennonites, and Conference Mennonites. Since moving to the Waterloo area from Pennsylvania in the late 1800s, the Old Order group has grown to over 3,000 parishioners (Epp, 2002). Despite this growth, they face constant pressure from both outside and within their community to change and adapt in order to preserve their way of life. Since the Old Order Mennonites provide particularly clear and intense instances of people's struggles to deal with change and continuity in the broader community, their society represents an exceptionally strategic sociological site for examining central features of human group life. Durkheim (1915) makes a similar case in his classic study, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, contending that there is much to be learned about the fundamental features of social life by studying a small, seemingly less heterogeneous group in great detail.

The majority of Old Order Mennonites trace their heritage back to the sixteenth century Swiss Anabaptists, a Christian group that emerged out of the Protestant movement (Scott, 1996). The Mennonites' namesake is derived from Menno Simons, a former Catholic priest turned Anabaptist reformer in 1536 (Fretz, 1989). For many years this group was persecuted in Europe by both Catholics and Protestants alike for its beliefs. Throughout Europe, Anabaptists were jailed, tortured, and exiled. In the 1670s many Anabaptists sought refuge in the German Palatinate where they were tolerated, but not allowed to own land. In 1683 a group of Anabaptists immigrated to Pennsylvania after the Quaker, William Penn, opened the state up as a haven of religious freedom. A much larger group followed, mainly from



Switzerland, in 1707. In 1710 many settled in Lancaster County (Fretz, 1989; Scott, 1996).

Along the way there have been several divisions among the Mennonites. Perhaps the most recognizable schism to North Americans came in 1693 when Jacob Amman, a young Mennonite bishop who advocated practices such as shunning, feet washing, and greater simplicity in dress, fell out of favour with the Mennonite church (Scott, 1996). Amman went on to form the Amish Church.

Within Waterloo Region there have been three significant schisms. The first came in 1889 when the Old Order Mennonites withdrew from the Mennonite Conference group who were interested in allowing new church practices such as Sunday school (Scott, 1996).

In 1917, a group that was to become known as the David Martin Mennonites, decided to form their own church because its members felt that the Old Orders were too progressive. Since the split, however, the David Martins have in many ways become much more progressive than the Old Order Mennonites. An Old Order gentleman interviewed for this study made note of this change, stating: “[F]rom where the Dave Martins were 40 years ago and where they are now... if they change this much in the next 40 years, they’ll be going on a spaceship.” Unlike the Old Orders, they keep to themselves and will not welcome outsiders into their church services. Also in contrast to the Old Orders, the David Martins send their children to public schools, make use of provincial funding for health care, accept government farm and business subsidies, and are more accepting of technology such as cell

phones and computers, but only if restricted to business transactions.

Similarities between the Old Orders and David Martins revolve around such things as dress, language, religiosity, and many aspects of a “simple” life.

Even here, however, there are variations. Some observations pertaining to the David Martin group will be made in the findings chapters.

In 1939, the Markham-Waterloo Mennonite Conference was formed as a result of a group of Old Orders believing that their church was too conservative and should permit the use of the automobile (Scott, 1996). The main difference distinguishing the Markham group from the Old Orders is the Markham’s ownership and use of vehicles for transportation. While most Old Orders will accept rides in a car, or take the bus for travel, they do not own their own vehicles. In fact, the Old Order Mennonites in Waterloo Region currently restrict tractors to a maximum of 100 horsepower, so as to remove the temptation to utilize farm machinery for travel purposes. Usually when Old Order Mennonites leave their church, particularly over an interest in driving a vehicle, they will join the Markham group. The Markham Mennonites are sometimes referred to as “black bumper” Mennonites, as their vehicles are black without chrome in an effort to remain unostentatious.

Despite all of the divisions and challenges to their way of life, the Old Order Mennonite community has rather successfully maintained its cultural heritage and its numbers continue to expand. And, although the community experienced a significant decline in membership due to the schisms of the early 1900s, Old Order Mennonites tend to have large families resulting in rapidly increasing numbers (Scott, 1996). Such tremendous population

growth, however, has also presented problems. A finite amount of arable land and increased economic pressures facing small-scale family farming has meant that the community has had to adapt in order to sustain its way of life. The Old Orders have responded in various ways, which of course, is the focus of this dissertation.

### **DISSERTATION OVERVIEW**

The guiding research question to be addressed herein is, “How are the Old Order Mennonites able to maintain their distinct way of life?” I submit that the answer to this question revolves around the community’s emphasis on separation and accompanying social boundary maintenance practices (Barth, 1969). Social boundary maintenance refers to social practices insulating ethnic groups from cultural change (Barth, 1969). An important point made by Barth (1969) is that social interaction between groups does not necessarily lead to assimilation and a loss of culture, but rather can serve to reinforce social boundaries between groups. Combining Barth’s (1969) ideas with symbolic interactionist (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934; Prus, 1996, 1997) and social constructionist (Loseke, 1999) insights offers a more informed sense of how it is that the Old Order Mennonites in this study actively negotiate social change.

The contribution of this dissertation lies in offering an interpretivist understanding of social change, resistance to acculturation, and the preservation of culture among Old Order Mennonites. By building on previous research on social change, and resistance to acculturation and

assimilation by religious ethnic communities in particular, I develop new concepts (e.g., prescribed change, divine rationalizations, rhetoric of necessity) and highlight the more generic applicability of the insights developed herein.

My central argument is that the preservation of Old Order culture is best appreciated by understanding how it is Old Orders attempt to maintain their separation through social boundary maintenance practices. I submit that it is by examining social change at the micro level on a sustained basis that we begin to better understand *how* social change happens. In doing so, social change is appreciated as a negotiated process that occurs as minded individuals interact and influence one another's actions and perspectives.

To conclude this introductory chapter, I offer the following chapter-by-chapter overview to help situate the reader and detail how I develop my argument.

In chapter two I present a review of the literature on social change. I begin by considering some of the main sociological theories on social change. Acculturation and assimilation are highlighted. I indicate that much of the material that has come to dominate our sociological understandings on social change can be characterized as deterministic and unidirectional, with subordinate cultures gradually being subsumed by the dominant culture (e.g., Alba & Nee, 1997; Eaton, 1952; Gordon, 1964; Park, 1950). There is often little attention given to the perspectives of those people who are negotiating change. I also review literature pertaining to social change among Mennonite and other religious ethnic communities. I introduce the concept of social

boundary maintenance—a concept discussed by Charles Loomis (1960) in largely functionalist terms and then later given a more micro focus by the anthropologist Fredrik Barth (1969). I argue that this concept can be more thoroughly tied to symbolic interactionist (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934; Prus, 1996, 1997) and social constructionist (Loseke, 1999) ideas and concepts to explore how social change is socially constructed and mediated at the micro level as people go about their everyday lives.

In chapter three, I present the research methods and background details that informed my study. In-depth interviews and participant-observation were employed to acquire firsthand understandings of the processes of interest. Offering an overview of my own background and relationship to the Old Order community provides a more complete picture of the research findings and methodological limitations. I highlight the impact of personal reputation on the data I collected. In doing so, I illustrate how my assumed familiarity with Old Order culture and my family's reputation in the Old Order community both enhanced and limited my research. I suggest that being attuned to how we are seen as researchers—personal reputation included—is important to take into account when in the field and interpreting data.

Chapter four represents my first findings chapter on the role played by social boundary maintenance in mediating change among the Old Order. Although the Old Order community is self-contained in a number of ways (e.g., religion, education), it is not “institutionally complete” (Breton, 1964). That is, Old Order members rely on the outside community for services or social well-being (e.g., financial and retail services). As a result, complete

isolation is not achieved, and practices which insulate members from and during contact with outsiders are necessary. I argue that it is through social distance—both complete and mediated—that members limit and filter interaction with outsiders and outside culture. I maintain that geographical isolation, technological barriers, interactional boundaries such as clothing and language, and interaction rules create social boundaries to interaction with outsiders. Despite contact between insiders and outsiders, social distancing serves to restrict external cultural influences and preserve Old Order culture.

Chapter five and six explore the influence of social control in maintaining social boundaries and mediating social change. Chapter five introduces the concept of prescribed change, which denotes how the Old Order community, led by its clergy, actively attempts to prescribe the types of changes to be made to its culture. The concept of prescribed change is similar to Eaton's (1952) notion of "controlled acculturation," however the concept of prescribed change emphasizes that change is a negotiated process and can involve not just impeded acculturation to more progressive cultures, but illustrates that change can also be controlled through boundary reinforcement (e.g., establishing rules to entrench a waning cultural value) and by prescribing cultural reversion (e.g., reinforcing earlier or more conservative traditions). I flesh out the idea of prescribed change by describing the role played by the *Ordnung*—church rules detailing the responsibilities of brethren—and church leadership in controlling change. I then analyze the role of prescribed change in managing threats to cultural continuity such as financial challenges,

prosperity, and choice. In doing so, I highlight the type of influence work and claims-making that takes place as prescribed changes are negotiated.

Expanding on the idea of social control, in chapter six I explore deviance among Old Orders as an internal influence on social change and the role played by social control in managing deviance. I examine the Old Order perspective on deviance, discuss two particular forms of deviance—wayward youth and defection from the Old Order community—that were highlighted by participants, and analyze how deviance is handled so as to preserve Old Order culture. I argue that Old Orders attempt to avoid outside interference (e.g., law enforcement in cases of criminal misconduct) and thereby manage their own so as to maintain the community’s religious-oriented perspective on communal, Christian group life.

In chapter seven, I explore the Old Order perspective on separation from the outside world and how brethren socially construct their way of life. In order to appreciate how Old Order culture is preserved, I argue that it is important to consider how the group’s ideology represents a social boundary and how their perspective becomes incorporated into a vocabulary of motive (Mills, 1951) justifying the existence of the group’s practices, including those used to maintain other boundaries. In order to appreciate how the Old Order way of life is actively preserved, I maintain that it is essential to understand the social psychological framework undergirding Old Order culture. To accomplish this I explore: (a) the ways in which the outside world is social constructed by Old Orders and how their own way of life is rationalized as good and proper; (b) how members engage in “defensive structuring” (Siegel,

1970) by revisiting their history of persecution and potential future persecution, which has the impact of reinforcing the legitimacy of community leaders and generating social solidarity; and, (c) evidence of the internalization of the group's ideology.

In the concluding chapter I summarize the key findings of my study, detail the contributions made by this dissertation, highlight areas for future research, and discuss some of the research limitations. I maintain that it is important to consider how the boundaries discussed throughout the dissertation are intertwined with one another and become a dynamic feature of the Old Order cultural fabric. I conclude by re-emphasizing the point that exploring social change from the perspectives of those directly involved in the preservation of culture is essential to understanding the intersubjective, interactive, and minded ways in which people influence the social change process.



## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

It would be an understatement to say that the focus of sociological research on Mennonite society to date has been on social change. In fact, nearly every study examined while conducting my research on the Old Order Mennonites has addressed at least some component of change. Indeed, an empirical interest in social change has been an enduring tradition within studies on culture and ethnicity, and sociology in general.

Of most interest to the current project is the literature on social change as it pertains to the processes of acculturation and assimilation. While the terms acculturation and assimilation are sometimes used interchangeably, there are differences between the two concepts that are worth noting (see Teske & Nelson, 1974). As used herein, acculturation refers to the process by which groups acquire aspects of an additional culture (e.g., language, values, norms). New cultural elements are acquired while the group maintains some aspects of its former culture. Assimilation is used to refer to the process by which groups become integrated into their host societies such that they have exchanged their former culture for that of the mainstream. Most, if not all, aspects of the group's former culture are lost as individuals become fully integrated into their new society. Assimilation involves both primary and

secondary group<sup>1</sup> contact, while acculturation is typically limited to that of secondary groups (Teske & Nelson, 1974). Furthermore, assimilation involves a general acceptance of both sides—i.e., members of the out-group become more or less accepting of the dominant culture and vice versa (Teske & Nelson, 1974). While some groups seek to become acculturated and, although at times begrudgingly, assimilated into mainstream society, others make a concerted effort to resist both acculturation and assimilation. The Old Order Mennonites represent an ideal case study for examining the process of resistance to integration.

In terms of North American studies on acculturation and assimilation, immigrants—ethnic minority groups in particular—have drawn the most interest from social scientists (e.g., Alba, 1990; Alba & Nee, 1997; Gans, 1979, 1992, 1994; Park, 1950; Rumbaut, 1994; Teske & Nelson, 1976; Thomas & Znaniecki, 1918-1920; Zhou, 1997). This should not be surprising since such groups are directly engaged in the process of negotiating acculturation and assimilation. They also tend to have cultural characteristics that are more noticeable and empirically observable given that they often present stark cultural contrasts with mainstream society.

While it has become increasingly recognized that assimilation is a mutual process, with minority and majority groups influencing one another, the bulk of research in this area is still predominantly concerned with how

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<sup>1</sup> A primary group is a small group in which members engage in intimate, face-to-face associations with one another for extended periods of time. Primary group members have a common sense of their group identity (Cooley, 1909). A secondary group is a group in which members develop more specialized, less intimate, goal-oriented relationships with one another that last for limited periods of time.

minority groups and cultures are subsumed by that of mainstream society. Reviewing the literature on acculturation and assimilation, Teske and Nelson (1974) point out that “many writers” treat acculturation as unidirectional, stating that “in their research or theoretical discussions, especially in regard to immigrant groups, culture changes relevant to the one group, as well as factors contributory to such changes, are identified and discussed with no attention given to changes, reciprocal or otherwise, in the other group or groups” (p. 353). They go on to indicate that, “these writers do not argue for acculturation as a unidirectional process; they simply treat it as such, failing to acknowledge any two-way, or reciprocal, acculturative initiative on the part of the other cultural system” (p. 353). Bidirectional or mutual cultural influence is implied, but seldom emphasized. As a result, assimilation is largely cast as a deterministic process with it only being a matter of time until immigrant groups exchange their culture for that of their host societies. This viewpoint was much more popular in the early days of assimilation theory. That being said, as recently as 1997 Alba and Nee (1997) have argued for the viability of assimilation theory to understanding contemporary immigrant assimilation issues. They argue that the concept of assimilation “offers the best way to understand and describe the *integration* into the mainstream experienced across generations by many individuals and ethnic groups, even if it cannot be regarded as a universal outcome of American life” (p. 827, emphasis added). While acculturative influence might well be an unequalitarian process, more needs to be understood about the reciprocal nature of this process and the

active resistance techniques employed by those caught up in attempts at cultural preservation.

Also endemic to early assimilation research is a clear ethnocentric bias towards transforming immigrants into full members of their new society.

Highlighting the “intellectual sins” of early assimilation theorists, Alba and Nee (1997: 827) point to the ethnocentrism explicit in the work of Warner and Srole (1945):

Warner and Srole (1945: 285 ff.), in their classic account of assimilation among ethnic groups in New Haven, describe ethnic groups as ‘unlearning’ their ‘inferior’ cultural traits (inferior, that is, from the standpoint of the host society) in order to ‘successfully learn the new way of life necessary for full acceptance.’ Warner and Srole also correlated the potential for assimilation with a hierarchy of racial and cultural acceptability, ranging from English-speaking Protestants at the top to ‘Negroes and all Negroid mixtures’ at the bottom.

In a paper entitled, “Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Assimilation but were Afraid to Ask,” Suárez-Orozco’s (2000) overview of renewed research on immigration and assimilation suggests that an ethnocentric bias is still apparent in contemporary American assimilation literature. The questions guiding current research into assimilation are summed up by Suárez-Orozco as: “Are they learning English?... Are they becoming American in letter and in spirit?” (2000: 5). His work suggests that such questions build off anxieties and xenophobia fuelled by immigration.

Since the mid-1900s there has been a growing sociological interest in how groups maintain their cultures and resist assimilation (e.g., Boldt, 1985; Devereux & Loeb, 1943; Driedger, 1977a; Eaton, 1952; Jager,

1983; Reitz, 1985; Shaffir, 1987, 1995, 2004). It can be said that assimilation into modern Western nations has changed markedly since the initial writings of race relations' researchers working in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Most notably, Western societies have become more pluralist with many adopting multicultural policies permitting for the greater inclusiveness of all groups and cultures (Suárez-Orozco, 2000). Suárez-Orozco (2000) argues that multiculturalism, new mass technologies and transportation, and a constant flow—as opposed to waves—of immigrants means that having to make a “clean break” from one's old culture is no longer inevitable or necessary. This new social reality has fostered the preservation of ethnic identities and culture and has meant that it is not as essential as it once was that immigrant minority groups sacrifice their ethnic heritage in order to make a living (Portes, 1996; Suárez-Orozco, 2000). While some measure of acculturation (e.g., adopting the host society's language and laws) is still necessary for most immigrant groups, complete assimilation is not. As such, ethnic groups have been able to retain aspects of their former cultures and, with greater freedoms, make a direct impression on their new society's cultural landscape.

As reflected in the history of the Anabaptists, it has been a common pursuit of ethnic groups to not only seek out areas where they might make a better life for themselves, but also be able to have at least some measure of cultural freedom. For instance, Alba's (1990) discussion of ethnic neighbourhoods in America illustrates how urban ethnic communities—not fully homogenous, but still “disproportionately ethnic” (p. 255)—permit adult

residents to keep their ethnic loyalties and sentiments alive while “socializing a new generation to ethnic ways” (p. 254). The literature on assimilation has attempted to account for changes in assimilation patterns, however there is still a strong deterministic undercurrent to much research, and studies on the barriers to integration and cultural adaptation continue to be the major intellectual curiosity of assimilation researchers. Zhou’s (1997) assessment of current assimilation theory and its applicability to understanding “the challenge confronting immigrant children and children of immigrants” illustrates these biases. Zhou (1997) asks:

Given the fact that children of contemporary immigrants will represent a crucial component of future American society, how are we to understand these children’s adaptation to their role as citizens and full participants in American society? How do migration processes, contexts of reception, and biculturalism impact the process of becoming American? Has assimilation continued to lead to upward social mobility? Has the younger generation of today’s immigrants been able to assimilate into American society, following the path taken by the “old” second generation arriving at the turn of the century and advancing beyond their parents’ generation? (p. 64)

These represent worthwhile questions pertaining to assimilation, but absent in this type of research are questions such as: For those who are disinterested in adapting to their host society’s culture, what strategies are employed on a day-to-day basis to resist assimilation? How are social changes that lead to assimilation perceived by those attempting to maintain separation? How does the culture of groups resisting assimilation present viable, liveable alternatives to the mainstream? By examining a community of Old Order Mennonites that has committed to remaining separate from society, this dissertation seeks to provide answers to these questions.

Despite the wide array of literature in this area, an interactionist analysis of insider perspectives on assimilation, and more specifically how groups negotiate integration into mainstream society and culture *in situ*, has been largely absent. In discussing the results of a 1994 survey of Canadian ethnographic literature, Buchignani and Letkemann (1994) note that the study of ethnic relations at the micro level has not increased since the 1970s. They maintain that this is a “significant gap” in the literature as there is little known about how immigrant groups negotiate integration and develop relations with their host societies. They argue that more research needs to be conducted in this area to better understand the “direct experiences” of ethnic groups as they interact with the broader society. Shaffir’s (e.g., 1987, 1995, 2004) research on the preservation of culture among the Hassidim of Montreal serves as a significant exception. Given the methodological and theoretical similarities and substantive interests of our two projects, comparisons will be drawn regarding social boundary maintenance practices among the Hassidim in Shaffir’s research and the Old Order Mennonites in the current study.

In the following section I explore some of the relevant literature on social change, presenting first an overview of material on social change with an emphasis on acculturation and assimilation. Following this I outline the conceptual and theoretical framework of the dissertation, noting how Barth’s (1969) ideas regarding social boundary maintenance can be combined with complimentary understandings of social life from symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934; Prus, 1996, 1997) and social constructionism (Loseke, 1999). I will then examine research on Mennonite society and

religious ethnic communities, noting how this dissertation builds on and extends insights regarding social change and resistance to assimilation gleaned from these past studies.

## **INFLUENTIAL THEORIES AND CONCEPTS PERTAINING TO ETHNIC GROUPS AND ASSIMILATION**

### **Classic and Straight-Line Theories of Assimilation**

First used in the study of race relations in America, the concept of assimilation was proposed to describe the process by which immigrant groups were integrated into mainstream society. What has become known as *classic assimilation theory* was established by scholars working at the University of Chicago in the 1920s. Chicagoans such as William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki and later Ernest Burgess and Robert Park provided the intellectual underpinnings of classic assimilation theory. In the “The Polish Peasant in Europe and America” Thomas and Znaniecki (1918-1920) studied the diaries, letters, and other personal documents of Polish peasant families who had immigrated to cities in the United States in the early 1900s. They noted the difficulties these immigrants faced in light of their new American culture. Social disorganization, brought on by rapid social change, was seen as characterized by a breakdown in the ability of families to control its members, difficulties in adapting old world ways to the new world, and barriers to integrating into their new society. Thomas and Znaniecki maintain that Polish immigrants resist adopting American culture wholesale and do not completely retain their Polish culture. Instead, they argue, this group ultimately becomes Polish-Americans adapting their old culture so that it might better serve them



in their new societal context. The ideas contained in their five-volume treatise on the Polish immigrant were to become foundational statements on assimilation, immigration, race, and ethnicity.

Classical assimilation theories assumed a more or less “straight-line” model of integration. For instance, Robert Park’s (1950) “race relations cycle” outlines four stages—contact, competition, accommodation, and assimilation—new immigrants go through as they become integrated into their host society. Expanding on these earlier ideas, Milton Gordon (1964) presents a generational model of assimilation among immigrant groups as they were exposed to American culture. Gordon (1964) argues that assimilation follows a series of stages culminating in the dissolution of prejudice, discrimination, and cultural conflict. Acculturation, the first stage in Gordon’s (1964) model, involves the gradual adoption of cultural habits and patterns of the dominant group—white middle-class Anglo-Saxon Protestants. According to straight-line theories, eventual assimilation is inevitable. Gordon (1964) maintains that immigrant groups become acculturated as they adopt the language, dress, customs, norms, and values of the dominant culture. He also suggests that not all immigrant groups will become completely assimilated, indicating that a high level of religious commitment serves as a buffer to integration.

While early theories on social change recognize that some groups will assimilate slower than others, and even maintain certain fundamental aspects of their own culture (especially religion), straight-line theories of assimilation are more-or-less unidirectional, representing a one-way process whereby the culture of minority groups is replaced by the dominant culture. Despite this

unidirectional emphasis in past research literature, theorists tend to acknowledge assimilation as a reciprocal process (Teske & Nelson, 1974), with dominant and minority groups influencing one another. Early models also presumed that assimilation into mainstream society was, for the most part, the desired outcome for immigrant minority groups.<sup>2</sup>

### **Segmented Assimilation Theory**

In recognition of the increasing cultural diversity of modern Western societies, *segmented assimilation theory* was proposed by Portes and Zhou (1993) to account for differences in the intergenerational assimilation trajectories of immigrant groups. They argue that newcomers to North America during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were mainly of European descent and had little choice but to assimilate into a rather homogenous white middle-class American mainstream. Modern societies now present a range of groups into which new immigrants can assimilate. Straight-line assimilation, where new groups are integrated into the mainstream society, is presented as one of three pathways to assimilation. A second pathway involves downward assimilation, wherein immigrants become assimilated into society's underclass. The third trajectory, selective acculturation, is characterized by socio-economic success while preserving aspects of a group's culture such as attachment to their ethnic community and cultural values (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Portes & Zhou, 1993). Segmented assimilation theorists maintain that the particular assimilation route an immigrant group will take has to do with their level of

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<sup>2</sup> See Suárez-Orozco (2000) for an excellent discussion of this point and the decreasing necessity to strive for complete assimilation.

human capital, the private and public context of their reception into their new society, and the form of immigration (either voluntary or forced). Structural impediments to a “desirable” form of assimilation are still viewed as the primary barrier to equal integration opportunity in American society.

Although offering a greater recognition of the various ways ethnic groups might assimilate into their society, an examination of the actual ways in which individuals make decisions and negotiate social change and sustain cultural continuity within the group context is still largely absent.

The theories discussed thus far mainly depict assimilation as an inevitable and necessary reality for permanent migrant groups. And as Gans (1979, 1994) has argued, those who do end up maintaining their ethnic culture tend to only do so in a symbolic sense, invoking it when it is convenient. However, certain immigrant groups, such as the various sects of conservative Anabaptists, have been successful at maintaining their culture despite pressures to the contrary. As Haas and Shaffir (1978) indicate in their edited compilation, *Shaping Identity in Canadian Society*, religious groups, more so than ethnic groups, have been particularly successful at maintaining their culture, a point which Gordon (1964) is willing to concede. Also absent in the research discussed to this point is an analysis of the types of interactive community-based strategies and techniques used by ethnic groups to preserve their way of life. As such, we need to consider the question: For those groups interested in resisting assimilation into mainstream society, how do they actively contemplate and negotiate the types of perceived pressures they face to change and assimilate? To explore the more active ways ethnic groups

manage assimilation and social change within their host societies, I turn to Barth's (1969) classic statement on social boundary maintenance. In explicating Barth's (1969) theory I note how we can more fully appreciate the interactive ways in which groups manage social change and pressures to assimilate by incorporating symbolic interactionist (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934; Prus, 1996, 1997) and social constructionist (Loseke, 1999) viewpoints. Following this discussion, I provide an overview of the various ways social change and assimilation have been examined with regards to the Old Order Mennonites and other religious ethnic communities.

### **Social Boundary Maintenance, Symbolic Interactionism, and Social Constructionism**

Fredrik Barth (1969), in his compilation *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, presents a classic statement on social boundaries and how ethnic groups maintain them. He extends the notion of a barrier into the social realm by suggesting that cultural continuity is by and large maintained through a process of social boundary maintenance. Social boundary maintenance, as a cultural practice, represents group activities used to maintain a particular way of life which separates group members from outsiders. According to Barth (1969), social boundaries are maintained through group interactions which signal the criteria for membership and exclusion. He notes that these boundaries tend to canalize social life by denoting rather complex organizational and behavioural patterns used to separate insiders from outsiders. As Alba (1990) indicates, employing the group's distinct language

is a significant way in which members signal their insider status, a point which I take up in chapter four.

Although a social boundary may be culturally defined at a set moment in time, Barth (1969) emphasizes the permeable and processual nature of social boundaries, indicating that they are maintained through “continual expression and validation” (p. 15). In addition, Barth (1969) suggests that members dichotomize individuals into fellow group members (insiders) and outsiders. To be an insider is to have a shared set of understandings and values, and “entails the assumption that the two are fundamentally ‘playing the same game...’” (p. 15). On the other hand, to be seen as an outsider, “implies a recognition of limitations on shared understandings, differences in criteria for judgment of value and performance, and a restriction of interaction to sectors of assumed common understanding and mutual interest” (p. 15). Although one might expect that inter-group contact and interactions would lead to a congruence between the two cultures, Barth (1969) argues that ethnic groups working at sustaining a unique culture and identity have prescribed rules which structure interactions and limit the types of encounters members may have with outsiders, thus insulating parts of the ethnic group’s culture from modification. In this way, Barth’s ideas surrounding change and continuity are much less deterministic than previous theorizing on assimilation and acculturation.

Barth’s (1969) notion of social boundary maintenance fits in well with Chicagoan symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934; Prus, 1996, 1997). In particular, interactionists emphasize the need to consider how

individuals act towards and socially construct their life-worlds (Blumer, 1969; Prus, 1996, 1997). As Blumer (1969) first articulated, people interpret and act towards the world of objects in which they live based on the meanings they develop during the course of their interactions with others. Building on Blumer's (1969) ideas, Prus (1997) notes that key interactionist premises revolve around human group life as being: intersubjective, multi-perspectival, reflective, activity-based, negotiable, relational, and processual. As such, the interactionist view of the social world places front-and-centre the ways in which individuals socially construct their realities on an-ongoing interactional basis. Given the human capacity to take their lines of action and selves into consideration, and to interpret and reflect upon the world around them, the process of defining and acting towards reality is seen as very much a minded, linguistically-mediated process.

Furthermore, I incorporate ideas from social constructionism—the work of Donileen Loseke (1999) in particular—to help explore the ways in which Old Order Mennonites construct social change. Using Loseke's (1999) analogy of the claims-making game, I analyze the influence work that occurs within the Old Order community as members attempt to persuade one another to adopt particular points of view. I draw on concepts from Loseke's (1999) writing to analyze the rhetoric of social change and resistance to social change that is employed by brethren. Some of the key concepts are defined here to help develop my theoretical framework. Claims represent statements about reality used to convince others how to think and feel about particular issues (Loseke, 1999). Claims-making refers to making assertions about the

existence of a problem that requires a solution (Loseke, 1999). A claim-maker is a person that attempts to persuade others to see something as problematic or unproblematic (Loseke, 1999).

Also consequential to my analysis is the interactionist emphasis on studying the situated ways in which people shape their realities. As such, a qualitative approach emphasizing sympathetic introspection, wherein researchers attempt to truly see the world as their participants see it, is at the heart of intimately understanding the empirical social world. In this regard, interactionist assumptions about how culture is managed as an enacted, ongoing enterprise are well aligned with Barth's (1969) conceptualization of social boundary maintenance.

Combining constructionist ideas with an interactionist framework and Barth's (1969) ideas surrounding boundary maintenance, permits the analyst to more fully appreciate how individuals socially construct and manage their culture and cultural boundaries in an attempt to sustain their chosen lifestyle and identity.

#### **PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON SOCIAL CHANGE AND ASSIMILATION IN MENNONITE SOCIETY**

Issues of assimilation and social change with regards to Mennonite society have attracted a significant amount of scholarly attention (e.g., Arthur, 1998; Boldt, 1979; Brubacher, 1984; Driedger, 1977a, 1977b, 1982, 1983, 1995, 2000; Driedger & Redekop, 1998; Fretz, 1976, 1989; Hamm, 1987; Iorio, 1991, 1996; Jager, 1983; Jentsch, 1976; Kanagy & Driedger, 1996; Kauffman, 1977; Laurence, 1980; Lee, 1996; Redekop, 1976; Saillour, 1984; Urry, 1983;

Winland, 1993). It is important to keep in mind that these studies examine the vast range of different groups that compose the “Mennonite mosaic” (Kauffman & Driedger, 1991), with some studies focussing solely on Old Order Mennonites, and others offering comparisons of multiple denominations and sects within the Mennonite church. As such, research on cultural continuity of the Mennonites has been approached from a variety of different angles. The key focus of most research in this area, though, has been on the Mennonites’ relationship with their host society. Pertinent to research on change and continuity among the Mennonites has been the socialization process, the social structure of community life, inter- and intra-group interaction, identity formation, outside influences on change revolving around the push to modernize, and media consumption. The role of isolation in “negating change” (Jentsch, 1976) is a recurring, overarching theme.

### **The Role of Socialization and Social Structure**

Some studies focus on how individuals within Mennonite society are socialized and how their society is structured so as to preserve their way of life. For instance, Redekop (1976) examines differences in socialization practices between Mennonite communes. Analyzing the factors that contribute to these differences, he found that the relative isolation of the community and the intention of the commune (e.g., retreatist-isolationist vs. mission-evangelistic) were significant indicators. In another study, Driedger (1977b) applies Breton’s (1964) concept of “institutional completeness”<sup>3</sup> to

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<sup>3</sup> Institutional completeness refers to a community’s internal capacity for self-sufficiency in terms of institutional support such as religion and education.



the urban Mennonite population of Winnipeg to analyze how this group has been able to sustain itself. He found that their society has a high degree of institutional completeness, thus indicating the potential for maintaining a distinctive culture.

The role played by the school in socializing and isolating Old Order children from modern society was investigated by Jentsch (1976). Jentsch argues that having a separate education system is essential to fostering social stability in the Old Order community. Kauffman's (1977) research on more liberal Mennonite groups echoes this point, suggesting that parochial schools reduce the amount of contact Mennonite pupils have with their more secular non-Mennonite neighbours. By encouraging conformity over innovation and insulating children from outside contact, parochial schooling helps the community foster its own norms and values and maintain cultural homogeneity (Jentsch, 1976). Such practices, Jentsch (1976) writes, foster group cohesion and reduce social change.

What appears to be missing from this area of research, however, is an examination of the interactional processes that occur within these communities. Such research can be used to better understand how social and cultural boundaries are created, maintained, challenged, eroded, and changed. The idea of isolation raised in Redekop's (1976), Driedger's (1977b), Jentsch's (1976), and Kauffman's (1977) studies will be explored further with regards to the Old Order Mennonites. Breton's (1964) idea of institutional completeness will also be discussed in relation to the social domains of Old Order Mennonite society, and the degree to which the Mennonite social

institutions overlap those of the broader society. A key question to be examined in this regard is: What roles do institutional completeness and isolation play in the preservation of Old Order Mennonite culture? Jentsch's (1976) ideas surrounding the role of parochial schools and cultural homogeneity in mediating social change will also be explored.

### **The Role of Agency and Interaction**

To date, there has not been much research conducted to examine direct interaction between Mennonites and non-Mennonites. Driedger (1977b) notes that this is quite surprising given that a defining feature of the Anabaptist movement has revolved around conflict with the larger society. Aside from writings on the early Anabaptist leaders as protagonists in the cultivation of the Anabaptist movement, there has perhaps been even fewer studies conducted examining specific individuals' influence on social change.

However, there has been some research on social interaction with Mennonites and non-Mennonites and the influence of particular individuals within the Mennonite community to explore how change occurs. For instance, Driedger (1982) conducts a case study of Johann Driedger's 1875 emigration to southern Manitoba (and later Saskatchewan) from Russia to offer an analysis of cultural change within an Old Order Mennonite colony. Although emphasizing the actions and decisions made by a single individual, he successfully illustrates the role of agency in influencing change within the constraints of a strongly embedded belief system and system of social control. Driedger (1982) examines the dialectic of individual freedom and community control and the cultural change that occurs as innovations arise out of

individual agency and begin to take hold within a community. The research is based on historical documents such as Johann Driedger's letters and interviews with six of Driedger's children. From this data, Driedger (1982) presents an in-depth account of how members were socialized into the community and how one individual influenced change and battled with his own individual beliefs and their contradictions with church doctrine.

In his master's thesis, Brubacher (1984) employs both qualitative and quantitative data from interviews with Old Order Mennonites and non-Mennonites to examine perceptions on changes that occurred in a particular geographical area since Old Order Mennonites moved to the community. A key interest of Brubacher's (1984) study was to examine the amount of interaction between Mennonites and non-Mennonites. In this regard, he found that interaction was limited mainly to business transactions. Although such separation can act to preserve a distinct identity, Brubacher (1984) notes that it has had the detrimental effect of generating stereotypes and negative impressions on both sides.

A theme highlighted in Brubacher's (1984) research and other studies discussed in this section, is the role played by isolation in maintaining (and sometimes hampering) cultural continuity. Taking the idea of isolation and interaction in a slightly different direction, Fretz's (1976) research indicates that isolation is sometimes used among members of Mennonite groups to avoid interaction with members of their own extended community. For his study, Fretz (1976) conducted open-ended interviews with ten Mennonite church leaders and held shorter conversations with parishioners of new

“intentional communes”<sup>4</sup> to investigate the motivations behind their separation from the larger Mennonite community. His initial findings indicated that members sought “greater personal commitment and more rigid discipline than were required in the congregations from which the members came” (1976: 104). Fretz’s research, conducted nearly thirty years ago, points to a trend within the Mennonite church that is still occurring today. In dealing with change, new communities of Old Order Mennonites have continued to be formed in Ontario (and elsewhere), and for some, part of the thrust of their relocation revolves around separation from their former Mennonite community. Here, interaction and agency are highlighted as key to better understanding social change and resistance to assimilation. I discuss elements of interaction such as dress and language, along with isolation, and how they figure into social boundary maintenance, in chapter four.

### **Identity as an Element of Change and Continuity**

The concept of identity is one that is applied throughout many of the works on Mennonites in order to analyze change and continuity (Hamm, 1987; Driedger, 1982; Iorio, 1996; Redekop & Steiner, 1988; Urry, 1983; Winland, 1993). For example, Driedger’s (1982) analysis explores Johann Driedger’s search for identity as he confronted conflicts between his own personal beliefs and that of the church. Urry’s (1983) study of the Mennonite quest for identity offers a socio-historical analysis of the question, who are the Mennonites? Examining differences in identity between various groups of

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<sup>4</sup> An intentional commune represents a community which deliberately separates itself from the broader community.

Mennonites such as the *Kanadier* (i.e., Canadian) and *Russländer* (i.e., Russian), Urry (1983) found that there have been shifts in identity claims over time. At different points during the past century, Mennonites have claimed identities in terms of cultural, historical, and religious criteria as well as national labels. He shows that as Mennonites were displaced from Germany to Russia their identity shifted from one based on faith to nationalism. Canadian Mennonites, Urry (1983) argues, have attempted to develop their identity around their ethnic distinctiveness and Anabaptist heritage. His analysis, however, presents a very broad overview of social events and group identities which fails to examine the process of identity change on a more up close, interactional level.

### **Meeting the Challenges Presented by Modernity**

In terms of examining the impact of modernity and outside influence on Mennonite culture, one particularly well-developed area has been studies on media use within Mennonite communities (see Driedger, 2000; Driedger and Redekop, 1998; Iorio, 1991, 1996). For example, Driedger and Redekop's (1998) study of Mennonite media use indicates that both exposure to modern society and outside media within Mennonite communities has risen. To analyze the consequences of this exposure they set out to test Marshall McLuhan's hypothesis of the globalizing effects of the media. Overall, they found that traditional aspects of Mennonite societies have declined as media usage increased. Accompanying this change has been a greater degree of participation in the global village.

Iorio (1991) also discusses the role played by media and its impact on change among a group of now more liberal Mennonites. As Iorio (1991) points out, how this group has framed the adoption of more advanced forms of media has been key to rationalizing its adoption. Hamm's (1987) book on continuity and change within the Canadian Mennonite Brethren (a more modern branch of the Mennonite church), also offers valuable insights into how the Mennonite Brethren have shifted their perspective on change over the years. He argues that the continuity and viability of this group has to do with its ability to create a balance between the dialectic forces of integration and differentiation. While once viewing accommodations to and integration with their host nation's predominant secular lifestyle as "unmitigated evil," today's Mennonite Brethren view change as necessary to their survival (Hamm, 1987). However, according to Hamm (1987), change resulting in a loss of faith is still viewed as unacceptable. Hamm's (1987) writing suggests that group ideology is an essential component to be examined when analyzing how change and assimilation are negotiated.

J. Winfield Fretz's research, and his book entitled *The Waterloo Mennonites: A Community in Paradox* (1989) in particular, offer valuable insights on the same Mennonite community into which I conducted my research. Picking up on the theme of change and modernity, and making comparisons between the varied groups of Mennonites in Waterloo Region, he argues that the Old Order Mennonites of this area have the greatest prospect of retaining their distinct way of life. He attributes the Old Orders' current and future success to varied factors including, but not limited to, their "daily use of

a second language, separation from the larger society, rejection of radio, television, daily papers, automobiles, and, above all, retention of the controlled environment and independent vocation of farming and preservation of traditional family life” (Fretz, 1989: 75). Resisting change and modernity, as we see here and throughout this section, entails an avoidance of the very things that bring the group closer to secular society. But as Fretz (1989) and others have pointed out, it goes further than that. Social control, language use and retention, and technological barriers to the outside world all serve to help the group maintain its way of life and avoid assimilation. These are points which I explore further in chapters four through six.

### **Emigration as a Response to Change**

As the history of the Anabaptists indicates, Mennonites, especially the more conservative groups, have recognized the need to relocate in order to find host societies willing to accommodate their perspective and way of life. Not only must the cultural conditions be right, but affordable farmland must also be available for Old Order groups to ply their trade and maintain their social structure. As such, another strategy which is discussed in previous research on the resistance to change is that of relocating when social conditions within a given area become tenuous and viable and affordable farmland becomes scarce. Lee’s (1996) research on the Amish and Old Order Mennonites in upstate New York provides a good example. Lee notes that increasing population in these communities and a lack of adequate and affordable farmland have led to different decisions being made by the two religious groups on how to handle the situation. On the one hand, the Amish have given up their traditional

farming occupations and taken on non-traditional vocations to remain close to their current community and historic homeland. The Mennonites on the other hand, in an attempt to maintain their agricultural tradition, have moved some of their families to more promising agrarian regions. Lee (1996) argues that while the new non-traditional lifestyle of the Amish has threatened the social structure of the community, it has ensured the continuation of their existence. However, he maintains that the distance that separates the new colonies of Mennonites from their brethren in the old communities threatens their social solidarity. Strategies similar to those discussed by Lee (1996) have also been used by the Old Order Mennonites of Waterloo Region. As their families tend to be rather large, with parents typically having between five and ten children, they have been outgrowing the available farmland for some time now.

The previous literature on the various Mennonite groups offers valuable insights into how change has been adapted to and negotiated, and how wholesale assimilation has been resisted. To examine these processes further, I now review some pertinent studies on the resistance to social change as it pertains to non-Mennonite religious ethnic groups.

### **RESEARCH ON SOCIAL CHANGE AMONG NON-MENNONITE RELIGIOUS ETHNIC GROUPS**

Exploring how boundary maintenance tactics are employed by various cultural groups allows one to more fruitfully examine the process of social boundary maintenance as an abstract or generic endeavour – i.e., as an undertaking that is not unique to one particular subculture. And, while it is important to note the similarities in this process, it is also important to examine and document



the ways in which strategies used to create, alter, and maintain a culture diverge.

In the following section I document some of the key findings from research on conservative Jewish and Hutterite communities. William Shaffir's research on social boundary maintenance within the Orthodox Jewish community of Montreal offers valuable insight into ways in which the group acts and interacts to maintain its culture. As such, I offer an in-depth overview of his research that is most relevant to this dissertation. A number of related studies have been conducted on different religious communities such as the Hutterites (e.g., Boldt, 1985; Eaton, 1952; Peter, 1987), which also offer some important comparison points. Here, I focus on Boldt's (1985) research on the Hutterites as a worthwhile comparison group to the Mennonites.

Shaffir, having started his research into ultra-Orthodox Jewry early in his career as a graduate student, has made a number of observations about the process of social change within the Hassidic community of Montreal. He has also made the process of social boundary maintenance and cultural identity sustaining practices a major focus of his work. In Belcove-Sahlin's (1995) edited text reporting on ethnographies of the Hassidic Jews of America, Shaffir writes about the process of getting involved in his research with various Hassidic sects in Montreal and the social boundary maintaining tactics used by these groups to preserve their distinct identity. He indicates that the most significant strategy used by the Hassidim to maintain their unique identity is to insulate themselves from outsiders. He reports on three specific practices used by this group to maintain their cultural identity: institutional

control, especially in terms of secular education; proselytization on the part of the Lubavitcher sect; and, the negotiation of public controversies.

Shaffir (1995) found that the ways in which Hassidic boys' schools coordinate their secular education is a form of boundary maintenance in the sense that the boys were insulated from the outside world in a number of ways. For instance, the practice of hiring secular teachers places the emphasis on finding a candidate who will not only be capable of teaching the secular curriculum, but perhaps even more importantly, will not influence the students' religious beliefs. Teachers are given specific instructions on how to present the curriculum so as not to challenge students' beliefs. For example, newspapers, magazines, records, tapes, and movies are not to be used in class. Also, teachings about reproduction and the theory of evolution, and a number of other secular ideas are to have no place in the curriculum. As such, censorship of classroom materials is used to help avoid exposure to the outside world which may disrupt the socialization of children into the Hassidic way of life.

In terms of proselytizing practices, Shaffir (1995) notes that this was a boundary maintenance strategy that was used solely by the Lubavitcher sect. For other sects, he points out, to have outsiders welcomed into their institutions presented the potential for "witnessing" a different way of life, and thus, challenging the group's beliefs and cultural identity. Therefore, segregation from the outside world is a social boundary sustaining tactic used by most sects. The Tasher of Broisbriand Quebec, another Hassidic sect found to the north of Montreal, are also noted by Shaffir (1987) as emphasizing the

role of segregation from outside influence so as to maintain an appropriate way of life. Shaffir (1987) found that the Tasher went to especially great lengths to shield and protect their young, so as to avoid them being influenced by the “many evils” of the surrounding city. For instance, school books are carefully screened to remove any unwanted secular material. To avoid unwanted contact with secular ideas, English teaching staff are to follow a strict set of rules and regulations which prescribe and proscribe their teaching methods, materials, and topics. Shaffir (1987) explains that such measures are in place to “ensure that their schoolchildren do not become acquainted with (or, worse still, become attracted to) the ways of those who do not faithfully adhere to their strict Hassidic life-style” (p. 33).

Shaffir (1995) also argues that another effect of encountering outside perspectives and different ways of living is that it actually serves to reinforce the group’s distinctive identity. That is, the difference witnessed in outsiders serves as a contrast which “...reinforce[s] the sect’s distinctive identity and fortif[ies] members’ self-identification” (Shaffir, 1995: 51). It is also argued that if people can be converted to Orthodox Judaism, the conversion serves to reinforce current members’ belief system that their way of life is correct. The activities and viewpoints are framed by the group such that the same activity can be seen as a positive or negative aspect of maintaining the group’s culture. In another article, Shaffir (2004) notes the role played by religious scriptures in orienting and informing the Hassidic perspective. He writes that, “In such an ideology, Torah is the benchmark for determining whether an activity is meritorious and therefore worthy of pursuit, while secular education does not

rank very high” (2004: 62). As can be seen, interpretation, influenced by the group’s ideology, plays a key role in how activities become socially constructed as “good” or “bad.” I explore this point in more depth in chapter seven where I discuss the role of ideology and what I term, “divinely ordained rationalizations.”

Using a couple of examples of tension between the Hassidic Jewish and the non-Jewish communities of Montreal, Shaffir (1995) demonstrates how challenges to the Hassidic community from outsiders help reinforce group solidarity and the cultural identity of this ethnic group. For example, a request to city council by the Vishnitzer Hassidic sect to rezone an area of land in order to erect a synagogue on the property was opposed by the non-Jewish residents of the upper-class Outremont neighbourhood. The debate that ensued, which was played out in the news media, resulted in a greater unification of various Hassidic sects in the area, a strengthening of communal boundaries, and a greater emphasis on stronger public relations in order to represent the distinct identity of the Hassidim in a positive light to local politicians and neighbours.

As indicated, Shaffir’s work draws out a number of social boundary maintenance tactics used by the Hassidim to preserve their unique culture and identity. While the Old Order Mennonite community engages in many similar practices, given their different religion and lifestyle emphases, they use various other strategies to maintain cultural continuity. For instance, one notable distinction between these two communities is that the Old Order Mennonites rely, for the most part, on agricultural operations for their

livelihood. Such a lifestyle places them, geographically, in the countryside on the periphery of small to medium-sized villages, very much physically apart from the modern outside world. A number of Hassidic sects, by contrast, are situated in the centre of Montreal (and other major cities), a large modern metropolis. Young male Hassidim are often trained to be businessmen and the community takes advantage of many of the modern amenities that the Old Order Mennonites have largely restricted in their communities (e.g., motorized vehicles). Given the distinct religious, lifestyle, and vocational differences between the two cultures, and a varying emphasis on the adoption of modern amenities, our research points to some differences in terms of strategies for maintaining cultural continuity. Although there are differences between the two groups Shaffir and I have examined, there are some significant similarities in terms of the boundary maintenance practices they have adopted, which I examine in the chapters that follow.

Boldt's (1985) research on the Hutterites offers another example of boundary maintenance practices among a religious ethnic group. As much of the research already reviewed in this section has suggested, isolation from modern society plays a key role in terms of preserving a particular way of life. Boldt (1985) indicates that this is also true for the Hutterites. Furthermore, as with Shaffir (1987), Boldt (1985) indicates that socializing the group's young people and keeping them in the fold is particularly problematic for the community. Both authors note that keeping adolescents' attention focused inward on the group, rather than on outside issues, is necessary if cultural continuity is to be sustained. Also like Shaffir (1985), Boldt (1985) highlights

the role played by social control among the Hutterites. For both the Hutterites and the Hassidim, church rules are used to regulate what is and is not acceptable within the community. Such control acts to restrict individual autonomy and focus individual's attention on the group as a whole. Social control also functions within the Hutterite community as a way of maintaining their numbers. That is, individuals are likely to avoid defection due to the fact that they are often unprepared to meet the challenges of the modern, outside world (Boldt, 1985). I pick up on these points as they relate to the Old Order Mennonites and social control in chapters five and six.

Boldt (1985) also discusses outside hostility and a history of persecution as central elements reinforcing the Hutterites' sense of identity and ideology. Here he makes the point that less hostility towards the Hutterite community has been a problem for continuity as it has been the antagonism experienced between insiders and outsiders that has helped to reinforce in-group solidarity. Indeed, major studies within sociology (see Coser 1956; Durkheim, 1951 [1893]; Simmel 1955) have highlighted the solidarity-building role played by external threats to a group and conflict between insiders and outsiders. For instance, Coser (1956) argues that conflict serves as a "form of socialization" and argues that it serves the function of establishing and reinforcing group identities. Similarly, Simmel (1955) maintains that conflict between groups serves to bolster social boundaries by strengthening an awareness of differences and separation. Fretz's (1989) research on the Mennonites also highlights the positive functions of conflict and persecution for this group. He indicates that persecution, and an

awareness of the role it has played in Mennonite's past and formation of their devout Christian lifestyle, has had the effect of cultivating a "seriousness of purpose among church members" and strengthening of group ideals (pp. 15-16). I pick up on these points as they relate to my research on the Old Order Mennonites when I discuss the role played by group ideology and the social construction of outside threats to culture in chapter seven.

### **MOVING FORWARD FROM PAST RESEARCH**

Although there are some exceptions, what is missing from most of the research conducted on Mennonite communities, is an examination of the processes of social change and resistance to assimilation from the perspectives of those within these societies. As discussed in this chapter, certain studies explore social change among the Old Order Mennonites and make mention of culture-sustaining practices, but largely absent has been research focusing specifically on insiders' perspectives on how their community preserves their way of life. Shaffir's (1987, 1995, 2004) studies on the Orthodox Jewish community offer perhaps the most valuable comparison points as he too combines an interactionist approach with Barth's (1969) ideas regarding social boundary maintenance. With this in mind, in the substantive chapters that follow I examine how the Old Order Mennonites consider, affect, negotiate, resist, and accommodate social change. Understanding how they experience their life-worlds by taking a first-hand, sustained, and interactive approach offers an important addition to research conducted more at arms-length such as those studies based on survey and archival research, media studies, and

content analyses. As such, this study analyzes the intersubjective processes of action and decision-making that go on within the Old Order community as people contemplate, speak out about, enact, and resist change. In doing so, this approach offers a micro, interaction-oriented understanding of the process of negotiating and resisting social change and assimilation within Old Order society.

In the next chapter I discuss the specific methods that were used to collect and analyze the data. Following this, I discuss how my own personal background and family history both enhanced and complicated my research on the Old Order Mennonites.



## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH BACKGROUND AND METHODS

#### INTRODUCTION

In-depth interviews and participant-observation were the key data collection techniques used for my dissertation research.<sup>5</sup> These approaches seem particularly fitting when conducting research on traditional communities such as the Old Order Mennonites. While surveys have been employed to research Mennonite groups, such an approach has mainly been used to examine more liberal, modern denominations. While I favour qualitative methods for answering most research questions, it is difficult for me to envision a successful research project on the Old Order Mennonites that would involve anything but qualitative techniques. Given the Old Orders' resistance to modernity and desire to remain separate, research conducted by outsiders taking a more formal approach and collecting data at arms length to participants/respondents would likely not be looked upon favourably by members of the Old Order community. As I have found, the opportunity to explain our research interests on a face-to-face basis and in less "scientific" terms can go a long way when examining groups that may be guarded against outside intrusions and thus, reluctant to become involved.

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<sup>5</sup> In order to maintain the confidentiality of research participants, I have used pseudonyms and removed other forms of identifying information.

Blumer's (1969) advice to employ sympathetic introspection and get close to people's life-worlds in order to generate a true, authentic appreciation for people's lived experiences seems to be the most valid approach in the current case. Not only that, I felt that the use of in-depth interviews and participant-observation was most likely the *only* approach that would work if I was to generate an informed understanding of how the Old Orders actively sustain their way of life. Such a humanistic approach recognizes both the complex reality of human behaviour and experiences, while pointing to the intersubjective nature of the data collection process. As such, I believe that acquiring the type of intimate familiarity that a qualitative, interactionist approach calls for, also highlights the need for us to be reflexive when documenting our methods. Therefore, in detailing the methods used for this research I will consider the ways in which my relationship to the Old Order community, preconceptions, and outsider status impacted upon the data collection.

I will begin by examining the specific methods used for data collection and consider the role that "being there" played on my understanding of the Old Order community. Following this overview, I discuss how my personal reputation impacted on the data collection and analysis processes. How I came to contemplate my research role and presence in the field for this project revolved around how I was seen by participants, particularly as this pertained to the positive and negative aspects of the reputational baggage that came with me for this particular project. While having a good reputation can be

advantageous in many ways, I consider the ways in which it both enhanced and impeded my research.

### **METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH: IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS AND PARTICIPANT-OBSERVATION<sup>6</sup>**

I began the research by discussing my approach with people who knew the Old Order community well, but were not Old Order Mennonites themselves (e.g., friends of Old Order Mennonites, members of more liberal Mennonite churches). I wanted to ensure that I was going to be able to gain access to the group and felt that the best way to approach it was to first get advice and perhaps some insider contacts from those who knew the Mennonite community better than I. During these initial stages of the research a common piece of advice was, “Just go chat with them, they’re much more open than what you might think.” While I was somewhat skeptical, this advice proved to be more accurate than anticipated. The Old Order Mennonites are a very hospitable people. It was not uncommon for me to be invited over for a family meal, asked to stay and talk much longer than what I might have, or return for subsequent interviews. Purposive and snowball sampling became a natural extension of how I began the research. I used these techniques to target potential interviewees and identify places to observe and interact with participants. Non-Old Order Mennonites who knew members of the Old Order community well, suggested names of people to meet with and provided me with contact information for these individuals. Although there was some trepidation around doing a cold call or visit to possible participants, my

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<sup>6</sup> Published, first-hand accounts of Old Order life (e.g., Horst, 2000, 2001) are also interjected and used as data and comparison points.

conscious was eased by having some background in the Old Order community and by being able to mention the names of others that were familiar and trusted.

### **In-Depth Interviews**

The main source of data for my analysis is 14 in-depth interviews which I conducted with current and former Old Order Mennonites. I have stayed in contact with some of these individuals throughout my research, sometimes talking on the phone, meeting in public, or getting together to follow-up on some of the comments made when we had last met. On certain occasions, other friends and family members were available and interested in joining in on our conversations. Interviewees ranged in age from 29 to 72, with a half-and-half split in terms of the sex of participants. While I did not directly interview any of the group's younger people, sometimes these individuals were present and commented during an interview that I was having with their parent or boss. I was also able to have some informal conversations with teenagers and observe them, and children in the community, during my field research.

I conducted a further 5 interviews with teachers and principals working in the public elementary school system and 2 health care providers who had close contact with the Mennonite community. These additional 7 interviews were conducted so as to investigate how those working in close proximity to the Old Orders view and interact with members of the Mennonite community. To help better contextualize my observations, and develop opportunities to meet with members, of the Old Order community, I also met with 4

individuals from more liberal Mennonite churches who had written or taught about Mennonites. Members of this group included a sociologist, an historian, a novelist, and a Conference Mennonite minister.

I also met with my uncle at the outset of the research. He has been friends with a number of Old Order Mennonites since his childhood and I felt it wise to get some advice from him before beginning to meet with members of the Mennonite community. My conversations with him helped set the tone for my research as he not only offered some very helpful insights into Old Order customs, traditions, and beliefs, he also was the first to suggest to me how gracious and welcoming people in the Old Order community can be. This went a long way to alleviating my initial insecurities about the research. I had felt that, from their austere outward appearance and presumed interest in keeping the outside out, Old Orders would perhaps want nothing to do with me and my research. Fortunately, I was wrong and my uncle was right.

The interviews were semi-structured in that I had a general set of topics I was interested in exploring, which were used to set the stage for the interview. I had constructed a series of questions leading up to the research (see the Appendix), which I would keep in mind during the interview. Instead of bringing a list of questions with me, I kept a sheet of paper on hand with the general themes of interest. I sometimes found it useful to share the paper listing the themes with participants at the start of the interview so we both had an idea of the topics of interest. It also helped stimulate ideas for discussion and set participants' minds at ease about the whole interview process. Topics listed on the paper included:

- Personal background and family history
- Changes in the Old Order community
- Keeping Old Order traditions
- Views about the non-Mennonite world
- Everyday life
- Church, education, family, work, leisure
- Handling misbehaviour
- People that leave the Old Order community
- Other areas of interest to you

I also made it clear that I was open to talking about whatever they thought pertinent to the themes of change and continuity.

The format of the interview was quite flexible. New lines of inquiry arose throughout the course of each interview. By probing for more detail and explanations, I was able to take the discussion in various directions.

Interviews were conversation-like, which gave my discussions with participants an informal tone, allowing for a significant degree of comfort and opportunities for elaboration. I offer the following interview excerpt as an example of the type of “flow” that is characteristic of the interviews I conducted:

Steve: [We are discussing how things were among the Mennonites approximately 40 to 50 years ago]. Going back to the Old Order community... Was the produce from the farms sold just within the community or was it sold to the outside?

Paul: It's always been sold to the outside.

Steve: Were the Dave Martins that way too or were they more self-contained?

Paul: To the outside, too. Back when I was a kid these cattle dealers always used to come around. They'd look at your cattle and they'd say, "Ah, they're up for another month. They're not quite fat yet." They'd come in and they'd give you a price. They did that to everybody. We then went after all the animals in our community. They were raised to sell to the packers. That's always been as far as I can remember.

Steve: I think a lot of people from the outside have the impression that it is self-contained... that most of the food and other products are only sold to other people in the community.

Paul: Even the market gardening, it all goes out. I would say so.

[We discuss changing seats, but stay put.]

Steve: That's interesting. The David Martins have really shot off in terms of the direction that they've been going in.

Paul: Our group has changed a lot, too. They've allowed us to use the loaders to clean our pens because the young farmers couldn't do it...

While the responses offered by Paul in the previous excerpt are brief, it was actually more common for participants to speak at length about many of the issues we discussed.

The interviews lasted anywhere from one to seven hours, and sometimes were separated by a break for a drink, snack or sit-down meal with the participants. With the participant's permission, interviews were recorded by a recording device. Some individuals, however, were either not comfortable with the technology or did not like having our conversation captured on the recorder. In these instances, I either took notes during the interview, while attempting to remain non-disruptive to the conversation, or after I had left the interview. We met at a location chosen by the interviewees, typically at their home. This helped to not only give respondents a sense of



comfort about the process, but also allowed me to make observations during my visits. For instance, I was sometimes given a tour of the location and able to observe family, school, and work life as it happened over the course of the interview.

### **Participant-Observation and the Role Played by “Being There”**

I also conducted participant-observation on and off over the course of a two-year period. Although I did not stay in the field for extended amounts of time, as one conducting an intense ethnography might, I made a point of negotiating access to certain realms of Old Order Mennonite social life (e.g., home, workplace, and church) that would be more closed off to most outsiders. This permitted me to acquire a better sense of how the community operated and how individuals interacted with one another and viewed “outsiders,” while generating valuable interview contacts. This component of the research was made possible through inquiries and invitations to attend church gatherings, visit and dine with families in their homes, tour workplaces including their barns and shops, and observe Mennonite and non-Mennonite children interact at school. While I did not end up visiting an Old Order Mennonite parochial school, I did visit a few different public schools which some Old Order Mennonite children attended. That said, the vast majority of Old Order children go to their own church-funded schools and are generally not part of the public school system.

Being able to meet with people as they went about their lives and interacted with others helped to contextualize many of the things we had been discussing during our interviews and ad hoc conversations. In this sense, the



field research helped to add depth and a sense of inside perspective to my understandings of how it is that the Old Order community maintains its culture. Even though at times I felt lost when in the field, I was able to be present when things were happening. For instance, while at an Old Order church service I understood very little of what was being said as their services are conducted in German. As I came to find out, however, English has crept into their services. In addition, a minister recognizing that I was not from their community approached me before a service and offered to conduct part of his sermon in English. I told him that it would not be necessary, but he insisted. In this case, I ended up understanding much more than I would have otherwise. It never bothered me that I was not fluent in their language as I saw this as an opportunity to better understand how subcultures distinguish themselves and how members of the community truly interact with one another. Observing interaction allowed me to see how it was that language and group perspectives acted to insulate the Old Orders from modern society. Even though I might have felt lost by not understanding the group's language, I was not shy to ask about what was being said. At times I would simply make mental notes on how people communicated impressions non-verbally. It is also important to point out that, even though I sometimes felt out of place, I was never made to feel unwelcome. Additionally, by being there I became known to people. In this way I was able to demonstrate a sincere, dedicated interest in the Old Orders' way of life. Needless to say, these types of sincere impressions are difficult to generate from a distance.

While it is impossible to discern just how far my “being there” went in fostering a sense of trust and rapport among participants, I was never turned away and got the sense that participants felt comfortable with me. Being a face in the crowd generated additional contacts and led to situations in which I ended up being invited to meet with people in their homes. The Old Order community lends itself well to conducting the type of qualitative research I employed as these people are so genuinely kind and go out of their way to make one feel welcome. That said, even knowing before my project had commenced that the Old Orders were a warm and inviting people, I doubted someone interested in conducting research would be so readily welcomed. I am glad to report that I was wrong, and that I feel that not only did my family’s good name aid in the research, but also being around and showing an interest in participants’ way of life also helped a great deal.

Being there also aided in providing me with glimpses into the ways in which objects acquired symbolic significance to members of the Old Order community. When meeting with individuals during both the interviews and in the field, I would sometimes be shown and provided books on their community. Moreover, various artefacts of interest to them were described in depth. For instance, after discussing the process of dating in the Old Order community, a participant showed me her wedding invitation and memorabilia from her marriage ceremony (e.g., decorative cloth samples of her wedding dress). This helped me to better appreciate her comments about how intimate relationships develop among young couples and see firsthand the objects that took on such significance to her. Not only that, but by bringing out artefacts

related to the wedding, it rekindled memories and emotions that simply would not have been visible and more difficult to discuss and comprehend had the data been collected in a more formal or non-face-to-face fashion. By being able to meet with people in the context of their everyday lives and have them show me directly that which they were talking about added much to the research. I was able to get a sense of what things meant to them and how they actually experienced their everyday lives.

### **Coding Technique**

When it came to the analysis of my data, I had a great deal of *in situ* experience to build on. I used a very straightforward method for coding my data. In essence, I read through all the material that I had collected and looked for themes and sub-themes around the topics of change and continuity. Some of the main categories that arose out of the data included: (1) feelings of guilt and confusion surrounding change; (2) the use of religion during conversation; (3) perceived internal and external pressures to change (e.g., prosperity, availability of land, choice, deviance, defection); (4) rules, social control, and the role of clergy; (5) perceptions about “worldly” things; and, (6) the value and problem of homogeneity. Although not using any formal qualitative data analysis software, the computer aided significantly in coding and managing my data. As I reviewed my materials in Microsoft Word, I sorted out excerpts into files around the themes that arose. In this way, trends and patterns were elucidated in a processual fashion, analysis was kept simple, and data made manageable.

In the section that follows, I contextualize the research further by examining a central methodological concern that weighed on my mind throughout my study: personal reputation and its impact on field research.

### **PERSONAL REPUTATION AS A FIELD RESEARCH CONSIDERATION**

Most qualitative researchers get introduced to fieldwork as undergraduate students. First experiences usually occur as the result of having to conduct a project as part of a research methods class. Having all been neophyte researchers at one time, a question we have agonized over is: “Where do I start?” In anticipation of this question professors often tell their students: “Go with something you know,” and better yet, “Why not start by asking a friend or family member to do an interview or get you an ‘in’ somewhere.” This advice is at least partially presented in an effort to make first attempts at qualitative research as painless as possible (while perhaps even making the professor’s job just that much easier). Of course, some professors, recognizing the complications involved with such an approach, recommend just the opposite. Having carried out several “mini” qualitative projects and a couple lengthier ones, I can say that I have encountered both sets of advice. For the current project, however, I felt that researching something that was close to home for me would be advantageous in that it would open up certain doors to a world I had always been curious about. Having lived near the Old Order Mennonites for most of my life, I *thought* I knew something about their lifestyle and was counting on my family’s reputation as an “in” to their community. In this section I will describe how I have come to think about the

benefits and drawbacks of one's reputation when in the field. Elements to be explored are the variously intertwined issues of: developing trust and rapport; dealing with taken for granted; the role conflict of being both a "real" person, and sometimes friend to the participants, and social scientist; and, leaving the field. But first some background to my research on the Mennonites.

### **Background Details**

Having grown up surrounded by the Old Order Mennonites, I had always been intrigued by the simple life they appeared to lead. Biking along the back roads around my village, it was not uncommon in the summer to see bonnet clad women with plain, dark-coloured ankle-length dresses working in the flower and vegetable gardens, children playing games with each other in the yard, livestock milling about in the pasture, and fathers and sons working the fields. Although tractors, electricity, and the telephone are now common amenities among these people, they belie the Old Order Mennonites' sense of simplicity as evidenced by their plain dress, horse-drawn transportation, and general suspicion of technology.

During my elementary school years I attended a school in which non-Mennonites were in the numerical minority. While there was some level of Mennonite to non-Mennonite interaction in my classes, mainly as a formal function of classroom activities, schoolyard behaviour most often found our two groups separately engaged but partaking in many of the same activities (e.g., road hockey, baseball). Despite my physical proximity to these Mennonites, I later realized that I really never got to know any of them or

understand their way of life. This became even clearer as I embarked upon my dissertation research.

I entered into the research with a somewhat false sense of confidence, thinking that my early exposure to the Mennonite community might offer me a more informed sense of who these people were and what they were about. After all, I had grown up surrounded by the Mennonite community, I knew that they wished to lead a simple Christian life, and that there were at least three or four different sects of the Mennonite faith. How naïve I was. As I began reading through the literature on Mennonites I soon discovered that I might well be in over my head. I quickly learned that there had been numerous schisms throughout the history of the Mennonite faith. In my province of Ontario alone there are 20 different groups of Mennonites. I read about how the early Anabaptists—the Mennonites' religious forefathers—were persecuted throughout Europe for their beliefs that were seen as being at odds with both Catholic and Protestant churches. I found out that Mennonite history and culture are much more complex than their outward simplicity might suggest. I also discovered that many others have been involved in exploring Mennonite society and culture, particularly as it pertained to my area of interest: social change and continuity. This was not a big surprise to me, however, as research on the Mennonites has the potential to present such valuable understandings about the processes of change and continuity, offering insights well beyond their own community. Much scholarly research in this area has been conducted by Mennonites themselves and a good deal of that emphasizing more macro, structural, and quantitative approaches. As a firm



believer in the value of taking a sustained, qualitative approach and employing interactionist theory to understand social life, I saw the opportunity to contribute something new to the literature.

My lifelong geographical proximity to the Old Order community offered several methodological advantages. Not only did it place me in the heart of Ontario's Old Order Mennonite country, it also meant that I had a history in the community. Or, more importantly, my family had a history in the community and our family name was well regarded. As one would expect with traditional groups, personal reputation forms a strong basis for judging whether or not one can be trusted. In this regard, my family name was key to helping facilitate access. My grandfather, Frank Kleinknecht, had taught many of the now oldest members of the Old Order community. This was before the small schoolhouses that once dotted the countryside were subsumed in the mid-1960s by the large township schools. Having this as a potential "in" to the Old Order community was both advantageous and problematic.

### **Contemplating the Role of Reputation in Developing Trust and Rapport**

As a qualitative researcher, a good reputation can be essential to finding an "in" to our research settings. When the group knows nothing about a researcher's *personal* reputation, group members consider other aspects about you in order to situate you within their understanding of reality. Like anyone, they do this so that they might better know what to expect from you, how an interaction with you might proceed, and whether or not you can be trusted. In these instances, when personal reputation is unknown, the reputation of our discipline, or people fitting the researcher identity more generally, impinges

on our efforts to conduct a study. In this vein, telemarketing research has done us no favours. However, what we do offer is a sympathetic ear, open mind, and lots of time to understand how our participants feel, act, and see the world. The opportunity to explain our approach to participants is perhaps the highest card we can play as qualitative researchers.

For groups that are familiar with us *personally*, the element of reputation takes on a new dimension. Rosalie Wax (1986) maintains that personal reputation is critical to developing rapport, indicating that people often make decisions based on their assessment of our personal qualities. Knowing something about our personal background, participants are able to at least partially transcend the “scientific researcher” stereotype and consider our personal reputation when agreeing to participate and offer intimate details on their activities, perspectives, and experiences. This, of course, works both to our advantage and disadvantage.

When researching a group of people that is already at least somewhat familiar with you personally, through reputation, one might be hasty to assume that trust and rapport are pre-established. While having a good reputation going into the project likely aids in the development of trust and rapport it is by no means going to be a constant one can count on. As with any sustained qualitative project that puts one in close proximity to the communities of interest, trust and rapport are constantly being negotiated. For me, rapport was partially pre-established, but most certainly developed as I invoked and provoked stories of my grandfather.



As I found that more and more people in the Mennonite community knew my grandfather, and saw him in a positive light, it became a useful icebreaker to open an interview or conversation with a line such as: “You may have known my grandfather, Frank Kleinknecht?” To which most people would respond with something like, “Ah, you’re Frank’s grandson! Your grandfather was a wonderful man.” *Or* “Let me tell ya a story about Frank...” *Or* “My sister was so interested when she heard that your grandfather was the old Frank Kleinknecht. Because she really liked him as a teacher.” *Or* “He liked the name Barbara apparently. I remember my sister saying that. He said, ‘You know what we would name a girl if we had one? Barbara. You know what we would name another girl if we had another girl? Barbara.’”

When asking to meet with one Old Order Mennonite, he ended the conversation by saying:

How about you come over for Monday at 5:00 p.m. and you can stay for supper as well. That way we can have supper and then chat all we want into the evening. Well, why don’t I check with my wife to see if that’s okay. I know that if I tell her that it’s Frank Kleinknecht’s grandson, she’ll say “most definitely.”<sup>7</sup>

This was a great aspect of the research. Not only did it allow me to foster rapport with participants and help keep our discussions congenial, it allowed me to learn more about a man I had so much respect for. But, it wasn’t always win-win.

On one occasion when meeting with an older very conservative Mennonite man, I found the interview was moving in an unproductive direction and the tone had become rather sombre, so I thought it might be a

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<sup>7</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, the excerpted quotes throughout this dissertation are from in-depth or ad hoc qualitative interviews with Old Order Mennonites.

good time to invoke “the ghost of Frank” to get the interview back on course and set a lighter tone. So, at the right moment when there had been a pause in the conversation I said:

Steve: I was wondering, you must’ve known my grandfather?...  
Frank Kleinknecht?

Samuel: Nope.

Steve: He was a schoolteacher back in the ‘50s and ‘60s around here...

Samuel: Nope... [long pause]

And so we continued our interview.

I must admit that at times I also felt a sense of guilt by building on my family’s well-regarded reputation in the community. Sometimes it felt that I was “using” and, though I do not like to think of it this way, “abusing” my grandfather’s good name to secure me brownie points. Perhaps it even led to me finding out more about the community than I might have, had they not so trusted me and respected my family. Of course, developing such intimate familiarity with a group that trusts you not only on professional grounds, but also personal grounds, adds a dimension to the research that some of us, myself included, may not be all that comfortable with.

### **Managing Participants’ Taken For Granted**

As we go about our everyday lives as non-researchers, assuming certain things about the world in which we live permits for life to proceed in a somewhat orderly fashion. It is good to know that when I come to a green light, that traffic running perpendicular to me will stop. Or, that when my wife and I come home at the end of the day from work, that we will both pitch in to make

supper and care for our children. It is good to know that everyone is playing the same game. As researchers, a number of the things we take for granted in our everyday lives, cannot be taken for granted when we don our analytical caps. Because, while in many ways we all share common cultural elements, there is usually much more going on within certain life-worlds than meets the layman's often ethnocentric eye. While we know that we, as researchers, need to attune our gaze to the perspectives of those we are trying to understand, our participants will most likely continue to work with their taken for granted.

For research participants, the issue of "taken for granted" arises when they presume that we have more familiarity with their life-world than what we really do. Although sometimes it is hard to interject when our background knowledge of the group is being taken for granted by participants, we know that it is imperative for us to do so. This issue becomes amplified when the group knows us personally. And why would it not be? Probably part of the reason we are allowed to be there and why they feel somewhat comfortable with us is because they feel that they know us. Maybe you are from their area or you have a reputation that is well respected by members of the group. For the Old Order Mennonites that I was studying, they knew I grew up in the area, that my grandfather had taught them or many of their parents and grandparents, and that I had a good reputation, or, more specifically, I had a good name by way of a positive family reputation. The types of taken for granted that arose on the part of my familiarity to the group were numerous, but revolved around: having a good understanding about the Mennonite way of life, knowing the geographical area, and knowing who was related to

whom. This led to some complications, which could have been somewhat damaging to the study, or at the very least embarrassing, had I let their assumptions take root. Let me demonstrate with some examples from my research. On one occasion following an interview with an older female Mennonite I asked her for directions to attend an Old Order church, and here is how our conversation proceeded:

Edna: Our church is the one just heading into Creekside.

Steve: Okay, I know where you mean... Actually, are there not two Mennonite churches on the way into town?

Edna: Oh yes, but make sure you come to ours and not the Dave Martins. Ours is the one on the left, the Daves are on the right coming into town.

Steve: I guess that would be a problem if I went to their church?

Edna: Oh, yes. They would not be too happy if you walked in. They would likely not be physical towards you, but they would wait until you left before they would start their service. They're not very friendly to people outside their group, and you would be made to feel very unwelcome.

Steve: That's good to know.

At times it was assumed that since I was from the area that I would be familiar with who lived where, or at least have a sense of the different back roads and key benchmarks in the area. In the following conversation I had just asked an Old Order lady for directions to a potential informant for my research:

Sarah: Ezra's the fourth Mennonite farm in on the 14<sup>th</sup>, left hand side, just off Martin's road.

Steve: Ummm... I'm not sure where Martin's road is?

At times, it was also assumed that I would know more about the community than what I really did, and would be a bit more of an insider than what I really

was. Note the following comments and reaction by an Old Order lady when I told her that I did not know how to speak their dialect of German:

Edna: You must speak the language just a bit, being Frank's grandson.

Steve: My mother knows a bit, but I don't really know many words.

Edna: \*quizzical look\*

It was often taken for granted that I knew more about their culture than what I did. Things that seemed superficial and common knowledge to them were of great interest to me. In this vein, I found myself probing for more information, which again was met with quizzical stares, as it was just assumed that someone who had grown up surrounded by Mennonites would know much more about them than what I did. My ignorance was baffling, but sincere.

The Old Order Mennonites know their local community so well, that I, also being from the same area, was expected to know the people, places, and history equally well, or much more than what I did. Judging by their looks of confusion when I did not know certain things about them and the area, said to me: "Are you *really* Frank's grandson?" When you know the group on a somewhat more personal level, your own individual reputation is definitely much more on the line than if you were conducting your research anonymously or at a distance. At the same time, there seemed to be a trend in that a great deal about their local community seemed to be taken-for-granted. This pattern in their comments gave me the impression that their community-oriented lifestyle made them much more aware of the local area and people

than their individualistic, “globalized” neighbours—a finding that is consistent with Tönnies’ (1963 [1887]) understanding of *Gemeinschaft* communities.

### **Dealing with Role Conflict and Leaving the Field**

For me, getting in at least partially as a result of my ancestral reputation was personally problematic. I had a hard time reconciling the role conflict generated by being both “objective” researcher and “friend” to the participants. First and foremost, I did not want to abuse the good-name and close relationship that my family, and particularly my grandfather, had built up over the years. In addition, as I carried out the research, my respect and admiration for the Old Order community had only grown. As many a qualitative researcher has found, the personal bonds which we develop with those who share not only many hours of their life with us, but also close, personal experiences, makes it difficult to write about the community in a professional manner without questioning not only, “Am I doing the group justice?” but also, “Am I doing my friends and family justice?” At the same time, when conducting the research on the Old Order Mennonites I felt an even greater obligation to avoid reporting on certain insider “secrets” even when I was told that I could discuss such things in my dissertation. Needless to say, expectations run high when personal reputation is involved.

When building on and developing personal ties with participants, it is always a dilemma to filter out any personal biases that might encroach on one’s analysis. To reconcile this discrepancy is not an easy task. Our own perspectives and experiences are tied to that which we have done and the stocks of knowledge we have generated. With this in mind, I attempted to

distinguish my role as both analyst and friend to the Mennonite community as I conducted my research, while fully recognizing that both are not wholly separable.

Additionally, sometimes researchers might wish to escape their past projects and certain participants they have met along the way. However, truly “leaving the field” and severing ties with participants is not a real option when personal ties are pre-established with the community. Fortunately, I have been able to stay on good terms with everyone I have met during my research. At the same time, I have learned that foregoing such relationships for the sake of science is not all that necessary.

### **Concluding Comments on Personal Reputation and Field Research**

I have come to a greater appreciation of field research by having to grapple with the various dilemmas brought on by personal reputation. The advantage my family reputation provided for me in offering a way into the Mennonite community is perhaps best summed up in the following comments made by an Old Order lady: “It helped a lot [knowing you were Frank Kleinknecht’s grandson], and I probably would’ve let you come anyway, but when you said your name was Kleinknecht, I thought, ‘He’ll be okay’ (laughter).”

Reputations are like ghosts that follow us wherever we go. We try to keep the good ghosts around, and do what we can to exorcise those that hinder us.

Fortunately for me, the ghost of Frank has been not only a good ghost, but one that I am very much indebted to for success in the field, and otherwise. By riding on grandfather Frank’s reputational coat-tails my research was both enhanced and complicated.



We invest a great deal of ourselves any time we conduct a qualitative study. I think we up the ante that much more when the research takes on a personal tone. A good personal reputation can really set the scene for you, get you some ins, partially establish an element of trust and rapport, and have participants be somewhat more at ease because they feel that they know who you are. At the same time, personal reputation and assumed familiarity with the group in question leads participants to take for granted that we know more about them than what we really do. In addition, potentially interesting surface issues may get glossed over and living up to one's reputation can be a constant concern. In the end, the ghosts of our personal past and discipline are difficult to overcome. In another context, Robert Prus, an experienced ethnographer from the University of Waterloo, once told me, "Steve, you can't fight ghosts, play your own game and hope you win." When reputation is on your side, I have learned to: appreciate the biases it creates, use it when it is advantageous, and, for my own piece of mind, try not to abuse it.

I have attempted to offer not only details on the specific methods used, but also present a sketch of the research background to better situate the findings in the forthcoming chapters. By inserting oneself in the life-worlds of the people we are attempting to understand, we necessarily become the instrument through which our participants' stories get told. I take the approach that it is necessary to be as upfront as possible about the background of our projects to help inform the reader of the personal factors that, despite our best efforts, influence the data we collect and present. While the qualitative researcher's representations of social reality are somewhat unique



to the storyteller, I believe that our depictions of social reality are as true to the lived experiences of people as we can get. Although there are limitations to such an approach, the benefits of being there and talking with participants about their reality in a very detailed manner cannot be underestimated. Research on classroom pedagogy is directing instructors more and more towards experiential learning. Such an approach works because it allows students to experience and apply the ideas for themselves. For many of the same reasons the open-ended in-depth interviews and field research techniques I employed offered me a more informed sense of Old Order Mennonite culture. I was able to better align my perspective with that of the participants and acquire authentic firsthand understandings of how Old Orders are able to go about their everyday lives, contemplate and negotiate change, and enact continuity.

With this background in mind, I now turn to the first of four results chapters. In this next chapter I analyze the role that isolation and insulation play in fostering social distance between the Old Order Mennonites and the modern world that surrounds them.

## CHAPTER 4

### ACHIEVING SOCIAL DISTANCE: ISOLATION, INSULATION, AND INTERACTION

#### INTRODUCTION

Steve: What sorts of things do you appreciate about being an Old Order Mennonite?

Enoch: (He ponders this a bit before responding. I'm leery that it's not an appropriate question, but he assures me that it's a good one.) Separation. Separation from the outside world. The human mortal is inclined to evil. We have to try to live a moral life. I go to town and do some things that other Canadians do. But, we believe in living separate from the outside world to avoid its negative immoral influences. There may be some good on the Internet and television, but there is also a lot of evil there. We have a willingness to sacrifice for the good of the next generation. (interview)

A defining feature of the Old Order Mennonites is living separate from the modern, secular world. For Old Orders, separation is a lifestyle choice, which as explored herein, is both a means and an end. Viewing themselves as “God’s people,” members of this group often suggest that, for them, it is important to live *in*, but not *of* this world. This perspective is not only reflected in the physical and geographical ways in which the Old Order segregate themselves from their “host” society, but also in how various material and non-material cultural elements such as dress, language, norms, and ideology distinguish them from the outside world. As with other ethnic

groups living in culturally diverse societies, the Old Order Mennonites find themselves in a constant battle to maintain their culture.

In this chapter I analyze the ways in which physical and geographical isolation, technological barriers, interaction rules, dress, and language serve as elements of social boundary maintenance. In so doing, I intend to show how this particular group of Mennonites actively attempts to preserve their culture and sense of group identity amidst the widespread and fast-paced social change that occurs in the modern communities surrounding them. I argue that the various social boundary maintenance components are largely interrelated and interwoven within the cultural fabric of the community, and serve to mediate change and preserve the Old Orders' culture. While chapters five through seven examine the roles played by social control and group ideology as boundary maintaining practices, this chapter focuses on how the aforementioned cultural elements isolate and insulate members from, and during, interaction with people of other cultures. These practices serve to create social distance between insiders and outsiders. If direct or indirect contact between insiders and outsiders is a precursor to acculturation and assimilation, then achieving social distance represents a central constituent in the preservation of culture. Throughout the analysis I offer insights into how the concept of boundary maintenance and ideas from interactionist theory provide a more in-depth understanding of how social distance is managed and maintained "on the ground."

## PHYSICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL ISOLATION

[Non-Mennonite culture is] something that we've never been exposed to really. The only time that we saw non-Mennonites [growing up] was if we went into town and dealt with them, or the feed salesman came here and talked with my husband. It was just always at a distance. (former Old Order Mennonite, interview)

Within the social domains of religion, family, work, education, and leisure Mennonite social life is largely self-contained. As a result, each of these domains is more or less separated from overlap with the same social domains in modern society. For instance, today's Old Order Mennonites still choose to live, as much as possible, in physical isolation from the outside world. While not segregating themselves in communes as Hutterites (another group of Anabaptists) do, the majority of Old Order Mennonites live on farms outside modern communities. As one Old Order put it: "Most Old Order Mennonites do not have that much to do with the outside world" (interview). By and large, work is carried out on the family farm, providing goods or services to others within their community, and working with other Old Orders. Most Old Order Mennonite children attend their own parochial schools. And while non-Mennonites may attend Old Order church services and vice versa, this is not common. Social and recreational activities such as visiting, singing, and playing games like baseball, volleyball, and hockey also take place predominantly with other Old Orders. As a result, interactions with outsiders for most Old Orders are limited, as much as possible, to business transactions. Access to the amenities of the outside world is still afforded by living on the peripheries of modern communities. By distancing themselves from the

outside world, they are able to avoid extended contact with outsiders and thus, help to reduce undue outside influence on their culture.

### **Farming**

In discussing the history of the Anabaptists (the Mennonites' religious forefathers), Jager (1983) points out that farming was one of the few occupations that allowed the group to support itself and achieve some degree of autonomy. Farming also involved "the need for minimal contact with hostile outsiders" while isolating the Anabaptists from "the threats of urban life and urban culture" (Jager, 1983: 78-79). While the Old Orders no longer perceive the threat of persecution as being as real or imminent as it once was, they are still cautious about the integrating forces of modern society. As they continue to engage predominantly in farm-based labour, they are well aware of how this economic choice separates them from modern society.

Of particular concern for the community is keeping the young men and women on the family farm. The temptations of the outside world are seen as being greater for their young, and teenagers in particular. A community-wide emphasis on maintaining their simple, agrarian lifestyle reinforces separation and, in turn, cultural continuity. Donald Martin (2003), in his book on the Old Order Mennonites of Ontario, makes this point well: "The Old Order generally prefer agricultural work above other occupations because the youth are more sheltered from outside influences" (p. 272). A former Old Order Mennonite offered similar comments, emphasizing how being on the farm keeps their people separate:

Old Order Mennonites really try to keep their young couples on farms still at the moment. I think that's another way of trying to keep traditions. If you're on a farm you're not under society. You're kind of there on your own, separate. (interview)

The lifestyle that accompanies farming reinforces integration within their own community. As Jager (1983) points out, farm labour is time-consuming and exhausting, leaving “little leisure or energy for reflection or for innovation” (p. 82). At the same time he points out that farm-life binds the family and community together as a cohesive unit in a way that is largely absent in other forms of urban occupations. Living off of the land has been a natural extension of the Mennonites' vocational history, and has served to keep them away from the potential integrative forces of the modern world.

### **Religion and Education**

Having their own churches and schools, also found in rural areas, further enables the community to physically remove itself from contact with those outside the group. In a number of ways, Breton's (1964) concept of institutional completeness applies to Old Order Mennonite society. Institutional completeness refers to a community's internal capacity for self-sufficiency in terms of institutional support such as religion and education. To a great extent, the Old Orders are able to meet the social needs of their society without having to rely on the outside community for services or their social well-being. Social life is largely contained and maintained within the confines of the community, thus avoiding a great deal of unnecessary contact with outsiders and potentially contrasting perspectives.

Through their parochial school system Old Orders not only have a good degree of control over the curriculum, they are also able to segregate their children from non-Mennonites and the modern world. Members of the Old Order community have written some of the books used in their schools. This allows them, for example, to teach the children more about their own history. An Old Order Mennonite schoolteacher had this to say about the use of more Mennonite-oriented material in the parochial schools:

We felt that our children should be taught about their history so we had some books made to explain it. Since Canada is multicultural and promotes different cultural groups teaching about their own cultures, we are not scrutinized in our schools much from the outside. So, our schoolbooks are more apt to be allowed. (interview)

By emphasizing the group's way of life through their separate schools, they are also able to foster a perspective about Mennonite life as being preferable and worldly conveniences as unnecessary or "bad." This point is exemplified by an Old Order Mennonite teacher's comments regarding an exercise carried out by his students:

In school I have children do a project on what they like about living in the country versus the city. Although you could have a television in the country, a lot of children say that the television is one of the negative things about living in the city. (interview)

The quote speaks to how the two social worlds are constructed. The outside world is presented as having many sinful, immoral temptations in it, while the Mennonite world is depicted as, although still prone to sin, somewhat more regulated so that its lifestyle is less prone to sin. Again, the avoidance of alternative perspectives, especially during the younger generation's formative

years, allows for primary socialization to take place with minimal interference from the modern world.

The Old Order Mennonites have some one-room schoolhouses, but most of their schools consist of two rooms. In the two-room schoolhouses grades one to four are taught in the primary room and grades five to eight are taught in the senior room. An Old Order Mennonite or a Markham Mennonite teaches the classes. Although non-Mennonites might have better formal training, having only Mennonite teachers helps reduce the influence of the outside world. Shaffir's (1995) ethnographic research on Montreal's Hassidic Jewish community relates here. He observed that selecting teachers in Hassidic boys' schools was done so as to choose a candidate that would not influence the students' religious beliefs.

For the Old Orders, exposure to the outside world is further restricted by the arrangement that their children finish their formal education either at Christmas or at the end of the school year in which they turn 14 (typically grade eight). The passage of Bill 52 in 2006 raised the required age of formal education from 16 to 18. Previous to this change in legislation, the legal stipulation was that in order to leave school before the age of 16, Old Order children must continue their education by working on the family farm. As one Old Order deacon told me, leaders of the Old Order community are keeping a close eye on what this change will mean for them:

We are closely watching Bill 52, which would change the requirement for children to stay in school from 16 to 18 years old. We are working through the Mennonite Central Committee to negotiate on the new Bill. (interview)



An extended formal education is seen as largely unnecessary for the simple, farm-based lifestyle they choose to live. One Old Order gentleman put it this way:

We strongly believe in the importance of parents teaching their children particular skills which are part of the Mennonite lifestyle. The boys are taught how to farm and the girls are taught about the home and work there. (interview)

Moreover, the infrastructure is not in place for separate full-time secondary schooling. Attending high school would mean a transfer to the public school system, a move which the Old Order Mennonites are not prepared to make.

The Old Order Mennonites did not always have their own school system, though. Until the mid-1960s they went to school with non-Mennonite children. In 1964, Bill 54 abolished the province's 1,500 small schools in favour of large central township schools, where children had to be transported to and from school (Martin, 2003). The Old Orders resisted this change and decided to form their own private, parochial school system. They cited the following reasons for withdrawing: they were uncomfortable with the modern teaching of evolution; they did not appreciate the emphasis on space travel; they opposed physical training and the required clothes; they rejected the use of TV as a teaching aid; they feared the exposure of their children to the profanities and pornography of the larger society in the large consolidated schools; they deemed the long bus rides to and from school unprofitable to their children; and, they did not appreciate the idea that some of the grade seven and eight students would be transported to separate junior high schools (Martin, 2003). Their opposition to the changes being made in the public

school system demonstrates the types of fears the Old Orders have about the acculturative effects of new schools on their children.

Canadian public schools have become increasingly secular, losing much of the overt Christian moral grounding that had once been an everyday part of school life for teachers and pupils. The parochial school system allows the Old Order Mennonites to retain and extend the use of religion within the classroom. A senior Old Order gentleman, who had attended the public school system before the Old Orders separated, discusses this point:

Well when we went to school we would have our Bible reading every morning. We would have the Lord's Prayer every morning. We recited the Apostles' Creed every morning. They took that out of the Public School system completely now. Those are things that they do in the parochial school.  
(interview)

For Old Order children and children from other conservative and moderate groups of Mennonites that still attend the public school system, teachers try to avoid discussing issues within the classroom that might conflict with their students' beliefs. In doing so, as a public school teacher mentioned, students are shielded from some of the beliefs and ideas that run counter to their own: "So we don't do any teaching on the dinosaurs whatsoever, just because they want to keep their children isolated from the outside world as much as possible" (interview).

It was common for public school teachers who taught Old Order Mennonites and David Martin Mennonites to talk about the degree to which the Mennonite children had been socialized within their distinct community so as to respect authority within the classroom. The following comments made

by a public school principal are representative of remarks made by other public school teachers and principals regarding the experience of working in a school with Mennonite children:

If they [i.e., teachers] come from another school to here, it's like stepping back to the 50s and 60s. Their kids are so well behaved, there is a respect, there is not the bad talk, there is not the swearing, there is not the disrespect you see in the city schools. They [i.e., the Mennonite children] know that they are there to learn, it's their job and they know they are here until grade eight and that is their job until grade eight. Then they go back to the family farm. When teachers leave here and go back to the city schools, again it is culture shock because they can't believe how disrespectful, loud, and rowdy the kids are either towards each other or towards their teachers... (interview)

During their children's early formative years, the process of primary socialization is an area which the Mennonites aim to exercise as much control over as possible. By developing their own school system they have been able to further isolate their children who are seen as most vulnerable to outside temptations. An Old Order Mennonite teacher remarked that school segregation has been helpful in terms of maintaining a sense of contentment with their lifestyle:

Since we adopted the parochial school system, our children and families don't rub shoulders as much with the outside world. This has helped to maintain our community, as people are happy with their lifestyle. (interview)

The temptation to question the group's beliefs is lessened by not knowing or being directly exposed to opposing viewpoints. A former Old Order Mennonite reiterates the importance of keeping outside contact to a minimum through limiting school attendance and work to within the Mennonite community:

I asked my mom, “What is the reason that we don’t send our kids on to high school?” She said, “A lot of that is to keep them away from the influence of the world. If we sent them on to high school they would be more out from under our wings. Then they would start accepting the worldly way of doing things.” So, the only way the Old Order Mennonites can keep up their traditions is by keeping everybody within their own circle and not letting them go out to public places. If they have contact with somebody, it’s just to be with another Mennonite. That’s just the way of it. If they have jobs, it usually is just with another Mennonite, not with people outside the community. (interview)

There is disagreement within the community regarding the extent to which members will be separated from the outside world, alternative viewpoints, and disagreeable activities. For instance, an Old Order participant explained how some material in the public school system is censored so that conservative Mennonite children are not exposed to ideas that run contrary to their beliefs. She made it clear to me, however, that not everyone in the community is of the same opinion when it comes to matters of schooling and the degree of separation. While Old Order Mennonites see the value in sending their children to their separate schools so as to reduce outside influence, differences of opinion exist when it comes to what children should be exposed to within the school. When it comes to screening reading material, for example, she had this to say:

We have screening [in our schools], too... You might think that we all think alike, which is very untrue because we don’t. Because I might think that a child needs to learn how to differentiate between things. So, the child needs to learn that just because this person in the book got away with talking like that, that you can’t get away with talking like that. There’s a certain age that a child could manage to read that and not get real harmed. So, I think if they don’t ever see anything they’ll be very sheltered or innocent. I think that they need to exercise their brain. My son-in-law [a parochial school teacher] says,

yes he knows, and he feels that way too, but for his school, there are several families in his school that feel that that must not be in school. But he said that at home you can do your own censoring for books. (interview)

Differences of opinion exist when it comes to handling the social boundaries of the community. On the one hand, there is an effort to avoid as much exposure as possible to activities and viewpoints that might challenge insider beliefs and norms. On the other hand, completely sheltering their children from outside influences is seen as a poor strategy. This point relates to Shaffir's (1987, 1995) observation regarding the "witnessing" of alternative perspectives and different ways of life among the Hassidim of Montreal. For some Hassidim, encountering these things is seen as problematic as it might serve to undermine the group's perspective (Shaffir, 1987). For others, however, witnessing contrasting perspectives and lifestyles is seen as having the effect of reinforcing the group's identity (Shaffir, 1995). From this point of view, at least some exposure is assumed to be necessary in order to help children learn to differentiate "right" and "wrong." Where and when this exposure happens, however, is still of concern. Access to witnessing different ways of doing things is still seen as best handled within the context of the Old Order community (e.g., within the parochial school or at home under family guidance). Total isolation, at least from the Mennonite perspective, is ultimately not essential for the survival of their culture. Rather, when it comes to distancing members of the community from the modern world, controlled or mediated exposure is perhaps a more apt way of describing their approach to

boundary maintenance. I develop this point further in subsequent sections and chapters.

A relatively recent educational initiative in the Waterloo Region has been the introduction of high school courses that cater solely to the more conservative and moderate Mennonite groups. This special program is run in a town that is right at the heart of Mennonite country. While the town has a public high school, the Mennonite classes are run in a separate building. A former Old Order Mennonite described the setup in the following way:

They go two days a week and then the rest of the days they are allowed to work at home on the farm. They have to report everything that they do. So it's not just that they are let loose and are allowed to do anything, they actually have to report that they're helping on the farm and what it is that they are doing. But at least they are getting their education that way. And they have a lot of homework that they have to do, too. (interview)

During a time when family farming has become more difficult, the Old Order community continues to consider ways to adapt to the challenges they are facing. Any new arrangements, however, must consider the extent to which they alter the Old Order lifestyle and bring them closer to the modern world. For some members of the community, extending their education past grade eight is seen as the lesser of two evils. The more intrusive alternative, perhaps, would involve having Old Order Mennonite teenagers continue with full-time education alongside their non-Mennonite counterparts in public secondary schools. The current part-time, separate school arrangement allows for continuing education when necessary with students still being able to spend most of their time working on the farm with their family.

In a very direct, physical way keeping to the their own community by working on the farm, and by attending their own schools and churches, allows for members of the Old Order community to avoid coming into contact with non-Mennonites and a lifestyle that in many ways is at odds with their own. In doing so, they avoid being influenced by outsiders and tempted by outside things. In essence, this avoidance of contact allows them to maintain their viewpoint that the outside world, although in some ways is good, is also filled with much evil. Outside encounters have the potential to introduce new ways of envisioning the social world that might well present viable justifications for doing things differently. By confining their lives to the Mennonite world, the Old Orders are able to help sustain a belief system emphasizing the Mennonite way of doing things. Their perspective and approach to life, while accepted as one of many ways of doing things, is still seen by and large as the best way.

However, as Brubacher (1984) observed, the types of farming which Old Order Mennonites have become engaged in, involves them “rubbing shoulders with a broader section of society than ever before” (p. 6). Now, 25 years later, farm-related enterprise is no longer the sole money-producer for the Old Order community. Since Brubacher’s writing, the Old Orders have become involved in on-farm manufacturing at an increasing rate. New ways are emerging to make a living during a time when affordable, arable land is becoming increasingly scarce. Instead of looking to vocations that would take their young men away from the family farm, the Old Order community has responded to the challenge through such measures as settling in other rural areas offering a fiscally viable way to continue their lifestyle; finding new

ways of marketing their products to the general public; building a growing cottage industry around Mennonite-produced crafts; allowing for, but controlling, new forms of technology that enhance farming and allow them to remain competitive; and, constructing shops on their farms to diversify to small-scale manufacturing. As a result of these changes, they have continued to increase their contact with those outside their community. Economic accommodations are seen as necessary, however, in order to avoid having individuals seek work in urban centres. This permits the family to stay close throughout the day and avoid sustained contact with outsiders. Physical isolation then is only one component of how the Old Orders are able to sustain their culture. As more and more contact is made with outsiders as part of accommodating to the changes in their community, Mennonites have had to organize their interaction with outsiders in ways which delimit the types of encounters they might have. As discussed next, technological barriers to interaction are but one of the ways in which interaction is controlled.

## **TECHNOLOGICAL BARRIERS**

In terms of what you can and cannot have, I figure it's all a matter in where you put the hedge. (Old Order Mennonite, field notes)

In striving to live a simple life, Old Order Mennonites eschew many forms of advanced technology such as television, computers, the Internet, and automobiles. The conveniences of modern technology are seen as infringing on a humble, pious life. Old Order Mennonites often describe such possessions as being “too worldly.” Restricting access to and the use of some



of the outside world's more advanced forms of technology serve to further insulate the community from change. The automobile, for instance, is not seen as evil in and of itself, but when used inappropriately it can become problematic. As an Old Order lady described it, one problem with motorized vehicles is that they allow you to get to places the community feels you probably should not be:

Some people think that we think the car is an evil thing, we don't. Most of our people don't think that at all. It's just that they figure there's a danger if you own a car that you're much more able to get to places easily where you don't really fit in with a car than you would with a buggy. We do accept rides in cars. We don't think the car itself is an evil thing or else why would you ride in it? (interview)

In providing an insider's take on the Old Order Mennonites, Isaac Horst (2000), an Old Order himself, has this to say about restricting the use of the automobile: "We do not wish to offer a readily available means for escaping from the watchful eye of parents... As long as no car stands at the door, beckoning to be used, these temptations are much smaller" (p. 93). Another Old Order participant makes a similar point, but acknowledges that restricting access to vehicles only impedes what one can do, arguing that, despite attempts to control their young people, it ultimately comes down to a will finding a way: "If they have the cars, then the young people can go *wherever* they want. They can go places where we don't want them to go to and all that sort of stuff. In a way it makes sense, but in another way we find that it doesn't because they will get there anyways" (interview). Another Old Order highlights the ways in which having the horse and buggy as their primary means of transportation keeps them separate:

The horse and buggy keeps us separate and therefore maintains our community. If you pass me with a car, I don't feel like I should have a car or that I'm missing out on something. Some people in the outside world, though, may feel a need to compete with you and have a nicer vehicle. I do not feel a need to compete with you because I am separate from your society and I do not feel as inclined to fall into the sins of the outside world. When I am going into town this afternoon in my buggy, I do not feel part of society and thus I'm not drawn into society's lifestyle. Driving a car is not sinful, but it makes you part of society. (interview)

The comments of a former Old Order Mennonite reiterate the idea that driving a horse and buggy restricts access to the outside world and therefore helps to remove the temptation to engage in wrongful acts:

[One Sunday after church] we were getting company and I had forgotten to get this one kind of ingredient that I needed. So we stopped in at the store and got some and we would *never* have done that as an Old Order. I almost felt guilty doing it. I think the other thing too that comes with it is the convenience of the vehicle because with a horse and buggy I just couldn't have done it. (interview)

Also consequential is how she “almost felt guilty” for shopping on a Sunday.

What is of interest is how buying into the ideology of the group translates itself into feelings of self-approval and disapproval. In essence, the ideology creates a social-psychological boundary reinforcing aspects of right and wrong in the community, and thus dissuading innovation and potential social change.<sup>8</sup>

Computers and the Internet are looked at in much the same way as the automobile. An Old Order makes this point by stating that keeping more advanced forms of electronics out helps to preserve their way of life: “[A] way of maintaining the community is staying away from computers and not having

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<sup>8</sup> I explore this point further in chapter 7, which examines the social construction of the group's ideology.

a fax machine” (interview). Mennonites feel that these things may serve goodly purposes, but can also lead to sin. At the same time, they believe that computers and the Internet permit greater access to learning about the cultures of other societies which may be in contradiction with their own.

Regarding the David Martin Mennonites, who are permitted to have a computer in their barn or shop for work purposes, stories get passed around among the Old Orders that the David Martins, particularly the teenagers, are using the technology inappropriately. An Old Order Mennonite recounted a story she had heard about some David Martin Mennonite children using the Internet to watch hockey. She maintained that, “[The] fathers that use the computer should know of some of the temptations that they’d [i.e., the children] be exposed to on the Internet” (interview). The suggestion here is that the computer and Internet should not be allowed. Given that they are permitted, however, it is surprising to her that the parents do not better control their children’s access. By controlling access to such technologies, the Old Order Mennonites help to ensure that aspects of the modern world and all of its problems are kept out. At the same time the temptation to do sinful things and become more worldly is reduced. As illustrated by the previous quotes, the Old Orders feel that indulging in the conveniences of the modern world only serves to remove them both physically and mentally from their own community.

Disasters with admitting new technology generate folklore surrounding the negative consequences of such mistaken permissions which serve as fuel for denying future requests for new technology. An Old Order Mennonite told

the story of a neighbour who had bought a steam-powered tractor that was subsequently stored in the barn. A spark from the machine ended up setting hay in the barn ablaze and burning the building to the ground. He explained it this way:

You might wonder why many in our communities didn't adopt modern farm equipment right away. Well, for my neighbour, it became clear to him that he didn't want to use it. He had purchased a steam powered tractor and back then they didn't have the safety features they do now. When he had put his tractor in his barn one night a spark from the coal started a fire and burnt his barn down. So after that he didn't want to use any modern equipment anymore. (field notes)

This costly “experiment with technology” served as an important lesson to the Mennonite, and those who know the story, of what can happen when a group is too hasty to adopt new forms of technology.<sup>9</sup> That said, while many outsiders might see the Old Order community as being locked in time, this is not the case. Rather, the Old Order Mennonites believe that some change is permissible, so long as it does not jeopardize their lifestyle and does not contradict their religious teachings. Technology is slowly allowed in after great debate as the church ponders its necessity for preserving other aspects essential to their way of life. Some technology, such as the telephone and electric stoves, has been cautiously permitted over the years. Members of the church ministry—i.e., deacons, ministers, and bishops—are typically the last to adopt new forms of technology, since they are to serve as exemplars or role models for the rest of the community. As one deacon described it, “Most

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<sup>9</sup> Another Mennonite couple recounted the same story to me in explaining some of the rules they have had about storing farm equipment in their barns.

[clergy] are willing to make a personal sacrifice for the sake of the church” (interview).

Building on their principles of separation from the world and worldly things and living a simple, humble life, the Old Order Mennonites are able to distance and further mediate contact with outside cultures. The next section explores how elements of dress and language further serve to distinguish Old Order Mennonites from non-Mennonites during face-to-face interaction.

### **SELF-PRESENTATION THROUGH DRESS AND LANGUAGE AS INTERACTIONAL BOUNDARIES**

The focus of analysis to this point has been on how the Old Order community acts to isolate its members from outside interaction. Barth (1969) argues, however, that complete isolation from acculturating forces is ultimately not essential for preserving a group’s culture and identity. What is essential is developing means through which interaction with outsiders is limited and controlled. This raises the issue of how self-presentation is mediated by rules and how various interactional elements such as communication (both verbal and non-verbal) and physical appearance (e.g., attire, body weight and size, jewelry, hairstyle) are used to negotiate meaning during face-to-face interaction. Such elements become important components of our definition of the situation, and subsequently how we attempt to persuade others to view us in certain ways (Goffman, 1959).

In their everyday encounters with insiders and outsiders, the Old Order Mennonites communicate meaning, verbally and non-verbally, subtle and direct, to others through their self-presentation. As Goffman (1959) notes, it is

through our everyday presentation of self that we attempt to influence others' impressions of us. Most Old Order Mennonite to non-Mennonite interaction can be seen very much in dramaturgical terms wherein outsiders are, for the most part, only permitted to witness the Old Orders' front-stage selves. Here, I explore how "interaction rules" structure the types of encounters Old Order Mennonites have with outsiders. I continue by examining how the Old Order Mennonites' plain style of dress and unique dialect of German, as components of their self-presentation, are used to symbolize difference and act to influence interaction rituals with insiders and outsiders.

### **Interaction Rules**

As part of controlling change, the conservative Mennonite community as a whole believes in following certain guidelines for everyday life that play themselves out on an interactional level. These rules of interaction are expected to be followed by both Mennonites and those that interact with them in settings where non-Mennonite and Mennonite social worlds overlap. Formal rules of interaction are communicated to members of the group via the church, whereas more informal rules are learned through family and peers. Similarly, the norms governing interaction with outsiders are sometimes communicated directly to the non-Mennonite community by a representative of the church, through verbal or non-verbal communication with members of the community, or by word of mouth between outsiders who are familiar with the rules of the Old Order group. And, as will be seen in the subsequent two sections, certain rules are interpreted indirectly from elements of the Old Orders' self-presentation such as their dress and dialect. For the Old Order

Mennonites, direct forms of interaction with outsiders occur most frequently during business transactions and when visiting non-Mennonite settlements for such things as shopping, health care, and, for a select group of Old Order and David Martin Mennonites, education. In these situations, interaction rules act to insulate, rather than wholly isolate, members of the conservative Mennonite community from acculturation.

A strong emphasis on endogamy—i.e., only marrying from within one’s cultural group—helps to ensure that intimate relationships are reserved only for others within the Old Order community. Scott (1996) indicates that the group’s rules inhibit members from marrying both non-believers and Christians of other denominations. Such rules stipulate the appropriateness of relationships between insiders and outsiders. While some Old Order Mennonites generate friendships with non-Mennonites, it is more common to have stronger ties to those within the community. In cases where a visit is made to a non-Mennonite home, social rules structure the interaction and activities while there. For instance, a former Old Order Mennonite recalls a time when her family was invited to visit with a non-Mennonite family and the discomfort she felt:

They had the TV turned on and *ahhhh* I wanted to watch the TV, but Mom always said, “No, you can go and do something else.” So things like that made it awkward to be in a home that had those kinds of things. So you never really felt comfortable.

Similar rules apply when visiting more progressive groups of Mennonites. Again, children are instructed or reminded by their parents about what is and is not permissible. Note the following research participant’s comments:



Mom always said that the churches in the States were about 15 years ahead of us here with traditions and stuff. I still remember when we went to the States as teenagers, she really strongly warned me. She said, “You can go to the States and you can have lots of fun, but just remember leave there what is theirs and come home and go back to your same traditions again. Don’t get envious about their way of dressing up and stuff.” (interview)

With regards to the types of commercial transactions Old Orders have with non-Mennonites, discussion is more or less limited to business matters. That said, the Old Orders are much more open than the David Martin Mennonites, who are amenable to doing business with outsiders, but will not tolerate much, if any, socializing. Laurence (1980) observed a similar trend in his research on the Amish. He notes that Amish business transactions with outsiders were “impersonal, and mediated with money, while internal relations were very personal and individual, and were almost never mediated with money, but with conversation and real communication” (Ch.2, p. 41). In his study on non-Mennonite and Old Order Mennonite interaction, Brubacher (1984) observes that, since members of the two groups do not know or understand each other’s culture very well, “There is an underlying uncertainty as to where members of each community are free to interact with the other, without damaging the integrity of either” (p. 84). By keeping outsiders more or less at arm’s length during their face-to-face interaction, the Old Orders are able to depersonalize their non-Mennonite dealings. In doing so, they further bolster the social boundaries which restrict the types of relationships that are formed between insiders and outsiders.

As mentioned, Old Order Mennonites, for the most part, do not attend public schools. However, there have been some exceptions. One public



elementary school in the Waterloo Region of Ontario serves only the area's Mennonite population. Students attending this school include Old Order, David Martin, Markham, and Old Colony Mennonites. There are other rural schools in the Region that have both Mennonite and non-Mennonite pupils. In these schools new teachers quickly learn the informal rules for interacting with the more conservative groups of Mennonites. While there is no rulebook per se, teachers new to working in such an environment learn from members of the teaching staff what is and is not permissible. The following comments are illustrative of the types of insights shared by teachers and principals regarding how they came to understand the rules:

I asked Mr. Maxwell if the Mennonite children were to be treated differently than the non-Mennonite kids due to their religious beliefs. He told me, "Yes, the Mennonite children were and are to be treated differently in certain circumstances." I asked him if they [i.e., teachers] were told this when they started the job. He said, "Yes, the principal would let you know some of the dos and don'ts about working with the Mennonite children." I asked him if there were any "formal" rules written down, such as in the form of a handbook, that would tell them how the Mennonite children were to be handled. He didn't think there was a book, at least he had never seen one. (teacher, field notes)

In cases where public school teachers overstep the boundaries of what the Mennonite community regards as acceptable course content and teaching techniques, some parents will either write or phone the teacher or principal explaining the indiscretion. For instance, in a letter sent to a teacher reprimanding him for discussing the reproductive system in his science class, a Mennonite parent writes:

Mr. Smith, Edna was very upset regarding the discussion in science class about the body systems. Occurrences like this

become very embarrassing at these sensitive ages, especially BEFORE BOYS. I would like her excused, should this happen again. As you know, we don't practice these things between boys and girls, and greatly appreciate if you would try to consider this. Thank-you.

Another teacher recalls a similar situation, but with the boundaries of the community being reinforced by a member of the clergy:

Mr. Maxwell also recalled a time when he was teaching health, and in this case details about the reproductive system, to a group of students that included male Mennonites (not females as they were not permitted to be in the health class and thus were given other things to work on). He stated, "I was showing the class a diagram of the male reproductive system and knew, given that there were Mennonites in the class, that I had to speak in very very general terms about what things were and what they did. So, I spoke in general terms. The next day the school principal approached me and said that he had had a call from the Mennonite bishop complaining that I had taught the Mennonites about the reproductive system, which they were not supposed to know about. I told the principal that, yes I had done this, but tried to be very very general when speaking about it. He told me, okay, that he would handle things." (field notes)

In line with some of the reservations that the Old Orders have about the public school system (as mentioned earlier), through word of mouth teachers are instructed to avoid the use of television in class, especially when a program or movie is purely for entertainment purposes. Likewise, newspaper assignments that talk too much about the outside world are to be limited. Furthermore, it is expected that teachers will control access to books discussing evolution, space travel, and the reproductive process. When such topics are to be discussed in class, Mennonite students typically visit the library so that they are not exposed. Shaffir (1995) observed similar practices within the Hasidic all-boys' schools he researched. Like those working with

conservative Mennonite children, teachers in his study were given specific instructions on how to present the secular materials so as not to challenge students' beliefs. For example, newspapers, magazines, records, tapes, and movies are not to be used in class. Also, teachings about reproduction and the theory of evolution, and a number of other secular ideas are to have no place in the curriculum. As such, censorship of classroom materials is used to help avoid exposure to the outside world which may disrupt the socialization of children into the Hasidic way of life.

Library books that might strike a chord with the Mennonite community are reviewed ahead of time, and if they are not felt to meet the Mennonites' standards, they will not be allowed to sign out the material. A teacher described how some books have to be censored at his school:

We do have censorship. Other books that come to mind are books on the ancient Romans and the Egyptians where they have pictures of the statues and, of course, the statues are nude. So, what do I have to do? I have to get a marker out and put clothing on the statues. (interview)

It is also typical in schools with large conservative Mennonite populations to form all-Mennonite classes. In other cases, teachers might choose to group Mennonite students together in their class. Such strategies help to limit Mennonites' exposure to what their community might regard as questionable content or inappropriate classroom exercises (e.g., newspaper assignments, units on dinosaurs and space travel) or teaching methods (e.g., television programs or films). In these ways, the rules for teaching Mennonites help to reduce exposure to unwanted aspects of the outside world and further maintain the social boundaries of the community.

### **The Role of Clothing**

In terms of their individual, physical self-presentation, Old Orders choose to dress in simple, plain clothing and do not wear jewelry. Women wear black bonnets, dark coloured dresses with a simple print, and aprons. Men wear broad-brimmed hats (made of straw or fabric), suspenders, dark pants, and plain button-up shirts. Their modest style of dress is based directly on theological explanations regarding humility and non-conformity. Fretz (1989) states that Old Orders' motivations to dress the way they do "...are based on the attempt to symbolize resistance to vanity and pride. Plain dress is intended to remind members of their commitment to follow Christ and to show that there is a difference in the value systems of the believers and of those in the world" (p. 74).

Old Order Mennonites recognize the ways in which their austere clothing and overall outward appearance serve to maintain their identity. Note the following remarks by an Old Order female participant: "[Your dress] is part of your protection as a Mennonite. When you go away it's like God's way of shielding you with your garb" (interview). The Old Orders see their style of dress as not only serving as a constant reminder of who they are, but also separating them and restricting outside interaction. In this way, their attire and accompanying frame of mind about how they appear help to restrict unwanted influences in the outside world. A former Old Order Mennonite makes this point well:

Traditionally, years ago they [i.e., Mennonite men] wore suspenders to keep the pants up because the pants weren't tight at that time. Now it's just done more out of tradition, it's not there to keep the pants up. It's more that when you go into

town wearing suspenders you always feel kind of different. It's the same with wearing a bonnet and the shawl. It kind of separated you from not feeling quite so comfortable with society as a whole. Because I remember when we still dressed like Old Orders and we went in the public, people looked at you differently. There were always people that looked at you and you could tell they kind of wondered where you were from. You always felt slightly self-conscious and I don't think there's a Mennonite who doesn't. (interview)

An Old Order comments on how their style of dress mediates their interactions and restricts the types of places they might otherwise visit had it not been for their distinctive attire:

Now the way we dress, we don't think that our clothes are going to save us at all. But, it's a way of keeping our identity. Then we're apt to not want to go to some places because of the way we'd stick out, you see? Just recently, one of our ministers mentioned again, he said, "I hope that all of the young people that are here today will realize that it's not our plain clothes that are saving us. But our plain clothes can sometimes save us from getting into situations which afterwards we wish we hadn't gotten into." You know, it's true. The older I get, the more I see that. (interview)

Brubacher (1984) notes that Old Order Mennonites, although having a value system respected by outsiders, are frequently seen as unapproachable. He argues that this impression is perpetuated, in part, by Old Orders' austere outward traits. Dress and, more specifically, the identity we attribute to Old Order Mennonites based on their outward appearance, serve as boundary maintenance markers indicating to people that they are different, that this difference requires perhaps a different ritual for interaction, and thus, acts as a social boundary between Mennonites and outsiders.



### **The Role of Language**

Language retention has been identified as a key factor in binding ethnic communities together and sustaining cultural continuity (Hertzler, 1965; Reitz, 1985). In his study, *Language and Ethnic Community Survival*, Jeffrey Reitz (1985) uses survey data from four ethnic groups in Canada to study the role language retention plays in the survival of ethnic groups. Based on his findings he concludes that:

Language is important to ethnic communities not merely as an expression of traditional ethnic culture; the data suggest that ethnic language retention is a cornerstone of the ethnic communities themselves. Failure to learn the ethnic language leads to failure to participate in the ethnic community, and this to a large extent explains reduced participation in the second and third generations. Language loss is a well-founded concern of ethnic community leaders, however difficult might be its prevention. (Reitz, 1985: 120-121)

Language also serves a major function for the Old Orders in terms of how they present themselves and its retention can be seen as quite important to sustaining their distinct way of life. Their unique language, known as Pennsylvania Dutch, is a German dialect and thus only understandable to select groups of people. As a result, the use of Pennsylvania Dutch, a language that continues to be passed down to new generations, becomes an aspect of social boundary maintenance. As I discuss next, the continuing use of Pennsylvania Dutch acts as a symbol of one's in-group status while delimiting the boundaries of face-to-face interaction with outsiders.

Offering a frank inside look at the Old Order community, Isaac Horst (2000) makes the following remarks about the preservation of Pennsylvania Dutch: "Invariably, when and where English was introduced, other modern

practices followed. Usually this included a change from simplicity in dress and manners to more worldly forms” (pp. 219-220). He goes on to make the point that, “The language barrier guarded us against being absorbed into the social life outside of the Mennonite circle... As long as we have so many differences between us, there is so much less danger of being assimilated into mainstream society with our own language” (pp. 220-221). However, given that the Old Orders do business and have contact with those outside of their community, it becomes important for them to learn English as well. So, while speaking mainly Pennsylvania Dutch at home, classes within the Old Orders’ parochial schools are taught in English. As one Old Order Mennonite described it to me, English is taught specifically so that they are able to interact with those outside their community: “In our parochial schools everything has to be in English or else how would the children learn how to cope when they go out of the community. They have to be able to think in English... But all the teachers know the German. So if there’s any real problem it’s okay if you say something in German” (interview). That said, Pennsylvania Dutch is their language of choice when communicating with other Old Order Mennonites.

Throughout the field research I noted how inviting the Old Order community was and how they went out of their way to make sure I felt welcome. For instance, as discussed in the previous chapter, before a church service I was approached by the home minister<sup>10</sup> who asked if I knew German.

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<sup>10</sup> There are typically three members of the clergy that preside over the church service. These include the home minister, the visiting minister, and a deacon. Sometimes a bishop may also be present. All members of the clergy are male and selected by lot from the laity.

I told him that I did not. He said he would do part of his sermon in English then so that I could understand. I told him that I appreciated it, but did not want him to do it just for me, to which he said it would be no problem at all (field notes). I mentioned this to an Old Order later on, and she told me that it would not have been polite to do otherwise. However, I also noticed times when Pennsylvania Dutch was used in the presence of others that did not speak it and the impact it had on the situation. For instance, on one occasion when I was visiting an Old Order Mennonite family, one of the children came into the room and asked for something using the German dialect. I noted how instantly this created a barrier, and for me, a sense of unease as it *felt* like I was deliberately cut out of the conversation (field notes). In this sense, it can also be noted how a lack of linguistic fluency creates a sense of unease and confusion and, in the extreme, a complete inability to communicate ideas and share directly in the meanings others attach to their life-world.

It can be reasoned that the Old Orders' maintenance of Pennsylvania Dutch is a key element of cultural preservation in at least a few ways. In the most direct sense, a loss of the dialect would signify a loss of culture, thus bringing them closer to the modern world. Communicating in Pennsylvania Dutch when in the presence of those that do not speak it also creates a barrier for interaction. When one does not understand the language, shared understandings of reality cannot be developed. As one public school teacher put it, in terms of Mennonite and non-Mennonite interaction “language creates a wall” between those that can speak the German dialect and those that cannot (interview). She indicated that it was common for Mennonite children to slip



into their own language cutting off interactions with non-Mennonite children. In another sense, sharing a language only understandable to others within the Old Order community re-affirms one's insider status.

To be part of the community is to share fully in its culture. Being able to speak the dialect bolsters solidarity within the group, as members experience a common bond with those that know the language, and can thus more fully share in the culture of the community. Reading from an article written in a "Horse and Buggy Amish and Mennonite" magazine, an Old Order emphasized how sharing a language symbolizes commonality and insider status with others that speak it:

A common bond is the Pennsylvania German dialect. Whenever and wherever an Old Order person meets another "plain person," they know these people will be able to speak their dialect, and this makes for an immediate bond. They have no fears about starting a conversation with a complete stranger. (interview)

However, being unable to communicate fluently using the group's language (or not partaking in other forms of culture seen as representative of the group – e.g., dress, possessions, beliefs, activities), leads others, and potentially oneself, to question a person's commitment to the group. In his research on ethnic indicators of Italian-Americans in New York, Alba (1990) notes that the use of language is an essential component in signaling one's ethnic identity. He argues that, even if members of a group are not fluent in their ethnic language, the use of even a few words or phrases becomes a form of "ethnic signaling" that reminds others in the group of their shared cultural background. Similarly, Reitz (1985), in discussing Hertzler's (1965) work, states that, "Language knowledge, by serving as a basis for ethnic solidarity,

in effect defines the boundaries of the ethnic group. It defines who is included in the ethnic group and who is excluded” (p. 106).

For groups such as the Old Order Mennonites, where there is an expectation that all members, including subsequent generations, be fluent in the group’s dialect, only knowing a few words or phrases from their language might well lead other insiders to question a person’s devotion to the group. When the boundaries of the group are firmly established, both insiders’ and outsiders’ devotion to the group can be evaluated. As such, blurry boundaries (e.g., wavering on what signifies appropriate language or appearance norms) present difficulties in determining members’ and non-members’ relationship to the group. In this regard, a strong commitment to the maintenance of the Pennsylvania Dutch dialect can also be seen as crucial to the Old Orders’ cultural continuity.

Various elements of Mennonite material and non-material self-presentation, from their architecture and level of technology to their dress and language, convey often differential meanings to Mennonites and non-Mennonites. For both groups, however, tangible and intangible cultural elements signify that they are, in many ways, different from those in modern society. In the interview excerpt that follows, an Old Order shared how she feels about being treated differently by non-Mennonites. She went on to describe a time when she was visiting someone at a prison and how she felt she was reacted to because of her distinctive Old Order Mennonite dress. The reaction was largely stand-offish, and read to her as, “You’re different. Why

are you here?” She described her feelings about being treated as an outsider and her interaction at the prison as such:

As an Old Order Mennonite, I only ask that people be civil to me. You know, some people can be stand-offish and look at you and wonder about you. But if people are reasonably civil, then it doesn't bother me. But some people, if you don't look exactly like they do, they will keep you at a distance, if you know what I mean.... I guess it's because I'm an Old Order Mennonite that [I'm sometimes treated differently], and I don't blame them because some people are distant and don't talk much. But, you don't feel quite as well disposed towards them if you can see that they wonder if she's perfectly all right, and her brains are all there.... I could see her [a correctional officer at the prison] giving me the once over, that she couldn't quite figure this out. I said to my friend, “It wasn't that she wasn't friendly to me, but she gave me a calculating look.” She must have wondered how it was that this Old Order Mennonite woman was in the prison on a day pass (laughter)! (interview)

Self-presentation of difference and separateness acts as a key insulating mechanism against cultural change. When coming into contact with groups whose language or dress is unfamiliar, contact may be avoided to preclude an uncomfortable situation where in some cases not only the language and dress, but other elements of culture, including such things as beliefs, values, and norms are foreign. As such, language and clothing serve to separate and distinguish Old Orders from non-Mennonites. In terms of boundary maintenance then, language and clothing are two elements of interactional boundary maintenance which act to keep the outside out while keeping insiders in.

## **DISCUSSION**

For Old Order Mennonites, part of being separate involves removing themselves from the world and worldly possessions, as well as dressing and

speaking differently than those in modern society. Based on the theological dictates of their belief system, such choices act to preserve these, and other, aspects of their lifestyle. Through physical and geographical isolation the Old Order Mennonites are able to reduce the frequency of interaction with outsiders. Interaction is further mediated by technological barriers which limit their ability to efficiently traverse time and space, so as to avoid making the outside world and its material and immaterial culture readily accessible. On a more micro level we can observe how dress and language limit and deter interaction with those who may not be familiar with Old Order Mennonite customs. Dress and language symbolize difference to others, effectively communicating, “We are different and should be treated differently or left alone.” At the same time, fluency in the group’s unique language serves as a marker of one’s insider status, effectively establishing a boundary between who is part of the group and who is not.

Physical and geographical isolation, the disavowal of advanced forms of technology, living by a set of rules for outside interaction, and engaging in a presentation of self that emphasizes simplicity in dress and commitment to a unique dialect comprise both a cultural goal of the Old Orders (i.e., not conforming to the world) and a means of obtaining and sustaining this goal. The boundary maintenance elements described in this chapter not only serve as insulating mechanisms, their dissolution, in a very direct sense, would mean a loss of culture. Old Order Mennonite culture is the very thing that keeps them separate and distinct. That is, believing in and actually living out a simple, pious life *is* the way in which they are able to maintain their culture –

culture and the very things that preserve it (e.g., simplicity and non-conformity in dress, language, transportation) are one for the Old Order. Thus, a breakdown in one area of their culture such as language represents a double loss: loss of culture and loss of a social boundary. In turn, such a loss, if recognized, could very well lead to the loss of other aspects of their culture – a chink in the cultural armour. The community as a whole, led by its clergy, acts to ensure that traditions are maintained, not solely for the sake of maintaining traditions and a commitment to their beliefs, but realizing that the loss of such things might well be the forerunner of the collapse of other aspects of their culture. The next chapter builds on the ideas presented here to examine the role of control in the negotiation of social change. As will be demonstrated, social control is a key mechanism reinforcing the boundaries discussed in this chapter.



## **CHAPTER 5**

### **PRESCRIBED CHANGE: THE ROLE OF SOCIAL CONTROL IN MANAGING CHANGE**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Sarah: Change is more controlled and it comes so slowly that sometimes you aren't hardly aware of it yourself. That is how things change. (Old Order Mennonite)

Steve: I guess we have the opposite. Change happens so rapidly for us that you're not aware of it. (interview)

The previous chapter examined isolation, technological barriers, interaction rules, dress, and language in terms of how they create social distance between insiders and outsiders and act as elements of social boundary maintenance. While it described how these features of the Old Order community function to inhibit acculturation, this chapter will begin to examine how social control, as an interactive feature of group life, ensures that these boundaries persist and, when necessary, that old boundaries are adapted and new ones forged. As will be seen, the rules of the group, as managed by the clergy, delineate the social boundaries of the community so as to limit change. If one is to understand how the Old Order group perceives and deals with social change, then we must take into account how it is that mechanisms of social control are enacted by members of the community.

I argue that it is through “prescribed change,” a new concept building off Eaton’s (1952) idea of “controlled acculturation,” that the Old Order Mennonites are largely able to limit the types of change that would bring them “closer to the world.” Prescribed change captures the idea that the leaders of the group are largely responsible for deciding on and designating the changes to their culture. This is not to say that church leaders are the only members of the community involved in mediating change. As described herein, all adult members have input into the decision-making process. The right to authority over collective decisions is afforded to church leaders by the community through a religious process that members see as legitimate. Guided by their clergy, change is controlled for the benefit of the group as a whole and can be in the direction of greater or lesser conservatism.

More specifically, I examine how the set of rules adopted by the Old Order Mennonites to establish order among their people, known as the *Ordnung*<sup>11</sup>, are used to control change. I argue that this group engages in prescribed change as a way of ensuring cultural survival. The relationship between social control and social change is analyzed by examining issues that have arisen within the community as the group attempts to control higher levels of prosperity (compared to the past) among members and difficulties surrounding a turbulent agricultural market. Perhaps the most significant dilemma arising from prosperity and market troubles for Old Orders is choice. In deciding on what changes to make, members of the community engage in

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<sup>11</sup> The *Ordnung* represents the Old Order’s “book of rules” (Peters, 2003: 24). And, as Peters (2003) also points out, the rules of the group do change through community discussion. This rulebook, however, is in the hands of the clergy and is verbally shared with members of the community twice a year.

claims-making to convince others as to what they see as the appropriate course of action. As used herein, claims-making refers to making assertions about the existence of a problem that requires a solution (Loseke, 1999). The notion of claims-making is explored most directly as it pertains to discussion surrounding the adoption of the telephone.

This chapter represents one of two chapters on the relationship between social control and social change. Chapter six picks up on the issues presented here and examines them in terms of: the Old Order perspective on deviance and its relationship to change; how deviation from the rules of the group are dealt with; and, how the various aspects of social control which have been explored in the two chapters come together to reinforce a key element of social boundary maintenance: homogeneity among brethren.

In the next section I define some of the key concepts used throughout this chapter and offer a general overview of the relationship between social change and control among the Old Order Mennonites.

### **OVERVIEW OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL CONTROL AND CHANGE AMONG THE OLD ORDER MENNONITES**

As used herein, social control represents attempts to regulate people's perspectives and behaviour. Social change refers to the transformation of culture and society. As Conrad and Schneider (1980) note, before industrialization the church served as the predominant agent of social control in society. In many ways, the Old Order Mennonites typify this image from the past. While abiding by the laws and regulations of their "host" cultures,



their communities still resemble a (quasi-)preindustrial society in terms of their level of technology and clerical authority on issues of social control. For the Old Order Mennonites, social control is a key mechanism used to manage social change.

While informal social control is touched upon herein, the emphasis is placed on formal social control—i.e., measures of social control which are processed at the organizational or institutional level (Bereska, 2008). As such, the focus is on the role played by Old Order Mennonite church leaders in controlling change. However, as collective, interactive processes, it is emphasized throughout this chapter that social control and social change necessarily involve the whole community. While the church leaders act as the formal arbiters of change and control, the laity is part of this process and is afforded a reasonably strong voice in the formal decision-making process. As Sallour's (1984) research on the Waterloo Region Mennonites makes clear, "The more conservative Mennonites tend to decide what is right and wrong as a group" (p. 61). The importance of the group is paramount among the Old Order. And, as a group, the Old Order Mennonites rely on their clergy to make decisions that will ensure the continuance of their way of life.

Change appears to happen so slowly in the Old Order community that some might well question whether or not there has been change at all to their way of life over the past century. It is true that from an outsider's standpoint it might appear as if the culture of the Old Order Mennonite people has stayed the same. But, this is not the case. There have been changes permitting the introduction of more worldly things such as electricity and the telephone.

Eaton's (1952) notion of controlled acculturation adequately accounts for how conservative religious ethnic groups such as Hutterites, Amish, and Old Order Mennonites control and gradually adopt progressive forms of change.

Controlled acculturation, however, does not take into account the type of retrenchment that groups engage in to preserve their culture. As I describe next, there have been changes within the Old Order community which have, at times, moved towards greater conservatism and changes that serve to reinforce pre-existing cultural values. I use the concept of "prescribed change" to capture the ways in which Old Orders control change.

### **Prescribed Change**

Prescribed change represents the process by which designated leaders of a social group decide on, implement (typically through rules and rule adjustments), and enforce changes to be made to their culture. Potential changes are negotiated among members of the community, but are ultimately dictated or prescribed by its leaders and put into practice by members of the group. Prescribed change can involve the controlled incorporation of another group's culture (controlled acculturation), but might also involve change that reinforces existing social boundaries (boundary reinforcement) and change that further distances the group from the culture of outsiders (cultural reversion). In the following sections I offer examples of cultural reversion, boundary reinforcement, and controlled acculturation as forms of prescribed change.

*Cultural Reversion*

Cultural reversion refers to prescribed change that further distances a group from the culture of outsiders. It typically involves a move towards greater conservatism. For instance, one Old Order commented that, while most changes she has seen are in the direction of modernization, community leaders are “pulling back on other things. For instance, the dresses have to be a certain length, much more so than they used to be. Little things like that” (interview). She offered the following remarks regarding reversion in some areas while modernizing in others:

In some things there is a trend to allow more things to cope in the modern world. But then I think, like when I was young, we didn't have cameras and we still don't, but we were allowed to keep a photograph of ourselves if somebody gave it to us. We were allowed to pose for somebody if they wanted a picture. Now it's completely in the ban. We're not allowed to have photographs, but at one time we did. So, they're trying to become more strict in some ways to hold back. Because I think they realize that, in some ways, the trend is more towards modernizing—especially in machinery, in tools, working in the barn, whatever. Because you have to have a bigger area to work with in order to make things pay so that you can make a living. Therefore, it doesn't just work to have a shovel and do raking. Now you've got to have more things. (Old Order Mennonite, interview)

Another interviewee maintained that the community is returning to a greater emphasis on rules as a way of maintaining their traditions. She went on to offer the following example:

The harnesses of the horses have pads to sit on the horses around the front of their breasts to keep them from getting sore from the leather harness. We used to have it whatever colour we wanted to, but then... they made a rule that once you are a member of the church the pads have to be black as a sign that you are humble. It's a sign of humility—as you're not fancying up your horse or your harness. Up until then it was just voluntary; a person could do whatever they wanted. But the bishop thought that that would be a sign of humbleness.

***Boundary Reinforcement***

Boundary reinforcement represents prescribed changes that fortify the pre-existing boundaries of the community. Such changes typically involve establishing or re-instituting formal rules to enforce church expectations. Participants described instances where a bishop felt that brethren were becoming lax about their values. In an effort to rectify this, the bishop developed or brought back a rule to help reinforce their values (e.g., an emphasis on the group over the individual, humility over immodesty, piety over secularism). When I asked one interviewee if there were any recent significant changes to the rules, she said “no,” and began to describe the process of how the rules are delivered to the community. She then discussed some of the new regulations:

After council, and just before the people go out in certain areas to talk to the ministry about how they felt about certain things, the deacon got up and read the rules – the things that are completely not allowed, and the things that they wish we didn’t have... For instance, we’re not allowed to have any government grants, tax rebates, and that sort of stuff. And of course no hospitalization and so on. No tractor use in the barn and so on. Those things. Nothing was different there.... The boys are not to have sideburns and not too long of hair. The girls were supposed to comb their hair above their ears, and not puff them to look really fancy. To wear their shawls on a Sunday when they’re driving with a horse and buggy. Always to wear their bonnets, their black ones over their white caps, when they’re driving. The men were to wear their hats. And overcoats rather than zipper coats for Sundays. It’s not allowed now to play hockey on a Sunday. There’s evening hockey sometimes during the week. And they weren’t supposed to have teams for baseball. It wasn’t supposed to become organized. Because it could get so that they’re competing against each other and that shouldn’t be among brethren. It shouldn’t be too obviously competitive. (interview)

The rules mentioned in the latter part of this participant's statement, demonstrate some of the ways group leaders are reinforcing the boundaries of the group in an attempt to manage change.

Perhaps the most obvious attempts at boundary reinforcement and cultural reversion can be seen when segments of the Old Order population choose to form their own separate group to practice an even simpler way of life. An example of this is illustrated by the David Martin Mennonite group whose church was formed because it was felt that the Old Order were too progressive. Further examples are offered in this chapter, one of which is the move by a group of Old Order from the Waterloo Region to Kinloss<sup>12</sup> to segregate themselves from their brethren. Participants explained that the group in Kinloss has neither electricity nor the telephone. A desire to avoid these modern conveniences was a reason for distancing themselves from the larger group. There are others among the Waterloo Region Old Order who also choose not to use the telephone or electricity, but I am told that this is rare. These findings are consistent with Fretz's (1976) research on the formation of "intentional communes" – i.e., communities that deliberately separate themselves from the broader community. He discovered that members separated themselves from the main group of Old Orders in an attempt to foster "greater personal commitment and more rigid discipline" among brethren (1976: 104). Despite changes towards greater simplicity, as was illustrated in some of the previous interviewee's comments, most change

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<sup>12</sup> Kinloss is a rural community about 90 kilometres northwest of Waterloo Region.

that occurs within the Old Order community involve increased modernization and less simplicity.

### *Controlled Acculturation*

Controlled acculturation represents the controlled incorporation of another group's culture. Examples of the multiperspectival, interactive, and negotiated nature of controlled acculturation are offered in the proceeding sections, but I present one instance of controlled acculturation here to demonstrate the concept and distinguish it from cultural reversion and boundary reinforcement.

When pressed by community members to permit greater mechanization to compete with non-Mennonite farmers, church leaders permitted the use of the tractor, but controlled it through rules by placing restrictions on how it was to be used:

[Y]ou're not allowed to drive faster than 10 miles per hour on the road with a tractor. If you do you'll be punished. They will say your name over the pulpit and say that this man has been disobedient to the church. I should say that if somebody sees you and reports it to the deacon, then the deacon comes and visits us, and then he says we will have to punish you... That rule came in when the Mennonites were allowed to have loader tractors... So they decided that if they're giving people one thing, so then they will have to take it away in another way. It was done just to make it so that the tractor wasn't just so handy. That way they don't take the tractor and drive it to town and everywhere else rather than getting the horse out... (former Old Order Mennonite)

It would appear that controlled acculturation has generic application, and can usefully be applied to investigate the process of social change among other subcultures. Eaton (1952) provides an excellent account of controlled acculturation as a cultural survival technique used by the Hutterites. He aptly



depicts the relationship between community members and their leaders in the following excerpt from his article:

The Schmiedenleut<sup>13</sup> regulations illustrate the persistent efforts of the Hutterite people to control rates of social change by defining the areas in which it is to be approved. When the pressure for change becomes too strong and the rules are violated widely enough to threaten respect for law and order, the Hutterite leaders push for formal change of the written law before it makes too many lawbreakers. By bending with the wind, Hutterites have kept themselves from breaking. (1952: 338)

The materials presented thus far pick up on one of the clearest patterns in the data for this study: the Old Order very actively attempt to control change and acculturation. Moreover, when changes occur, they are framed as justifiable and are all the more successful when claims-makers<sup>14</sup> effectively socially construct the change in keeping with the group's worldview (Loseke, 1999). Progressive changes, or the adoption of "worldly" things, perspectives, and activities, are justified as necessities to cultural survival in the modern world. The church ministry is the key arbiter of change within the community. In most cases, changes in a progressive or conservative direction are heavily contemplated and only made after full consideration of how they might impact the group's lifestyle and whether or not the changes are in keeping with God's Word. As one Old Order Mennonite explained it to me: "Any changes have to consider the good that comes out of them versus those things that bring us closer to the world" (interview). The notion of prescribed

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<sup>13</sup> The Schmiedenleut were described by Eaton (1952) as one of three cliques of Hutterite colonies that represent sub-units of the larger ethnic group.

<sup>14</sup> A claims-maker is a person that attempts to persuade others to see something as problematic or unproblematic (Loseke, 1999).

change is applicable here and is a worthwhile concept for analyzing the data presented throughout this chapter.

### **THE ROLE OF CHURCH LEADERSHIP AND THE *ORDNUNG* IN PRESCRIBING CHANGE**

Mennonites are seen as being rule-oriented, but I find society as being more rule-oriented. The rules are there in our community, but they are flexible. They are there more as guidelines of living rather than laws. (Old Order Mennonite)

In this section I describe how it is that change is limited and assimilation resisted by direct control through the church ministry. In this way, church leaders, in cooperation with members of the congregation, specify or *prescribe* what changes are appropriate and inappropriate. Reinforcing that members of the group live a life according to the Biblical scriptures, the rules of the group are seen as viable ways of actively mediating individual group members' decisions. In exploring these matters it becomes possible to see how the community actively attempts to mediate change and control its social world. At the same time, we see how people within the Old Order community are both contributors to and part of the social structure. This point is in line with Prus' (1999) assertion that social structure is best understood by attending to "...the ways in which people *engage* these human constructions in practice (including their abilities to disattend to and act back on various modes of social organization)" (pp. 131-132). The ideas presented in this section form the backdrop for subsequent sections in this and the following chapter.

The Old Order Mennonites live by a set of behavioural rules known as the *Ordnung*, or "order" as it is more commonly called by the Old Orders



(Martin, 2003). Although eluding direct English translation, as Martin (2003) points out, the *Ordnung* represents “a set of rules and orders of the church that are covered with a sacred shroud” (p. 365). According to Cronk (1989), the Old Order Mennonites and their Anabaptist brethren have a specific type of order in mind: *God’s order*. She states:

The purpose of the *Ordnung* is not only to provide a list of individually acceptable or proscribed ethical behaviors but to structure a whole way of life, lived according to God’s will, as expressed in the gospels. The *Ordnung* reflects God’s order as opposed to the order of the world.

Martin (2003) explains that while the *Ordnung* is not considered sacred per se, its violation “brings upon the offender similar repercussions as transgression against the Word” (p. 365). Church rules are seen as being in place to provide order and “to avoid confusion among the members and also to give a consistent example to the world” (Martin, 2003: 365). The rules of the church, including those regulations revolving around the scriptures, are central features of their group perspective. The rules are interfused with their ideology, presenting a consistent way for how to live and understand the world.<sup>15</sup> Managing how potential changes fit into the *Ordnung*, and whether or not they are, more broadly, in keeping with God’s Word, is the responsibility of the ministry (i.e., deacons, ministers, and bishops). As such, the ministry, in consultation with members of the church, attempts to control change to the advantage of the group so as to maintain cultural continuity.

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<sup>15</sup> Indeed, it is important to recognize that the various components of social boundary maintenance are interwoven with each other and within the cultural fabric of the community. Such cultural features are truly only separable as ideal types, used by analysts to sift through and more coherently present an otherwise complex social reality.

Whenever anything new (e.g., the telephone, farm machinery) is considered for inclusion in Old Order society these things are contemplated and discussed by the church community, and then the ministry prescribes any changes to their way of life. Sometimes changes will be accepted wholesale, while other times they will either be limited or not allowed whatsoever. One Old Order Mennonite described it this way: “When new things are allowed into the community, we decide on whether, as a whole, we will include it totally or include it with restrictions” (interview). In his book on the Old Order Mennonites of Ontario, Peters (2003) indicates that Old Order rules “prescribe three categories [of what is permissible]: the accepted, the forbidden, and what is ‘strongly discouraged’” (p. 27). He points out that the telephone is a good example of a change that was at first strongly discouraged, but went on to be accepted (Peters, 2003).<sup>16</sup>

While it is conceivable that certain forbidden items such as the Internet, television, and cars might one day find their way into the Old Order community, these types of worldly artefacts will likely be banned well into the foreseeable future as they are currently seen as those things that have profound implications for separation. Landis (1972) makes the following argument regarding change and the loss of key religious markers: “When a culture breaks, the externals go first; then go the internals, the attitudes, beliefs and principles. Letting loose of the symbol simply means the opening up of the

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<sup>16</sup> There is still a grey area concerning the complete adoption of the phone. For some time it was the case that clergy were expected to not have a telephone, as it was felt that they should serve as an example of piety and humility for the community (Horst, 2000). However, some members of the clergy now have the telephone. More details on this issue are presented later in this chapter.

way for letting loose the reality for which the symbol stands” (Landis, 1972). The Old Order community is very cognizant of what the loss of their symbols would mean for them, and therefore, are careful when contemplating and controlling change.

Twice a year before communion<sup>17</sup> the area’s three bishops, along with the ministers and deacons, consult with the congregation to hear their concerns and consider potential changes to be made to the *Ordnung*. An Old Order lady described the council meetings and dissemination of the rules in the following way:

Twice a year rules are read out to the community during the Council meeting. That happened just the other Sunday. It’s done at the church where each Council is held and it takes quite a while because there are so many different ones now. All the Council meetings are over now for this spring. On Friday is the big ministerial gathering when all the clergymen get together and bring all the things that were brought into Council from each different church district. Then they discuss some things and then thresh out how they are going to deal with certain things. (interview)

Once the church ministry decides on whether or not amendments to the *Ordnung* are necessary, the results of their decisions are proclaimed at communion to members of the church. A deacon elaborates on the previous explanation:

Council meeting precedes communion. We listen to advice for the lifestyle of the church. This advice is taken to a semi-annual conference. Possible changes are debated and discussed at the conference. The bishops, ministers, and deacons make the final decisions. Some might compare this arrangement to being like a government. We don’t really believe in hierarchy. The laity

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<sup>17</sup> Old Order communion commemorates the Last Supper of Jesus Christ. The bishop blesses and offers bread and wine—representing the body and blood of Jesus Christ—for consumption by participating members. Since only bishops administer communion and there are three bishops and several places where communion is served, Horst (2000) writes that it takes about five weeks for them to make their rounds.

expresses concerns at Council. The clergy are not there by their own decisions and desires. Rather they are there for the service of the church and God. People go into government for personal ambitions. We are God driven to serve. (interview)

The rules, and any amendments to them, are meant to help ensure that members of the church continue to live by God's Word, while helping to guarantee the preservation of the Old Order way of life.

As one former Old Order Mennonite described it, the Old Order's formal set of behavioural guidelines can be fairly extensive, especially during times when more restraint is seen as necessary to preserve the group's way of life: "Every year they read off the list of things that you can't do. I know the last time we heard that list it took 20 minutes" (interview). Along with the previous examples of Old Order rules (e.g., restrictions on dress length, hairstyle, competitive sports), the following quotes from interviewees further illustrate the types of church ordinances that govern group expectations:

[W]e're not supposed to have a lot of pictures hanging. I do have a few things ... and a lot more people are doing it. You're not supposed to have any photos. It's quite the thing. (Old Order Mennonite)

[Y]ou are not allowed to have ceiling fans in your house. Because they felt that it is too much of a luxury. So they try to keep all those fancy things out... If you stay away from all those "unnecessary" things—they see that sort of thing as unnecessary—it doesn't give you the opportunity to fancy up your house. Curtains are another thing that are not really allowed. That's not really a rule, it is just kind of an unspoken no-no. (former Old Order Mennonite)

The *Ordnung* is meant to be all-encompassing. Church rules touch on everything from hairstyle, dress, and possession to playing sports and the use of outside services. Although the clergy ultimately have the final say on what is acceptable and unacceptable within the community, they make their

decisions considering input from the community. That said, there is to be no questioning of the ministry's decisions as it is felt that they are put in place as a result of God's will<sup>18</sup> and that they will act in the best interests of the community. Peters (2003) writes, "It is a very serious offense for one to criticize decisions made by the clergy. Final authority is given to those chosen through the church as leaders" (p. 23). Through the ministry major decisions are made and then shared with all brethren. If it is discovered that brethren are not following the rules, church administered repercussions follow. It is in this way that the church attempts to control the social boundaries of the community.

Most in the community see the value in a strong social code and church oversight for the betterment of the group and its culture as a whole. In the following quote, an Old Order cogently describes her feelings about the necessity of rules and social control to maintain their separation from the outside world:

[T]he older people do realize that they do it [i.e., the clergy create and sustain a number of rules] in order to keep the community separate. That's the basic idea behind it. Which is a good idea. If you're going to be separate, then you've got to have certain guidelines. But then, some people feel that some things shouldn't be made into a big fuss. That's where some people get the idea that we figure our salvation lies in this. Which it doesn't really. They make that very clear over the pulpit, too. That these things that are for tradition, that it isn't that our salvation lies in this, but it

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<sup>18</sup> Bishops, ministers, and deacons are ordained by lot from male members within the congregation. Candidates are first nominated by members of the community. Following this, they are asked if they are willing to make the sacrifices required of them should they be chosen. A slip of paper is placed in one of several identical hymnals. The hymnals are then shuffled and handed to the candidates. The candidate whose hymnal contains the slip is seen as being chosen to do the work of the Lord. Isaac Horst (2000), an Old Order Mennonite, describes, "We consider it one of the most serious undertakings, because we want to feel assured that it comes from God and not simply from human beings" (p. 45). Bishops are chosen from among the ministers (Horst, 2000).



is to keep us separate. To keep a feeling of separateness... [I]f we feel we want to keep our garb and our lifestyle, driving the horse and buggy and so on, then we have to be able to recognize that we are separate or else there's no point in doing these things... [I]f people could have just whatever they wanted, then the young people could go wherever they wanted. Therefore, they would be apt to become friendly with people who don't have any spiritual values. And young people wouldn't know enough to stay away from that. And then they could go to all kinds of public places that just wouldn't be suitable for Christian people to be. It's so easy to drive a long distance and be out of the way of people who know you. That's the whole idea. To keep separateness.

The emphasis on having a set of well-defined rules to maintain traditions and separateness comes out strongly in this past excerpt. By and large, the community recognizes the necessity of this overarching form of social control. At times, however, some individuals will question the utility of such strict measures, certain traditions, and resting absolute authority in the hands of a few. Note the following interviewees' comments:

[In Pennsylvania] everybody feels perfectly good that they can't do certain things because of so and so [i.e., because of a certain rules and the reasons for the rule]. But, just like here, some people over there don't quite understand why they can't have certain things, but by and large they do. But some people would really like to go ahead, to say, have more rubber tires or something as it would be handy. (Old Order Mennonite)

In the end, you still have to make up your own mind. If a group of people all yield to one or a few people's thinking, and it's just a few people's opinion that's ruling that group, and people give into it, then the next thing they come up with something else, and we made them yield to our way of thinking before, we can do it again. I think that's something we have to be very very careful about: tradition in the Mennonite community. (Old Order Mennonite)

There are obviously those that will complain about the rules and make their own decisions. For those who decide that this life is not for them, they either

attempt to endure the rules or leave the community, a point which I take up in the next chapter with regards to defection and regulating membership.

This section has highlighted the role of the *Ordnung* and prescribed change within the Old Order community. A key concern for the Old Order Mennonites with regards to social control and change is how best to permit some acculturation so as to ensure the overall cultural survival of the group. As illustrated here and as discussed by Eaton (1952), a strong organizational structure with “recognized sources of authority” (p. 338) are necessary for controlled acculturation to ensure the sustainability of a group’s culture. However, acculturation is but one aspect of social change. Driedger (1977a) suggests that, “Assimilationists have been too quick to assume that any change within ethnic groups means assimilation into the larger society...” (p. 278-279). It is important to note instances of social change which see the Old Order further withdrawing from the modern amenities of the outside world. Movement towards greater austerity and overall conservatism are worthwhile to explore when researching how cultural continuity is made possible in that such changes often represent resistance techniques which are adopted as barriers to assimilation. Therefore, I have introduced the notion of “prescribed change” as a way of capturing how the leaders of the community work to allow some acculturation, while also attempting to bring about changes that would reinforce existing cultural practices and take them further away from outside society.

With the ideas from this section in mind, I now turn to an analysis of how prescribed change is used to manage the complexities of financial challenges, prosperity, and choice.

### **CONFRONTING CHANGE: THE ROLE OF PRESCRIBED CHANGE IN MANAGING FINANCIAL CHALLENGES, PROSPERITY, AND CHOICE**

In the sections that follow, I analyze the ways in which prescribed change can be applied to understand how the Old Order community manages the perceived pressures of social change. A contemporary concern for the Old Order Mennonites has been the dual, somewhat paradoxical, threats of meeting the challenges posed by prosperity and making a living in a difficult farm market. In this section I present how financial challenges and prosperity are envisioned by the Old Order Mennonites, and analyze the relationship between these perceived threats and social control.

#### **Dealing with Financial Challenges**

On the one hand, Old Orders see change as a necessary response to the economic difficulties that they face. The types of changes adopted by the Old Order Mennonites are at least partially characterized by research participants as begrudging responses or adaptations to external factors such as greater competition in the agricultural industry, increased taxation, government farming regulations, and the need for more affordable farmland. Some Old Order Mennonites described the current financial challenges in the following ways:

These things [i.e., paying for government services and coping with changing farm markets] are getting more and more complicated



because we're getting squeezed tighter and tighter financially. We're getting squeezed with all these things that are out there for us. Whether it's health care, or whatever, it costs so much. (interview)

When the U.S. border closed to Canadian beef we literally almost lost the farm. (interview)

Farms around here are getting very very expensive. So people are starting to move. One group started up in the Lindsay area, which is near Peterborough. Another group is in the Chesley area. Now they've started a group up in Massey. That's close to Sault Ste. Marie. There are about six families up there now and they're hoping to get more families to come up.... [Land prices] are just too high. And they started to realize that unless they want to have their kids having jobs [away from the farm] they'd have to move elsewhere to keep it going. (interview)

Farming has become a financial struggle, so machinery has become more acceptable to use. (interview)

We were talking about the on-farm shops and how long they've been around for. I said that when I was a child there were very few on-farm shops. But it became necessary because there was no way you could make payments on a farm. I might back down on that. I think if you farm intensely then you can get by. There are several farms that they have so much livestock and so much stuff, that they can run right into the evening or the morning.... Not everybody can take that though. I mean some people want to get through with the chores (laughter). Those kinds of people—those with lots of chores—could probably give it a shot. (interview)

These data stress the types of contemporary financial hardships faced by the Old Order Mennonites. A turbulent farm industry is the focus of blame for the most significant financial struggles faced. Changes such as diversifying into manufacturing, permitting bigger farm equipment, and relocating to find less expensive arable land are some of the ways the Old Orders are responding to potential economic threats to their way of life.

*Contemplating the Telephone as a “Necessary Convenience”*

The church is at the centre of the decision-making process regarding how to compete while maintaining a simple life. The emphasis is on managing change as a group—implementing or adjusting rules to cope with fiscal challenges—as they are guided to do so by the church. Perhaps one of the biggest recent changes mediated by Old Order clergy was the adoption of the telephone in late 1980s. Allowing the telephone was at least partially justified on the basis of having to compete with outside society’s advanced technologies, which offered modern farmers an edge over the Old Orders. In this regard it can be noted that claims-making plays an important role in how change is socially constructed within the group (Loseke, 1999). Claims-makers compete with one another to persuade the community to adopt their perspective on social reality, such as the need to allow the telephone. This section explores some of this process by emphasizing the types of claims<sup>19</sup> that are particularly persuasive. As noted in the data that follow, the claim of “necessity” or “necessary convenience” arises as the key rationale. Such a claim is particularly persuasive given the group’s viewpoint on their need to compete and survive culturally in the context of a turbulent agricultural industry.

Claims-making involves competition, and with competition there will necessarily be those who disagree on the claims being made and thus must decide what to do when their claims fail to win out. Note the following interviewee’s comments regarding the decision to allow the telephone:

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<sup>19</sup> Claims represent statements about reality used to convince others how to think and feel about particular issues (Loseke, 1999).

The telephone was a big change. And it took a long time for some people... and some people still don't have it. It's a choice. At one time, the lay people could have it and the clergy couldn't. But they can now, but not all of them do. But that made a biiiiiig change in our church. We're allowed to have the basic telephone, but not an answering machine, or call display, or anything like that. And, only two telephones per family... That's one reason why the community up in Kinloss started. Because they don't have the telephone. They still hold with us, but they don't have the telephone or the tractors. How long they are going to stay with us? I don't know.... [When we discussed having the telephone in our community] it was a real bitter thing. And for awhile, until it was allowed, at first you could have it if you had a business. You could have it in your shop. And some people had it in the barn. It was a great fear that the women would sit there chatting and gossiping. (Old Order Mennonite)

As this quote demonstrates, the decision to permit the telephone as part of the Old Order way of life was a controversial one. As a result, some members of the group left. Although the Kinloss Old Order community is still connected to the Waterloo Region group, what is notable is how they removed themselves from the area to protect their cultural ideals from their more progressive brethren. These data illustrate quite clearly just how thoroughly the Old Order work to control technology. The basic telephone is allowed, but they restrict the more advanced features that are perceived as being unnecessary luxuries.

A former Old Order told me that if a family has a telephone "it has to be black." When I asked her about the number of phones permitted in a household she offered the following remarks:

How is it? They have restricted it to one phone per party. No, you can have three phones... Can you? Yeah, you can have three phones on a property and that's it. Maximum two phones per party. No. Okay, we were allowed to have two phones here. But if we would have a granny flat and would have parents, they would be allowed one phone, too, because then that would be three

phones per property. No, because we would not have been allowed to have more than two phones. So, if someone would have caught us with more phones then, again, we would have had to confess in front of the church that we had disobeyed the church rules. (interview)

Her confusion on the number of phones allowed is possibly an artefact of having been outside the Old Order community for some time, but I introduced this excerpt to illustrate the scope of formal social control within the Old Order community. For this group, it is clear that if the telephone was to be permitted, it would happen under specific guidelines and that there would be repercussions for not obeying them. Again, we see the reliance of the Old Order community on prescribing change and having a set of rules that have institutional and community-wide support.

So, why adopt the phone in the first place if it is perceived as being such a threat to their way of life? In a word: necessity. Or, at least that is the claim that has been used to support its introduction. Perhaps “necessary convenience” better captures the reasoning behind the decision- and claims-making processes. Note the following Old Order interviewees’ comments concerning the need to adopt the telephone:

But there are certain times when we’ve got to get in touch with them [i.e., Old Orders in the Kinloss community]. So, they have a good neighbour that will take a message. But, I mean, this is one reason why we finally felt we had to have a telephone because it was getting to be too difficult for our neighbours to do that. And now there’s almost nowhere you can get away from it. If you have dairy herds, you’re going to have to get the vet quite often. No matter what. David and John here sell seeds and people are phoning in all the time and they have to phone these seed companies to ask for more catalogues or more seed. Then UPS has to bring them, and you have to order them. Now you’ve just got to have access to this [i.e., the telephone].

And:

[Allowing the telephone] was one big change. Now I don't know what the next big change will be, but that was a big thing. It was good, I think, that it was allowed because it was almost a necessity. Because some of the neighbours were starting to feel a bit put upon in some areas.

Also:

George: ...As far back as I can remember there was always this issue about the telephone.... I always said, "I need it just as much as he does [i.e., a non-Old Order Mennonite business person]." Because if I have a sick cow and need to get it to the vet right away, I have to either go to town and use the pay phone or go to the neighbours. I always was ashamed to do that. This was quite a hassle until about 1987 or 1988 when they finally caved in and allowed us to have the telephones....

Steve: Do you think that there is anything that finally changed their minds in terms of allowing the phone in?

George: I would say that it was an overall pressure from the church in general, like the whole area. Most people were simply concerned. It just doesn't look right, you know, if you have to run to the neighbours to use the telephone. When you buy a farm and take the phone out, then the next year you're running to the neighbours to use their telephone, it don't make sense. And all it was simply the old traditional rules that they had years back before telephones were even in existence. They just couldn't adjust to anything new. And the Markham Mennonites they pretty much stayed the way they were and yet they've changed with the times. They've changed a certain amount with the times. And I think that our church does, too. But they really really want to go cautious on anything new. Just like cell phones for instance. Well when we were allowed to have the phones, there were no cell phones. Back in the mid-80s there was none. The first ones that came out the batteries went dead in a couple of hours (laughter). Now when I hear people talk, I just tell them, "You don't know what you're talking about." They say, "Oh, these cell phones they are just so worldly." I always tell them that if I make a call to British Columbia, I think it takes the same



route as my cell phone would. It'll go up there and beam down. That's the way it goes.

While some community members felt that the telephone was necessary to make it in an economy where it is difficult to keep a small farming operation viable, it has also brought with it some anticipated changes to their way of life. In the following Old Order's comments we get a sense of some of the negative effects that he, and others, feel the telephone has had on their way of life:

The telephone has had far-reaching effects. It has become a social device. We now have a greater connection with the outside world. It also allows for a greater ease of contact. It has meant a change in lifestyle. The young people especially are more "groupy" with the telephone, so there is not as much intermingling. (interview)

While advances in communication technologies in the modern world have led some to challenge what constitutes meaningful social contact, the Old Order still very much value face-to-face social interaction. The "ease of contact" mentioned by the Old Order in the previous excerpt is seen as a challenge to their social world as he feels it has led to a reconfiguration of social life. The telephone makes it easier to connect with the outside world, develop cliques, and reduce in-person contact.

While other case studies within the Old Order Mennonite community exist (e.g., debates about adopting vehicles, electricity, cabs on tractors) which permit an examination of the interplay between the processes of claims-making, change, and control, the adoption of the telephone represents one of the most significant contemporary changes within the Old Order community. Here we see how perceptions of financial difficulties are used to justify the

need for change and the negotiated ways in which prescribed change happens. The next section delves into the second component of the paradox being examined: prosperity.

### **Managing Prosperity and Choice**

It seems peculiar that both financial challenges and prosperity be blamed for some of the changes which have occurred within the Old Order community. How is it possible for a community to be struggling financially and be financially well off at the same time? Part of the answer lies in the historically relative nature of the group's standard of living. As will be seen in the data that follow, compared to their pioneering brethren in the 1800s and those who lived through the Depression and two world wars, the latest generation of Old Order Mennonites are seemingly more well off. However, they continue to confront variations on challenges from the past. One significant new challenge that has grown out of prosperity and external advances in new technology is choice. Deciding on what types of choices are good choices for the Old Order Mennonites adds another layer of contentious debate to the processes of social change and control.

In terms of prosperity, one might argue that greater affluence is somewhat of an illusion in that credit is more readily available from outside sources and more and more Old Order Mennonites appear to be taking advantage of it. An underlying problem of this is that it changes both the dynamics of relationships within the community and makes members more reliant on outside sources for financial support. An Old Order Mennonite described it this way:

In the last 30 years the banks have *really* come a long way in serving the farming community, and it don't make any difference whether it is Mennonites or who it is, they really push to give you money to do expansions. And up to this point it has come back, but it is getting rid of that father-son relationship as far as the father helping the next generation to get started and working his way into it and finally he is debt free. I see that less and less all the time. (interview)

Greater prosperity and ties to outside credit sources have also meant the need for more internal control to limit what members can and cannot have. Note the following Old Order lady's comments:

With the farms, they have to keep their tractor horsepower down so that it's less than 100 horsepower. That seems to be okay, but you mayn't have cabs. They've now allowed roll-bars for safety reasons. With combines, self-propelled combines aren't allowed. So they keep saying, "The bigger the machinery the more you'll get into debt." That's the idea behind it. It's true. But also you can do things faster. (interview)

"Having more" is also problematic because when members get themselves into financial trouble, they turn to the church to accommodate their needs. Members of the community are willing to help others out, but negative sentiments arise when people feel that those in trouble got themselves into that position by spending beyond their means. Note the following Old Order interviewee's comments: "...as a church community we've always been able to help each other out, but if guys go into this head over heels, one after the next, the first thing you know nobody's got any money" (interview). He then went on to tell me that:

...[W]e have people like that [i.e., that spend beyond their means]. They just have no governors whatsoever.<sup>20</sup> They'll go out there and they'll just spend: "It doesn't matter what it is, we want it!" Then if it doesn't pan out or if you get a little bit of disease in your

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<sup>20</sup>Meaning that there are some people in the community that have trouble regulating their own behaviour.



herd or whatever, it doesn't take much, everything's figured out: "Oh yeah, this is gonna work on paper." But those times when things go a little bit wrong then the first thing you know the bank comes in and says, "Look. We're having some problems here." Then they [i.e., the church ministry] want to come after the old guys: "Can you give me a bit of money. We need to help this guy out." (interview)

In the past, a lack of money was seen as controlling much of what one could and could not have. Church supervision was not as necessary for many things, because most people simply could not afford to have what they do now. Note the following Old Order gentleman's comments:

They [i.e., the ministry] really encourage people to not buy the latest modern equipment. Because you can spend \$100,000 on a tractor just like that and they're nice. You can also buy a tractor for \$15,000 that will do the same work. That's what we had to do. When we started farming that's what we had to do. I mean *we had no choice*. We just bought used equipment and stayed within our means... Like my dad and a lot of old people that lived here before we came in, like John Smith, would say, "You didn't have the money, you didn't buy it!" That was the philosophy back then. Now it's, "I want it and I'm going to get it." (interview)

Prosperity and greater access to outside credit through the banks, along with access to a rapidly modernizing farm equipment industry, has meant that social control has become more necessary in order to dictate the limits of possession. As one Old Order Mennonite gentleman put it, prosperity leads to choice, something which if not controlled, can become problematic:

When you start buying modern farm equipment you have a lot of choices. But all these choices can get quite expensive and some of the young people want to have the best. But then if they have any financial trouble, they have a lot of their money already in their equipment and can't use it to help out. (interview)

An Old Order Mennonite couple detailed some of the everyday ways in which prosperity has impacted life for the younger generation:

Salina: [O]n the whole as women, yup, some things change. We preserve fruit, but the younger generation is more likely to buy things from the store. It's handier. Like Tabitha [my daughter-in-law], she's busy. She has six children, so it's just easier to buy things from the store. But still her daughters learn how to do things from the garden.

Like the diapers. We'd have flannelette diapers. But Tabitha has started with the youngest one now to buy diapers.

I know the chiropractor once told me that I should just go to the store and buy my clothes and buy this and that. I had said something about sewing dresses and my back had gotten so bad from it. He said it's just so different for him; he just goes and buys stuff. We make our clothes. That is still the same. But otherwise prosperity brings changes.

Edwin: The girls still do a lot of things the same. They make the quilts.

Salina: They make their quilts, but we made our mats and quilts from the left over old aprons and stuff. We'd cut them in strips and we'd hook our mats. Now they get them made by a lady who does the mat hooking with felt for the looks (laughs).

Edwin: We made things to use them.

Salina: Those things have changed. They'll make quilts, but they buy new material and cut it up to make quilts. Whereas years ago they'd use the leftovers from cuttings from the dresses to make quilts. They didn't buy much. But they couldn't—years ago, through the depression and stuff. (interview)

Another Old Order lady offered a similar example:

...Nowadays, everybody wants a certain pattern [in the material for dresses] because you can have it. For instance, you're not supposed to have anything very large patterned, like with a very large flower in it. And you can get nice ones that are subdued or sort of blended into each other. At one time, you would have been happy just to have material to make dresses for your children. I remember one time, mother had gotten this material. It was blue. It had nice blue flowers. And, she told me that I would get an outfit like this for school. It was too bright for church, but for school it would have been fine. And I was really pleased. Then

later on somebody gave her another piece of material that was bigger. Then, she changed her mind. “This was bigger material, so I’ll get that. It’ll last me longer,” and she could make a big outfit with tucks and so on, you know, that I could wear longer. Then she’d make this other one for Elizabeth. And, this one now that she was going to make for me, oh what a horrible pattern! Oh, I just hated it! I just hated it! I hated that dress all the time that I wore it. I felt it wasn’t fair, but I can see now that mother was glad that she had just gotten this material. (interview)

What is important here is how prosperity is discussed and viewed. In the above interview excerpts the participants describe a by-gone era when things were done a certain way out of necessity. Today, many of the traditions are maintained, but prosperity has meant more choice and has thus presented potential alterations to the traditional way of doing things. In their remarks we see how making certain choices has made life easier and eclipsed some of their former modesty. So while modesty was dictated and expected in the past, it was also controlled by the fact that immodesty was a largely unaffordable luxury. While this sentiment still persists, greater prosperity has yielded more choices.

For the Old Order Mennonites, choice, if not controlled, is seen as having the potential of bringing their group closer to the modern world and all of its “unnecessary” trappings. To remain competitive in the current farm market has also meant that the church has had to remove certain restrictions on what people can and cannot have so that they can do their jobs more efficiently. But this newfound efficiency has come at a cost for the community: more leisure time. While outsiders might view more leisure time as desirable, from an Old Order perspective free time can become problematic. As an Old Order gentleman described it to me, leisure time can become

challenging to manage, particularly for their young people, as they might not make the appropriate choices when deciding what to do with their free time:

This is fine [i.e., the use of machinery to make farming viable], but it also provides more time for our young people. The more leisure time you have the more sports oriented our young people become. So, they are less interested in farming and more interested in leisure. Handling leisure time is difficult from an Old Order Mennonite perspective. I believe that it is a good day when I work a long day... More free time for our young people has led to more leisure time. On Sunday the young people go to church then have their recreation time. But now there's too much recreation and more of an interest in sports rather than working and the family. There has been more worship of athletes as a result of having more leisure time. This is one reason why we downplay sports. More of our young people are going to town to watch the [local hockey team] play hockey. We discourage this. Our young people should learn the traditions of the church rather than society's traditions. They should not have earthly heroes, but Biblical ones. (interview)

Another problem with leisure time, an Old Order lady shared with me, is that young people get interested in the wrong kind of music, taking them further away from living an appropriate lifestyle:

Another thing about the leisure time is that they [i.e., young people] are tempted to get tape players and listen to music. Then of course they like the loud music, which of course isn't good—it isn't conducive to worshipping. That's an on-going problem with the music. Then, of course, there are some things that I'm not even aware of. (interview)

Taken together, these challenges, if not managed properly, are seen as posing threats to the continuity of the group and its culture. Despite the various challenges, Martin (2003) argues that the Old Order have continued to find ways to adapt and largely maintain their simple way of life:

In order for farming to be economically viable, the cash flow must increase as farmland values rise. This unavoidable equation has challenged the Old Order Mennonite community, because as production rises so does the need for automation. Manual labour has its limits when trying to remain competitive, but the Old Order

have adapted and entered the economies in which they can compete. (p. 272)

He goes on to state that one of the things that has fostered the sustainability of Old Order farming practices has been the sharing of farm equipment and helping each other out during harvest. As an Old Order Mennonite told me, however, the barn-raising ethic—i.e., engaging in self-sacrifice in order to provide mutual aid for the betterment of the community—has been eroded over the past several years as people diversify their trades and become more prosperous and self-reliant:

If I've seen one big thing, in the last 30 years... [when there was a barn-raising] *all the neighbours got together!* It didn't matter who it was... You knew when they were building a barn, but normally when a fella built a barn, word was sent out: "On Thursday there's gonna be a barn raising, we're gonna need your help." All of a sudden that stopped. Even in our church it's less and less. They have to come around and ask people to come because, you know, "We need help. We haven't got enough help." Whatever changed that... One of the things that I think changed was how everybody used to help each other whether it was hay harvest or corn harvest. Everybody's independent now. And when there's a fire they say, "Well, maybe I'll go and maybe I won't." We've lost that feeling of "I gotta go and help my neighbour" no matter what religion he is or who he is... Then the other main thing that has changed is that, when we build a new barn they usually just hire a contractor and do it. How long it will be until we totally get away from this, I don't know.

As we see here, managing outside threats to the Old Order way of life is but one issue. Perhaps even more significant is how individuals within the community decide to respond to things that might alter their lifestyle. Some values (e.g., focus on devotion to God, closeness to family) are emphasized over others (e.g., type of work and how it is carried out), and as such, certain aspects of their value system might be sacrificed so that higher order values

are sustained. What is meant by this is that, while the community would like to keep their simplicity and other significant values, they concede that from time-to-time it will be necessary to sacrifice on certain values in order for them to maintain those that are seen as more crucial to their way of life. For instance, financial challenges brought on by a turbulent farm industry have been responded to by allowing some modernization and vocational changes (e.g., furniture production) in order to compete. Such choices allow the young men to remain on their farms and near their families instead of finding jobs in the city. Partial sacrifices are made in terms of their simple lifestyle so that the community can continue to maintain its emphasis on family and separation from the outside world.

In the end, the choices that people make, working within the constraints of their social structure, have the potential to change their way of life. Quite often, the type of change that is permitted is seen as the lesser of two evils. A Mennonite historian reiterated these points, indicating that the choices made by the Old Order Mennonites on how to adapt to contemporary strains are done by taking into account what types of changes will alter the Old Order way of life the least:

I asked Lloyd [a Mennonite historian] why he thought the Old Order Mennonites have permitted the shops on their properties. He believes it has to do with economics and about preserving culture. In terms of economics, the shops allow them to make a living in a time when the small family farm isn't cutting it. Families will also move away from the region to buy farms in more affordable areas—the cities are encroaching more and more on local farmland and forcing property prices ever higher. In terms of how the on-farm shops help to preserve culture, he gave me an example of a Mennonite colony in the U.S. which started permitting shops on the farms. He said that the local automotive

industry had been attracting more and more Mennonites to work for them. The answer to offset the young men leaving the farms was to allow manufacturing to take place on the farms. Thus, the on-farm shops became the lesser of two evils. (field notes)

In this section we have seen how the Old Order Mennonite community views prosperity and the choices that stem from being able to do more within, and outside, their society. When times were more difficult, it was not as necessary to have such a high degree of institutionalized control over people's choices and acculturative forms of change as these things were almost self-managed by the fact that immodest and inappropriate choices were mainly unaffordable indulgences. Now, as younger generations have obtained more wealth, have greater access to outside sources of credit, and look for new ways to survive financially in a difficult agricultural market, alternatives to the way things were done in the past are more apt to be considered. The temptation to want and have more has become a growing issue, and without a commitment on behalf of their society as a whole to encourage self-restraint and submit to the wisdom of the brotherhood, choice, if not limited, has the potential to alter the culture in ways members, particular the elders and ministry, see as unfit for a faith community emphasizing self-sacrifice, devotion to God, modesty, family, and simplicity. As such, an emphasis on centrally and formally prescribing change has become increasingly necessary in order to sustain cultural continuity.

## **DISCUSSION**

As was illustrated in this chapter, decisions by the Old Order Mennonites to change are made slowly after extended discussion with people in the

community. The key arbiters of change for this group are the clergy. The bishops, ministers, and deacons are vested with the definitive authority and power to decide what changes will be allowed and what rules are necessary to maintain the group's way of life. The *Ordnung* and interpretations of the Bible are used to dictate what an appropriate lifestyle should include for members of the church. Confronted by the paradox of financial hardship and prosperity, the group decides on and reinforces the types of choices deemed permissible.

Social control measures are a significant means of cultural survival for the Old Order Mennonites. To understand the relationship between social control and change, I introduced Eaton's (1952) notion of controlled acculturation as a sensitizing concept. In this way, I was able to apply and extend the idea of controlled acculturation to further contextualize the relationship between social control and change among the Old Order Mennonites. A significant observation to be made here is that Eaton's conceptualization of change is one-sided. That is, acculturation is but one "direction" of social change. Thus, controlled acculturation aptly characterizes the types of social changes that move towards the adoption of more "worldly" things. But, it does not take into account changes that are brought about to reinforce a group's existing cultural boundaries or how a group engages in "cultural reversion" so as to reinstitute the material and non-material culture of a previous point in time. Data regarding the fortifying of social boundaries (e.g., instituting rules to make clear what is acceptable and unacceptable) and cultural reversion re-emphasizing past expectations (e.g.,



length of dresses, keeping photographs) were presented in this chapter. As was noted, dissenting groups will sometimes withdraw from the Old Order community in order to shore up their social boundaries and re-establish a simpler, more conservative culture. As was also indicated, certain individuals within the Old Order community will choose to individually keep to a simpler lifestyle than the rest of their community in order to practice a way of life meaningful to them and guard against secularization. Considering these two additional dimensions—i.e., reinforcing existing boundaries and cultural reversion—allows for a clearer characterization of how social change is controlled by the Old Order Mennonites.

I have attempted to build on the concept of controlled acculturation by incorporating the idea of “prescribed change.” Prescribed change represents the process by which the designated leaders of a social group decide upon the changes to be made to their culture. Potential changes are negotiated among members of the community, but ultimately dictated by its leaders, and put into practice by members of the group. As with controlled acculturation it might well involve accepting aspects of another culture, while integrating any such changes into their existing culture. As per controlled acculturation, it can involve a sacrifice in the degree of autonomy from other cultures the group experiences, but it might also mean changes that further separate the group from other cultures (cultural reversion) and changes that re-emphasize the cultural boundaries of the group (boundary reinforcement). As with controlled acculturation, prescribed change is only possible when the group yields authority to their leaders and the leaders have the support of the people. That

said, prescribed change does not always equal absolute recognition and following by those whom are part of the community. Individual members might resist the rules of the group. And, as with the Old Order Mennonites, there are mechanisms in place to deal with those who deviate. I take up this point in the next chapter.

It is also important to note here that financial hardship, prosperity, and increased choice might serve as catalysts for change in that people interpret them as such and act to share their perceptions and courses of action with others. That said, it is clear that change does not happen unless people make or permit it happen, and come to an interpretation of their social reality that views social change as having taken place. Within the Old Order community we are offered a worthwhile example of how social change is prescribed. Change does not simply impose itself on the Old Order community. Rather, change occurs through a negotiated, interactive process, with certain individuals—namely the clergy—being afforded the authority to decide on the types of changes to be made. Although there is a hierarchical decision-making structure legitimated by the community and based on the group's interpretation of the Bible, change is necessarily a negotiated process with members of the community making claims about what changes are appropriate and inappropriate. For example, when the Old Order Mennonites decided to permit the telephone into their community, they did so based on their perception of necessity. As described, not everyone in the community held the same opinion, but ultimately the claim of necessity was successful, the clergy approved it with restrictions, and the group adopted the telephone. This piece

of technology was socially constructed as becoming essential to sustaining their way of life, and further justified on the basis of saving face among their non-Mennonite neighbours.

External perceptions might suggest that changes such as the acceptance of the telephone were deterministically thrust upon the Old Order. Closer inspection, however, confirms this not to be the case. By examining some of the claims-making that surrounded the introduction of the telephone into Old Order culture, we are able to more aptly envision its adoption as a negotiated process. This subculture, working within the broader subcultural mosaic of their host culture, came to the conclusion that while perhaps too worldly in many ways and potentially altering the social dynamics of the community based on how it was put into use, the telephone was an acceptable loss – i.e., towards becoming more worldly. But note, however, that not all agreed that this conclusion was inevitable. For the dissenting group of Mennonites that moved to Kinloss to protect their culture, they perhaps recognized that the phone could make life easier in some ways, but it was not seen as necessary to their overall cultural survival. The extent to which it would alter their way of life was too much of a sacrifice. I raise the example of the telephone again here so as to reinforce a key point being made in this dissertation: to understand social change, we need consider the intersubjective, socially constructed nature of human group life. Without doing so, social change might be characterized as overly deterministic.

I agree with Blumer (1969) that, while social reality might well be obdurate, we come to a more complete understanding of the social world by

analyzing how people act towards it, no matter how stubborn it might seem to our actions and interpretations. Through a macrosociological lens it might appear as if change simply sweeps across the Old Order community.

However, examining their social world on a more sustained, situated, and up-close basis we are permitted a richer understanding of the interactive features of social change. When change happens, there are a variety of different perspectives vying to have their interpretations recognized as the most legitimate and beneficial for determining how the group as a whole will respond to perceived threats to their social world. With the Old Order community we are able to examine just how significant social control—as a socially enacted feature of a group’s social structure—is to the process of change.

This chapter has broadly explored the interconnection between social change and control within the Old Order community. The next chapter considers the influence of social control on change in an even more direct fashion by exploring: (a) how Old Order Mennonites define deviance and how deviance is perceived as a threat to cultural continuity; (b) how the community reinforces compliance with the rules of the group; and, (c) how these things, taken together, sustain homogeneity among brethren and why maintaining uniformity is so valuable to resisting social change for the Old Order Mennonites.

## CHAPTER 6

### MANAGING THEIR OWN: DEVIANCE AND THE APPLICATION OF SOCIAL CONTROL TO MEDIATE CHANGE

#### INTRODUCTION

When you are baptized you are not just adopting of our theological beliefs, you're saying you will adhere to the lifestyle and be under the direction of the brotherhood. (Old Order Mennonite, interview)

Building on the previous chapter's examination of social control and prescribed change, this chapter will discuss and analyze how deviance is viewed and controlled by the Old Order Mennonites. Two particular "forms" of deviance, although not mutually exclusive, emerged as problem areas for the Old Order. They included wayward youth and defection from the Old Order community. Youth were seen as, at times, presenting problems for cultural continuity as they are often the most resistant to authority and tradition, and more likely to openly covet worldly things. Defection, on the other hand, represents a direct loss of group members, and if not controlled has the potential to not only generate more would-be deserters, but also bring about the ultimate dissolution of the Old Order community. Beyond examining the issues of wayward youth and defection, this chapter also presents material on how these forms of deviance, and deviance more generally, are controlled. I also argue that underlying the issue of social

control for the Old Order is their emphasis on sustaining homogeneity. I posit that Old Orders are particularly vigilant in their expectations of uniformity, not only out of their commitment to the scriptures, but also because it is crucial for reducing social comparison and competition, and by extension, the desire or temptation to change. To situate the analysis that follows, I begin by examining the Old Order perspective on deviance.

### **DEVIANCE AND THE OLD ORDER PERSPECTIVE**

It is best to be clear upfront how the term deviance is being used here. In line with Becker (1963), Kitsuse (1962), and Erikson's (1962) early formulations of "labeling theory," I will be working from the notion that deviance is a societal reaction, and thus, deviance is what people so choose to label and react to as such. In this way I begin by examining how deviance is perceived from within the Old Order community, the relative nature of deviance for the Old Order, and why deviance is a threat to continuity.

Derived from their biblical interpretations, those things considered sinful are defined by Old Orders as deviant in the most absolute terms. It is felt that those outside the Old Order community are often lost in this regard (i.e., in terms of appropriately defining what is and is not deviant, and why it is considered as such), as most do not recognize (or have lost sight of) the Word of God as the ultimate authority on right and wrong. As a result, they view and address deviance somewhat differently and claim not to run into the same sorts of problems (or at least not to the same extent) that confront their host society.

During an interview an Old Order Mennonite deacon told me that his community does not have the same problems with deviance that those outside his group do. As an example, he pointed out that homosexuality is unheard of among the Old Orders. Why? Because for him, it is simply a fact that homosexuality is wrong, and therefore, should not be practiced. He explained that, “There is the gay movement in the outside world. This is not even a topic of discussion for the Old Order” (interview). His matter-of-fact take on homosexuality left little room for interpretation – it is sinful, and thus, deviant. Within the Old Order community interpretations of the Bible determine deviance, and thus sinful acts, beliefs, and appearances are seen as incontrovertible.

To keep their church membership, Old Orders are expected to live a life of discipleship. That is, members are expected to live according to God’s Word and therefore, they have a strict moral code. For example, while a glass of liquor is permissible, drunkenness is considered a sin and is not tolerated. If deviant behaviour persists, it will result in that individual’s excommunication from the church (Scott, 1996). As with any subculture, what is and is not considered deviant does not always correspond to broader societal viewpoints. For instance, it might be perplexing to (some) outsiders that Old Orders: do not wear shorts, even on the hottest of days; will never work on a Sunday; and, will pay out of pocket for their medical services even though they have paid taxes to support the state’s health care system.<sup>21</sup> However, at the group level, all these things are seen as normal and

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<sup>21</sup> In Canada, most health care expenses are covered by a government sponsored plan.

appropriate. And, of course to do the contrary is seen as deviant. This is obviously quite the reverse from the majority of people in their host society.

To help further elucidate Old Order understandings of deviance, I offer an excerpt from an interview I had with a principal. During our interview he shared with me a conversation he had with an Old Order Mennonite man from Lancaster County in Pennsylvania. Consider the Old Order gentleman's perspective on some of the things he views as normal and abnormal:

A lot of the stuff we do may not make sense to you, but it does to us when we look at why we are doing it.... A lot of stuff you do doesn't make any sense to me either... [H]ow many of you belong to a gym where you have jumped in your car, drive 3 miles to a gym, pay all kinds of money to use some of the equipment, then you go out and instead of biking home, you drive.... [T]he other thing is [that] ... the most valued people within our community are the grandparents. You put them in an old folks' home and shut them away so the grandchildren can't see them and don't have any contact with them once they are there. We incorporate them into our lives. It is very important for the young people to have interaction with their grandparents. (interview)

The examples raised here illustrate my points regarding the group's contrasting views on certain forms of deviance and the relativity of deviance more generally. In Blumerian-like fashion the principal who shared this story urged me to be mindful of the way in which the Old Order make sense out of their world, and not just consider what the Old Order world looks like to an outsider:

You can't just look at the end result and think, "That doesn't make any sense." You need to think of it as, "Okay, well they were trying to do this and that's why they came up with this rule and that makes sense to them...." You need to follow their line of thinking. Their line of thinking is how they arrive at that point. (interview)



Through sympathetic introspection, the Old Orders' perspective on deviance, and their lifestyle more generally, is revealed. By seeing the world as they do we are able to come to a more complete understanding of how it is that their norms and their adherence to them are not only what makes them separate and peculiar, but are also what helps to keep them that way.

Despite (or, perhaps as a result of) holding what outsiders might view as utopian standards, deviance does occur among the Old Order. The issues that arise, as with any group, are made more complex depending on the context, individual statuses, and power of those involved. Although the Bible is the objective benchmark against which people's acts are judged, there is of course a humanly interpreted component which impacts people's reaction to deviance. Like any community, there is differential treatment in the application of deviant labels and enforcement of rules. One participant illustrated these points by suggesting that in one case in particular:

...the bishop wanted to push it [i.e., accusations of wrongdoing] out, saying that [the accused person] is in good standing with the church, like dress-wise and stuff like that, that he sees no reason to excommunicate him.

Another informant stressed that the same accused individual received preferential treatment from the clergy, "Because it is who it was that did this." Thus, despite claiming to treat sinful forms of deviance as absolute wrongs, this is overly idealistic. Interpretations might be intersubjectively defined similarly among community members, but are nonetheless relative.

The Old Orders realize that their approach to understanding and handling deviance is not perfect, and they do not want to be seen as claiming

otherwise. Rather, informants stressed that it be understood that they are human and prone to fault just like anyone else. Note the following remarks by two Old Order Mennonite ladies:

A lot of people look at the Mennonites as real good people, but I always say we're just human like everybody else. We have our problems the big and the small (laughter). (interview)

And:

To put it bluntly, all of us are sinners saved by grace. That's it. If we don't believe in what Christ did for us on the cross, it doesn't matter if you're Mennonite or not, that's not going to save us. A lot of people seem to think that they can't do anything wrong. Then they can be terribly hurt perhaps, or surprised. It's just not a comfortable thing. You should never praise somebody too much I don't think. (interview)

Envisioning deviance differently than outsiders might does not preclude failures along the way. Group ideals set the standards for conformity, and in so doing, create the definitional preconditions for deviance.

The point to be emphasized from this section is that deviance is very much interpreted and defined as various actors present viewpoints. They do so as they seek to share and persuade others of their interpretation of reality. In defining and acting on one's beliefs towards right and wrong, good and bad, a certain level of social order and common social experience is established such that people are familiarized with the group's conception of deviance and the rules of appropriate social conduct. As the findings discussed over the last few pages have suggested and the ensuing sections will make clear, deviance, by its very nature and definition, threatens the way things are done and has the potential to promote social change.

The next two sections further explore the Mennonite perspective on deviance by examining the issue of delinquent youth and exiting from the Old Order lifestyle. The purposes of these analyses are twofold. First, I demonstrate how the Old Order socially construct the problem of deviance and its solutions. Second, working from an Old Order understanding of deviance, I show the interactive process through which members of their community invoke and apply social control measures to manage deviance and change.

### **MANAGING THE PROBLEM OF YOUTH**

Young people, whether Mennonite or not, are often viewed by the older generation as responsible for a number of social problems. In his discussion of the social construction of youth problems Tanner (2007) writes, “No other social group receives as much negative attention as the young” (p. 2). For older generations, and particularly those who are responsible for managing social control and change within a society, youth are seen as a noteworthy threat as it is felt that they are the most likely to challenge the wisdom underlying the way things are done and, subsequently, the boundaries of the community. Bereska (2008) writes that, from the public’s perspective, youth and deviance go hand-in-hand. She states that, “More than any other age group, it is youth who are perceived as having lifestyles built around deviance” (2008: 138). A similar trend exists within the Old Order Mennonite community.

There are concerns among older Mennonites that their younger people are particularly susceptible to lusting after worldly things and testing the

boundaries of their culture. In so doing, deviant youth become internal protagonists for acculturation. Although undercurrents of this pattern in the data are woven throughout the material presented in previous chapters (e.g., youth and cars, leisure time, music), this section will specifically highlight how the problems of youth are constructed by Old Order Mennonites particularly as they are seen as problematic for cultural continuity. The data for this section will demonstrate that the threat posed by youth deviance is characterized by participants as not so much an individual issue, but one that impacts the group as a whole, and if not properly controlled has the potential to change the group's culture in ways that people are uncomfortable with.

Whether Mennonite or non-Mennonite, adolescence for many can be difficult, tumultuous years of experimentation, self-exploration, and anti-authoritarianism. Although their culture may be more discipline-oriented, with a greater emphasis on devotion to God and the community than many Christian groups, Old Order Mennonites find themselves in similar circumstances in terms of having to manage youth delinquency as their non-Mennonite neighbours. As one ex-Old Order stated, each group will find problems with its young people:

My dad says often, “We had a bunch of bad people with the young group when we were young, too.” It's the same no matter where you go with young folks. There's always going to be one rotten apple. (interview)

Participants often discussed youth delinquency in conjunction with the temptations of the outside world. Note the following Old Order Mennonite teacher's comments: “Teenagers... are always looking beyond the borders of

the Mennonite community” (interview). In terms of controlling change, this participant highlighted the need for the church, school, and parents to reinforce the spiritual values of the Old Order community. Offering an inside look at the Old Order’s traditions and customs, Isaac Horst (2000), an Old Order Mennonite himself, suggests that the community’s “wayward ones” are more often than not their young people. He suggests that young people are more likely to be drawn in by worldly temptations. That said, compared to the problems posed by (or plaguing) youth in their host society, young Old Order Mennonites are puritan. Horst echoes this point in stating, “Considering the problems faced by many churches, we of the Old Order Mennonites have reason to be thankful” (2000: 92). However, when viewed in relative terms—i.e., within the context of Old Order society—controlling the problem of youth is an ongoing concern for the Old Order.

The most significant problems presented by youth revolve around smoking, drinking, going into the city for entertainment, and wanting to drive a vehicle. Two interviewees depicted Old Order youth delinquency in the following ways:

[T]hey get into parties and stuff like that, which is really hard to control. It’s really hard to control some of these parties that our young folks are getting into.... I think it was last Fall that we heard a couple young guys were at the young people’s meeting and they got into a drinking spree. (interview)

And:

With the young boys it’s usually the smoking and drinking beer and going to hockey games and things like that. It’s amazing. The older generations thought in theory was that if you drive horse and buggy you can’t go all the way down to Jamestown to watch a hockey game. Your horse just can’t handle that. That won’t

happen. But Alvin said, “There were ways that we could slip out of the young folk gathering and go down to this hockey game and come back again in time to take the girls home.” They had their friends that had cars and it was just a matter of jumping in and going. Or, if nothing else, he said that the city taxi did a great job (laughter). If they want to, they will go. (interview)

Another Old Order Mennonite echoes the previous interviewee’s concluding comments by pointing out that, should their young people want to visit the city there is not much their community can do to stop them: “That’s it exactly it. They get there anyways” (interview).

There was most certainly a tone of ambivalence throughout comments that I was hearing from Old Orders about how the group, and more specifically the church leaders, deal with the problem of youth. But, despite the fact that some members of the group attribute little success to the measures their community uses to dissuade deviance, older Mennonites recognize the benefits of setting firm boundaries. With the boundaries made clear to the young people it not only sets the bar for the level of deviance that occurs within the community, it also establishes the repercussions for transgression. These observations are reminiscent of Erikson’s (1966) book *Wayward Puritans*. In taking the English Puritan settlers of Massachusetts in the 1600s as his case study of deviance, Erikson (1966) notes that “...the styles of deviation a people experiences have something to do with the way it visualizes the boundaries of its cultural universe” (p. ix). Penalizing delinquent behaviour serves for the Old Order, as it did for the Puritans, as a way of reinforcing the boundaries of the group. Also, as with the Puritans, it is made clear not only how the

moral boundaries of the group are ultimately controlled by their ministerial leaders, but also intersubjectively defined and acted towards within the subcultural context. When juxtaposed with the types of regulations held by those outside the Mennonite community, the Old Order's rules are more restrictive and the boundaries are much more fixed and black-and-white. This is accomplished within a social reality where communal life is the norm and the rules frequently shared and enforced, resulting in an objectified reality that leaves little room for reinterpretation.

For most of the people I spoke with, peer pressure was seen as the major reason for youth deviance. Note the following interviewees' comments:

A teenager, if they really are honest, yes hormones have a lot to do with it, but they want to feel accepted. And peer pressure is so big. They want to try and find a spot and some of them just don't know the right way how to go after seeking attention. Then they seek attention the wrong way, they definitely do get attention, but just not what they were hoping for.

[T]he real young people, 14 and 15 year olds, they are very influenced by their peers. They don't want to be different.

That's one problem we have with our young people, is peer pressure. They have to get out there. They can't make a living off just farming anymore, so they get jobs and they get working with all kinds of different people. I'm not putting everybody in the same box, and there's a lot of people that I highly respect. I respect their Christian attitudes. As far as I'm concerned I sometimes think that they're better Christians than what we are. But then there's the other kind, too. That can rub-off so easily on a teenager.

As reiterated by the research participant in the last interview excerpt, the Old Order find it imperative to guide their children through the difficulties of adolescence, particularly in ways that ensure that they are as removed as



possible from the influence of those outside their community. When one's in-group includes people outside their subculture's social world, then peer pressure becomes particularly problematic. Eaton (1952) makes a similar observation about the Hutterites in his study. First identifying the outside world as pressuring the Hutterites to change, he continues by identifying young Hutterites as representing a key internal pressure towards change:

Second, there also is pressure from the "inside." Hutterites, particularly those in the younger age groups, are internalizing some of the values and expectations of their American neighbors. They want more individual initiative and choice and they consider things regarded as luxuries by their elders, to be necessities. (Eaton, 1952: 333)

The Old Order way of managing the problems of youth deviance has been to emphasize the tenets of their beliefs, while reprimanding those who choose to deviate. As such, the community has both proactive and reactive measures in place to control delinquency. Preventative techniques revolve around appropriate socialization and controlling access to worldly things and the problems that might arise from them. Reactive techniques are largely punitive, and are in place to help delinquents realize their folly and reaffirm their commitment to God and their brethren.

As argued in chapter four, the boundaries of their community not only act to keep the outside out, but keep the inside in. This point is made clear in terms of how they attempt to control access to worldly things and limit the amount of contact with the outside world. This is seen particularly in their restrictions surrounding the ownership of vehicles for transportation. But preventing their younger people from envying alternatives to their way of life



can be difficult. One Old Order gentleman told me that it has become harder to control their children. He suggested that part of this problem has to do with prosperity:

I think it is getting harder all the time to control the children; not really control them, but to discipline them and to raise them in an atmosphere that you can keep them out of parties like that, drinking parties and stuff like that and all kinds of things. For one thing they have much more money than we did. We had no money. When I was a kid if I got a dollar for Christmas to buy something that was considered a lot of money (laughter). They didn't have it. Back when we were kids there was the odd broiler barn.<sup>22</sup> Nowadays there are so many of these huge broiler barns around and they want young people to help catch these broilers. It's nothing for them to get \$200 in one night. And that's their money. If they go at night, that's their money. It's amazing what they can all buy with \$200 nowadays. (interview)

Having more money, leisure time, and greater access to outside things poses a threat to the Old Order way of life as their children now not only have the temptation to look beyond their borders, they have more free time and the financial ability to follow up on their interests. This point builds on some of the data that have been presented in the previous chapter, with the result being succinctly summarized in the following quote: "...the younger generation is more likely to buy things from the store. *It's handier*" (Old Order Mennonite, interview, emphasis added).

A former Old Order lady was critical of the Old Order's approach to managing youth, indicating that the reaction to adolescent deviance is too harsh. She suggested that the community would be better off by taking a "let kids be kids" approach:

...[T]hey're managing the church right now with more rules and regulations. They're *really* hammering on the young folks not to

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<sup>22</sup> A broiler barn is a barn housing chickens raised specifically for meat production.

do this, this, and this. Let the young folks be young. They should let them get their mischievousness out of them, but they don't. They get punished by every little thing that they do. (interview)

However, as Horst (2000) maintains, it was much more common in the past to shun<sup>23</sup> those who were seen as being disobedient. A more lenient approach is taken towards today's deviant youth. Horst (2000) writes that, "When a reasonably lenient attitude is maintained, there is the possibility that the wayward one may be won back" (p. 93-94). He goes on to state, "If we have failed to impress on our children the value of a humble and God-fearing life, we have likely failed earlier" (p. 94).

Old Order leniency would likely be deemed overly harsh by outside standards. To control their young, they believe in instilling a strong sense of "discipline, obedience, and discipleship" (Horst, 2000: 92), and they are not at odds with using corporal punishment as a way of ensuring that children are kept in line. Such an approach may strike outsiders as draconian, but from an Old Order perspective, it is part of how they are socialized and is justified based on biblical interpretations. As one Old Order gentleman explained it to me, parents are primarily responsible for ensuring that children are properly disciplined. However, he felt that it is becoming increasingly difficult to discipline their young:

I think home life has a lot to do with how your children will act or react from the time that they start school until they are teenagers. I think that has a very big bearing on it. I know some people that really have problems with it. They can hardly control their kids.... I mean you can't always control your children. Once they get into

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<sup>23</sup> Shunning represents the deliberate avoidance of a community member. It used to be that an excommunicated member was completely ostracised from the community—including friends and family—so as to remove the sinful person from fellowship with the church. Shunning continues to be practiced by the David Martin Mennonites.

adulthood they can do as they want. There is nothing that parents have to say to them anymore. I mean, I felt the same way about my parents once I was of age. I was my own boss, right? But as far as having our problems with the teenagers I think a lot of that has to do with discipline at home and teaching them what is right and wrong. I always had to be careful to teach my children that... (interview)

Perhaps his perspective has to do with some of the aforementioned problems in older generations overstating the problems of new generations, or he might well be hitting on a change within their culture. I am inclined to argue that it is the perception of their social reality that matters. Whether objectively correct or not, people act on their interpretations, a point that was eloquently made in W.I. Thomas' theorem of action and interpretation: "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (1928: 571-572).

Within the Old Order community there is the perception of the (growing) problem of youth delinquency. As a result, tradition and biblical interpretations have led them to address the issue in ways consistent with their beliefs. For the Old Order, it has meant being more lenient in some ways (e.g., no longer formally practicing shunning) and more restrictive in others (e.g., more rules enforcing the boundaries of conformity).

In the next section I expand on my examination of deviance, social control, and change to explore how leaving the Old Order lifestyle is seen and managed by brethren, and the impact it has on their culture.

## **DEALING WITH DEFECTION**

Perhaps the most direct internal threat to the loss of the Old Order culture comes when people end up leaving the community. Should individuals

become dissatisfied with their lifestyle they have the choice to either continue to submit to the brotherhood and be respectful of their brethren, or exit from the group. Such an exit, as will be shown, is more complicated than it would seem as leaving the group means leaving much of what that individual has come to know about the world and entering a new life that is foreign to them. The leaving of a comfort zone for the unknown in itself becomes a key social control mechanism dissuading departure. These issues, along with how exiting is viewed and controlled more generally, are taken up in this section. The benefits of exiting to cultural continuity are also explored, with the conclusion being that it is essential for the Old Orders to strike a balance surrounding keeping members and shedding their discontent.

In terms of who stays and who leaves, I was told that it is their young people whom are most likely to leave. My informants indicated that it has become an increasing challenge for the Old Order to keep their young people. It is believed that there are more temptations out there now compared to the past. Note the following Old Order lady's comments:

It's beginning to be more and more of a challenge [i.e., keeping their young people] because many ministers say there are many more conflicts and temptations out now than there used to be. (interview)

It was also suggested to me that a current trend with exiting has been young families leaving:

A lot of people wonder how we can keep our young people. Now, once in awhile somebody leaves the church. But interestingly enough lately it's been more young married people that have left than single people. That doesn't happen on regular basis, but it does happen. Usually it's because they want a car or whatever to get around. (interview)

A former Old Order Mennonite further discussed this trend with me, and noted that it is because the rules have become overly burdensome, to the point where she feels that the group is beginning to emphasize rules and tradition over living out their spiritual values. She indicated that Old Orders need to look to what is going on within their community, not outside, to discover why their young families are leaving:

...[T]he weird part of it is, you'd think that with losing so many families—like 30 families is quite a bit—you'd think they'd ask, "What are we doing wrong within our church that we're losing so many?" But they're not doing that. They're putting the blame on the people that are going. "They're just lustful after worldly things and they want more worldly stuff." Yet, everybody that leaves the church that we talk to, they're seeking more of a spiritual-traditional balance than the way things are going right now.  
(interview)

### *The Benefits of Defection for Cultural Continuity*

It must also be noted that in terms of sustaining cultural continuity having the discontented leave might well be better than having them stay. Having dissatisfied members remain in the fold presents problems for continuity in that these individuals have the potential to disrupt the social order through their alternative viewpoints, problematic behaviour, and general malaise. The Old Order expect total, yet voluntary commitment to their lifestyle and the brotherhood. Martin (2003) offers the following story to illustrate how the discontent are viewed and treated:

A brash young grandson, who later learned to appreciate the brotherhood, harped on his aged grandfather about the trivial issues and values held by the brotherhood. The aged man looked the youth in the face and said, "Look, we want a plain church and are striving to maintain those values. If these values mean nothing to you, you may go where your values are the norm, but don't dig up dirt here...." The Old Order brotherhood requires a voluntary

commitment from its members and looks upon its members to present their ideas, not push them. (p. 124-125).

Martin (2003) argues that it is not the number of members that makes the Old Order community what it is. Losing members whom are not interested in being appreciative of the brotherhood and practicing *Gelassenheit* (i.e., roughly, self-surrender to the community and God's will), is an acceptable loss. Those that challenge the brotherhood are at odds with values of the community.

In cases where, for instance, someone is interested in owning a car and chooses to leave for that reason, I was told by people that it is simply a matter of choice and the community would rather that they leave in peace. Note the following comments made during an interview with two Old Order

Mennonites:

Steve: I remember Eric [a non-Mennonite] telling me what Samuel [an Old Order Mennonite] had said to him, when they were younger, that one day he wanted to have a car like Eric's father. This is when they were both young. And I guess he never got a vehicle. But Samuel talked to Eric later on in life about his kids getting vehicles and how it kind of in a way bothered him still. He remembered telling Eric when he was younger that he wanted to have a vehicle. Then Eric remembered one day pulling up to Samuel's house and one of the boys pulling out in the truck. He said that Samuel must have finally given in.

Mary: No, it wasn't really a matter of giving in. The son would have just decided that that's what he wanted and then that's that.

Edna: He was 21. If he's that age, then they can make up their own mind.

Mary: They are not closeted or anything.

Edna: I don't think it damaged their relationship or anything. He was still Samuel's son you know.

Steve: I can imagine that people might look differently on the family though. Would that ever happen?

Edna: It bothers some people very very much, but for most it doesn't damage their relationship.

Mary: Years ago there was this theory that if you were really really hard on them and turn you back on them that they'll come back. Very few people found it hard to give up that theory. But it obviously hadn't ever worked, so now I don't know of anyone who is exactly like that anymore.

Steve: His son would have to leave the church though, would he not?

Mary: Oh yeah. But if he decides that he wants a vehicle that means that he'll have to join another church.

While perhaps the departure of the dissatisfied is better for the brotherhood as a whole, the loss of members impacts the community in lasting ways. The above statements suggest that relationships carry-on as usual when someone ends up leaving the church. Certainly the circumstances surrounding the departure impact how ex-Mennonites and their families are regarded and regard one another. As other informants made clear to me there is a process in place that ensures that members fully contemplate their decision to leave, that decisions to leave are not made lightly, and that there are some significant social difficulties that arise with departure. The material presented here highlights the important role played by defection in protecting the lifestyle of the Old Order. However, it only portrays one side of how the loss of members is regarded, and perhaps paints a rosier picture than what the reality may very well be.



*The Process of Leaving the Fold and its Implications for Change*

How people are treated leading up to their departure and after they leave becomes an element of social control worthy of mention. Those who are considering defection go through both informal and formal labelling and social control processes befitting Garfinkel's (1956) notion of a "status degradation ceremony" and Tannenbaum's (1938) concept of "the dramatization of evil." Essentially the social control strategies enacted by the Old Orders surrounding would-be exiters and former Old Orders serve to inculcate in both the deviant and other potential defectors, the wrongfulness of their decisions, the difficulties they will face in the outside world, and the ordeal they will encounter should they seek to return.

When someone decides to leave the church, the dynamics of former relationships are significantly altered. While the Old Orders do not practice shunning (as the David Martin Mennonites and Amish do), there is still a stigma attached to ex-members. Note the following comments made by an Older Order gentleman:

There is grief involved when a family member leaves the church. Sometimes whole families leave. Sometimes they are looked upon unfavourably, but when a family has someone leave the family is not looked down on. There is a stigma involved, though, that doesn't go away. A family that keeps all their children in the church is seen as a good example of family. (interview)

Exiting typically involves a fairly drawn-out decision-making process as such a choice can dramatically alter an individual's social reality. Of particular concern is the way in which leaving the Old Order alters one's relationship to family, friends, and the church. An Old Order Mennonite deacon described to me the process one goes through when contemplating such a change: "If



someone wants to leave, a deacon will discuss their decision with them. If they decide then to leave, it is announced in church that they dropped their membership. It is a long, deep decision that someone makes before they leave” (interview).

One ex-Old Order Mennonite described to me the way in which leaving altered her relationship with family and friends. While family members found certain aspects of her decision and new lifestyle hard to accept, she stated that both her and her husband’s family were more or less accepting of the decision. However, as she describes, she has had very little contact with non-family members, and when there is interaction, former acquaintances tend to be aloof:

Steve: Do you still communicate and have relationships with other people in the Old Order community?

Melinda: Actually very very little. Hardly anybody. The people that were my closest friends, they turned their backs towards us. Well, yes, I meet them on the streets and they say “Hi,” but it’s very distant. (interview)

If in contemplating their departure former Old Order Mennonites did not consider the way in which their world would be altered, the reality of now having left becomes very clear to them. Although family might well support them on some level, other relationships can become tenuous.

The Old Order life is the only life that people growing up in this community have known. As a teacher with a Mennonite heritage related to me, unlike many outside the Old Order community whom have multiple, familiar social worlds to draw on should one world be cut off to them, the Old Orders typically have but one social world that they are a part of:

You and I have many circles that make our life and who we are. And so I have work circle, I have a sports, hockey interest, women's hockey and my job. And I have a church circle and a family circle. I have a neighbour circle here with my people where I live. And they can overlap, some overlap quite a bit or just touch each other or whatever. So lets say I decide I am not happy with my living circle, where I live, okay. I can move, but I still have many other circles intact. For the Mennonites, the work circle, social circle, church circle, interest circle are all overlapping concentric circles. So now we have circle, circle, circle, circle [As she says this, she is drawing imaginary overlapping circles in the air with her finger]. And now you're upset maybe with your work situation and you're going to leave the work. *If you jump out of that circle, you are jumping out the rest.* And that pull to stay within, is *soooo strong*. It's like a *castle wall*, those circles. They do need to go out. Like obviously they'll come to the stock market and do their thing and come back. So for enterprise or if they need a product or something, they'll be in contact with the other world, the English-speaking world. But the pull to stay within that group is *so strong*. Because you'll be shunned and ex-communicated. (interview, emphasis in the original)

As the above quote illustrates, the social world of the Old Order itself serves as a “castle wall” or boundary against defection. Should an Old Order Mennonite choose to leave their family, such as in the case of divorce (which is virtually unheard of in this community), choose to find a job deemed inappropriate for their group, go on to full-time higher education, engage in leisure pursuits unbecoming their faith, or, ultimately, leave their church (which all of the aforementioned issues may lead to) they may voluntarily, or be forced to, leave their community. Exiting a single area of one's life means the sacrifice of all the other areas. Such is the case for religious communities where their tight-knit social world becomes the totality of their social reality. As such, an Old Order Mennonite lady stated that if people choose to leave it is probably best to do so when they are young:

If people leave the Old Order community to drive vehicles, it's probably better when they're young. They haven't had as long as time... Of course, if they go to another Mennonite church that's quite conservative, there aren't as many changes, but there are still changes. (interview)

She intimates that earlier departures may be easier on exiters in terms of their ability to become integrated into a new social world, as they have not yet been fully socialized into the Old Order way of life. She later described to me that it is the friendships that people develop in their community, or any community for that matter, that help them to appreciate life and keep them in the fold:

A [non-Mennonite] girlfriend of mine from Edmonston had a young lad here when she came to visit me. He was sort of a troubled fellow, and he asked me—this is what most people ask—“How in the world do you keep your young people? What do they do to enjoy themselves?” I said to him, “Do you live in Edmonston?” He said, “Yes.” I said, “Do you have a circle of friends?” He said, “Yes.” I said, “Do you make lots of new friends?” He said, “No, I keep basically my same friends.” I said well it's the same way with us.” Yes, they say if you have a car you can go out and increase your circle of friends and have more fun. But basically it boils down to the fact that the friends you have around you, those are the ones you are happy with. And that's how it is in our community. (interview)

Her illustration drove home the point for me that leaving any primary group, but the primary group developed in the Old Order community in particular, carries with it some significant problems that those contemplating defection might be given cause to think otherwise. Having to cut off, limit or re-envision ties with a core group of friends and develop new ones is a significant consideration.

Given that the culture of the outside world is largely unknown to the Old Orders, exiting takes on great significance. Leaving the church was described to me as nothing less than a culture shock, with a key coping

mechanism being to hold on to aspects of one's former life. One ex-Old Order Mennonite put it this way:

For me it kind of feels like we haven't lost everything from our traditions. Otherwise it would almost be a culture shock. It was enough of a culture shock for us just leaving and changing dress code and whatever all. I still hold on to some of the old things, like a woman wearing a covering and things like that.... It would probably almost be the same as having you move over to Africa or something like that. It's just a totally different lifestyle.  
(interview)

She described to me some of the lifestyle changes she had to make that she had not considered before leaving the Old Order and how difficult it was for her family:

One of the things that we were most lost with is where to go to get your license. And when you get your license, where you go for insurance? And fire insurance? Liability insurance? Where do you go for that sort of stuff? We were just totally lost.... There were just so many things that we were scared, very scared. The mountain looked so big. There were all these things and we had no idea what to do. Well with health insurance we wondered what if we get sick? We knew about OHIP [i.e., the Ontario Health Insurance Plan], but we really didn't know what it did. We wondered what we would do if we got sick and ended up in the hospital. We had no money to pay.... I didn't even know what OHIP did. There were all these things! You just had no idea.  
(interview)

As the previous quote illustrates, having been raised as an Old Order Mennonite makes it very difficult to live outside the community. People that leave the church know that they are sacrificing a great deal for a relatively unknown future, but the full reality of leaving is only experienced when ties have been cut with their former world and they are immersed in a new, unfamiliar one.

The decision to exit becomes increasingly difficult when considering the humbling experience it would take to re-join the church, such as through public confession before one's former congregation. Note the following comments offered by an Old Order lady describing what happens when one is not in good standing with the church and the process of reconciliation that is necessary to be brought back into fellowship:

If the error is bad enough, you're put into the ban. Also, if you're out of fellowship, it means you stay back from one communion, and if it was not such a gross thing, you could be received back without going through council. If the deacon visits you and you say you're sorry for your error, then you're automatically back in fellowship. The bishop will get up before the service starts and say that this person is now welcome to come back. But if it's a real gross thing, then they have to sit in front of the congregation and the bishop will meet with them and ask them several questions, and they will have to say how they feel about a certain thing. Then he'll give them the rank of fellowship. Then they're allowed to take communion. (interview)

As a further social barrier against the loss of members, and the rationale for separation more generally, the Old Orders have socially constructed a clear dividing line between the culture of their community versus the culture of mainstream society. The claim revolves around the notion that their society cultivates the milieu for living a Christian life, while the outside world is characterized by the unfamiliar and the temptation to do evil. In this sense we see how the group's ideology is interlaced with their social control mechanisms. The role played by ideology is revisited and extended in the next chapter.

In a very tangible way the Old Order community loses a part of their culture when a member chooses to leave. In this sense we can see again how

the social boundaries of their society not only act to keep the outside out, but also keep what is inside in. The decision to leave or remain outside the church is negotiated in conjunction with others. Through both informal and formal control mechanisms, running the gamut from discussing what the decision would mean to grandparents, parents, siblings, and friends to considering the weight of the decision on one's life and relationship with God, the ex or potential ex contemplates the ways in which the decision would alter the meaning and course of their life. Self-reflection, combined with prayer, is part of this process. In cases where the individual has difficulties reconciling their displeasure with their lifestyle, leaving the fold might well be not only a worthwhile personal decision, but also a decision, should there not be a mass exodus of members, that benefits the continuity of the group's culture. As was illustrated in this section, it is important to consider the exiting process as it is one that alters relationships which in the end do impact the culture of the group. Exploring how this process is envisioned and controlled permits for a better understanding of the micro dynamics of change. In the following section I explore how deviance is managed by the group so as to insulate the group from internal threats to change by reinforcing the value of conformity.

### **HANDLING DEVIANCE**

The ministry is responsible for punishing behaviour that is seen as in violation of church regulations and the scriptures. This is done so as to maintain an appropriate lifestyle among all church brethren. The different levels of

regulations and the process through which the rules of the church are enforced were described to me in the following way by an Old Order Mennonite:

There are three levels of rules in the Mennonite church with different sanctions. For example, inappropriate sexual behaviour is punished by excommunication from the church. There are Biblical sins, including a gay lifestyle. There are also man-made rules, if violated, you have to forgo communion if the behaviour continues. If you're excommunicated there will be an excommunication announcement made in church. You may come when this announcement is read. You may be permitted back into the church if you make every effort to make restitution. If you demonstrate that you are truly sorry for your sins, you could be forgiven by God. There is no set time for which you must demonstrate that you've tried to make things right. You may apply for re-instatement if you prove that you are sorry. Your lifestyle must reflect the change you've made. If you have repented then you will be considered to be re-instated. If you break a man-made rule and still persist, you are not allowed to communion. If you persist for three consecutive communions, you will lose your membership and will need to be re-instated. You essentially put yourself outside of the church. For even lesser offences a deacon will visit and discuss these things with you. He will plead with you over these things to set things right. (interview)

Given that an Old Order Mennonite's life revolves around family and religion, excommunication is a very severe punishment. Furthermore, falling out of favour with the church brings shame to the transgressor, and by extension, their family.

Another Old Order Mennonite offered further insights into the process of dealing with deviance. In the following interview excerpt she highlights the role of all members of the community in handling deviance and the religious doctrine supporting this process:

... Quite often what happens in the church, for instance if a church brother or sister is seen to do something against the church regulations, then if another church member will see it, the tendency is to go immediately to the deacon and tattle on them. But according to Mathew 18, first you go to this person and tell him,



and don't do it in a nasty way, but ask him if he was not aware that this was supposed to be. Then, maybe sometimes things can be fixed. Sometimes if the person does it the right way, then it can be worked out. But then if it doesn't, then that person is supposed to take two other people to talk to him. And then, it's like Elmer Shantz said just recently, "You shouldn't take two people who are going to agree with him. You should take two completely unbiased people." Now that's difficult, too, sometimes, but that's what it said. Then if he doesn't hear them, then you can go to the deacon and tell him. Meanwhile you're not supposed to blab it out to your friends on what you've been doing, you see. That's what's really difficult sometimes. It goes against the human nature more or less. Yet, that's what you're supposed to do. It's proven you have to be very diplomatic. If it really bothers you enough that you have to speak to the person about it, then you have to be very diplomatic in order for him or her to feel remorseful.

She continued by describing a situation where her father was visited by a deacon for using his tractor for transportation. She felt the proper steps (outlined in the previous quote) were not followed and illustrated the types of misunderstandings that can arise when brethren do not follow protocol:

For instance, this was years ago, my dad had gone out with the tractor to Hammondstown and when he came back in, an older man sitting on the porch out here had seen that he had a parcel in his hand and you're not supposed to use the tractor for transportation. So, immediately this old man thought that Matthias used the tractor for transportation. And dad hadn't even thought of it, it was just something he held in his hand on the way to get something else with the tractor. It was something with machinery. Anyhow, the first thing we knew of it, the deacon came to visit dad. He was a very nice man and he has a very nice way. We thought they [i.e., he and his wife] were just coming to visit us. They came in from the shop and we sat here in the house and his wife was along. Poor Martin was very embarrassed, I could tell. Then he said what was brought to his attention. Of course from what was said we couldn't help but know likely who the man was. Then dad said, "Oh, yes, I think I did do that." He said he just never gave it a thought. But he said, "But yes, he's sorry, but it suited so well just to bring it along." It wasn't from the post office. It was something that somebody had given him. Then he explained where it happened. Then Martin said it's fine. It wasn't bad enough that he'd have to stay back from communion or anything. But, dad really felt badly because he had known this old



man ever since he was young. It hurt him to think of it. But then, I said to him, “Maybe in his old age he’s just getting along.” My dad had a great deal of respect for him because he had taught him how to do a lot of work. He said, “Why didn’t he come and talk to me about it?” That’s what he should’ve done. He didn’t seem to hold it against the neighbour man.

The experiences shared by participants in this section thus far help to illustrate some of the informal and formal social control mechanisms in place within the community to deal with deviance. We also see that their approach, in an ideal sense, is guided by their interpretation of the scriptures.

Violating church regulations or God’s Word are matters taken very seriously by the Old Order. In accordance with the gravity of the situation, the process of atonement can be quite humbling and embarrassing for the offender. The following statement made by an Old Order Mennonite implies that general and specific deterrence help to keep group members in line: “Church punishments are more for humiliating and putting a fear in you that you don’t feel too smart if you have your name announced over the pulpit. So you try to not have that done to you” (interview).

Given the community’s emphasis on putting the group before the individual, reparation practices are in place to ensure the well-being of the community as a whole. Regarding Ontario’s Old Order Mennonites, Martin (2003) writes: “In a sense the individual does not exist—it is the group that exists” (p. 117). For the Old Order, acting deviantly or expressing non-conformist beliefs means that one is not at peace with God or themselves, and thus the community suffers. Social control mechanisms are meant to keep

and, when necessary, bring individuals back in line with the group. If left unchecked, the actions of a few may serve to jeopardize the group as a whole.

While there are disagreements within the community about how best to manage deviance, as a group the Old Order believe in handling things internally. Violations to the *Ordnung* and against certain teachings within the Bible would not elicit outside interference from state authorities. However, it might be expected that law enforcement officials become involved in cases where someone has broken the law. And, at times, this is certainly the case. There is a sense, though, among local law enforcement and among the Mennonites that they will handle their own. Note the following Old Order gentleman's comments regarding police perceptions:

[T]hey [i.e., the police] always felt that we look after our own problems. The church will discipline anybody that breaks the law. Whether it is drinking in public or whatever, the church will discipline them. I think they just feel that the church will look into it properly. But I feel in the last 10 years the church... it tried, and in some cases they have neglected doing the proper discipline. The police still look at it as though we'll look after it. (interview)

He illustrated his point with the following example:

[Young Old Order Mennonites whom had been drinking] were out on the road and they were stumbling around I guess on [the highway]. One of them fell in the ditch and banged his head up against something. He had a big gash and was bleeding like crazy. A car came along and saw that there was something wrong here. He stopped and he saw this. He had a cell phone with him and of course reported it to the police. So, the police ended up at the young people's gathering. Of course, these were minors that were drinking. I guess they questioned this whole group. There could have been maybe 150 young folks there that night. He questioned them and they found out who the guys were that supplied the drinking. Of course, these were older guys that were about to buy it. They just let them off with a warning. Now, I sometimes have mixed feelings about that. I don't feel that the Mennonites should

be treated any separately than anybody else. But at this point that is still happening. (interview)

He then continued to describe a case where there were allegations of sexual assault within the community. He said that he felt their group was not dealing with it properly and that, regardless, the police should address the issue. He was told, however, that the police feel, “The Mennonites look after their own church, we don’t want to get involved in their business.” He concluded by voicing the distinctions he feels should be made about internal and external social controls:

I don’t know what I think about it. There are things, like if we have squabbles *amongst us*, those things can be straightened out. That’s fine and dandy. But once it’s a crime I think we shouldn’t be treated any differently. We shouldn’t be treated any differently. But when I was young we never heard of these things. (interview)

Apparently the clergy had been taking too long (from his point of view, and others whom I spoke with) to deal with the issue as it involved accusations against a deacon. The case helps to illustrate how deviance can lead to tension and divisiveness within the group. If left unchecked, deviance and differential applications of social control can threaten the fabric of the group’s culture. Boundaries become unclear, and community members feel disconnected from one another in terms of their group perspective and what is seen as appropriate for a Christian community. Once again we see how it is not the “objective” act per se that threatens the stability of the group, but rather how people *interpret* and *react* to the act. When there is agreement across the community that the act is being addressed appropriately, the

group's boundaries are adequately reaffirmed. Disagreement has the reverse effect, and threatens to change the community.

## **REINFORCING HOMOGENEITY**

Deviance can be seen as an assault on the way things are done within a community. It has been argued herein that youth delinquency, defection, and generally skirting the boundaries of group protocol are threats to cultural continuity. Such threats if left uncontrolled have the potential to alter the group's lifestyle in ways that the majority may not be comfortable with. Thus, formal and informal social control measures are in place to keep potential deviants in line, and in effect *establish and reinforce uniformity among brethren*. The previous sections have culminated in the ensuing analysis of the role played by homogeneity (i.e., the quality among brethren of having uniform appearance, perspectives, activities, and language) among the Old Order. Homogeneity is discussed here in terms of how it serves as a social control mechanism maintaining the group's separation from society. I begin this section by first emphasizing the role of the group among the Old Order and how the primacy of the group over the individual is the consequential ideological precursor to maintaining homogeneity. I then stress the importance of homogeneity as a social control mechanism that serves to limit change.

The opening quote for this chapter suggests that being an Old Order Mennonite means a complete devotion to the group and God. When baptized—something that happens when potential members are old enough to

make a mature decision—they accept to sacrifice individual indulgences for the good of the group. The essence of this form of group submission is captured by the German word *Gelassenheit*, for which there is no English equivalent, but refers to “...an attitude that is ready to yield, abandon, or surrender personal desires before God and the community” (Martin, 2003: 364-365). Martin explains that, “Not only does *Gelassenheit* shape the Old Order understanding of salvation, it shapes everyday life in the community” (2003: 365). A deacon described to me the essence of *Gelassenheit* in recounting how deacons are ordained:

Deacons are ordained by lot. Some people on the outside might think that this means that deacons are chosen by chance, but we do not believe this. We believe that the Holy Spirit guides the selection. A certain number of men are nominated as potential deacons. On the day the deacon is ordained, each of the men file into an anti-room one-by-one placing their names in a Bible. Then one of the bishops opens a Bible and whoseever name is there, they are selected as a deacon. These men are ready and willing to serve the Church. They do not see it as some duty which has been forced onto them from the outside. They give themselves up freely to serve the Church. In our community there is less individualism, and more emphasis on the community. If you’ve read Donald Martin’s book [see Martin, 2003], he speaks about the spirit of giving oneself to serve the church and community as *Gelassenheit*. Our relationship with God is not complete without our relationship with man. This doesn’t take away from our belief in Jesus Christ. We see ourselves as serving God through serving our fellow man.

Each member of the clergy is selected from the men in community and chosen by lot. They are typically farmers, just like most other Old Order men. They are not paid for their work as bishops, ministers, or deacons (Horst, 2000). Although it is recognized that the leaders are prone to fault, just like any other Christian, members of the ministry are to serve as exemplars of piety and humility. Such individuals are to be role models for the group and establish a



benchmark for the type of submission to God and the group that is expected of other brethren (Horst, 2000). The important point, at least for the topic at hand, is that individuality is sacrificed for the good of the group, and such expectations go for all members of the community. The consequence, as it is practised by the Old Order, is that individual submission to the group establishes uniformity among brethren.

Social control mechanisms reinforce homogeneity among the Old Order Mennonites. For those who deviate, as has been discussed, there are attempts made to bring them back in line with the group through formal and informal social control measures. The establishing of homogeneity goes further, though. Standards in such things as dress, level of technology, beliefs, and religious practices establish uniformity across the group such that homogeneity and the maintenance of it reinforce the boundaries of difference. If innovation is limited to that which is in fitting with their group's ideology, then the playing field is levelled and comparisons are made against a group for which there is not much room for variation. Sameness becomes important to a group emphasizing the community over the individual in that it limits the scope of social comparison. As one Old Order lady puts it: "If everyone else doesn't do these things either, then the temptation doesn't arise as much" (interview). An Old Order gentleman echoes these sentiments:

There are a lot of things in our church that they really can't base it on religion. I guess they base it on wanting to be very cautious about things that, especially with the young people, giving into too much peer pressure and stuff like that. By doing that, I guess they have to hold back on some things and not allow them. *If I have it, then the next guy wants it too.* (interview, emphasis added)

Emphasizing not only conformity, but also sameness reduces the feeling of competition among brethren and the temptation to want more.

The following statement by an Old Order member illustrates the impact of homogeneity in maintaining their separation from mainstream society: “We believe in sameness in our community to emphasize community. It is human nature to be drawn to compete. A young person in a ‘car-driving society’ is more apt to compete. Through our sameness we lessen pride in possession” (interview). By focusing the group’s attention inward, there is less temptation to want what should not be had or act in ways unbecoming of a true Christian. So, while a key aspect of the Old Order Mennonite community is homogeneity, sameness as it is reinforced through social control has the impact of shoring up the boundaries of the group.

The saying, “one does not miss what one has never had (or experienced)” applies here. Within the community, alternative patterns of identity and activity are limited. The Old Order community serves as the legitimate reference group (Shibutani, 1962) to which members compare themselves. Where comparisons are made to the outside world, these options, as discussed, are constructed as inappropriate alternatives. Everything from meeting the appropriate dress code to keeping one’s tractor to a maximum of 100 horse power (so as not to be tempted to use it for transportation), the rules and their enforcement help to ensure a level playing field, uniformity, and, as a result, separation from mainstream society.

As some participants made clear to me, uniformity is not without its problems. Part of maintaining uniformity, as was discussed in chapter four,

involves restricting contact with the outside world. As one participant described it, this can be problematic:

Steve: Do you think that there's been less contact over the years, since you were younger, with the Mennonite community and the outside world?"

Edna: Yes, because the children, as a rule, don't grow up with others that aren't in their community. To a certain extent it makes for more cohesiveness, perhaps. But there's a danger in that, too. Nothing is ever quite good one way or the other, because there's a danger of children thinking that because this is how we do it, that this is the way it should be, and no other way is okay. But that can work for the other side, too. (interview)

Being such an insular community may, on the one hand, reinforce cohesiveness and uniformity among brethren as alternative perspectives are limited, but it can also lead to internal conflict. As another interviewee indicates, a great deal of emphasis on uniformity can mean that it becomes such a highly elevated value, that it can lead to individuals policing one another with negative consequences:

If everybody has to be so alike, people start really watching each other. And if they start watching each other, then they start finding failures in others' actions and ways of doing things. Then they start backbiting each other. Then that's where the confusion comes in... [Y]ears ago they didn't have all these rules, so people accepted each other as they are more that way. I'm not condemning everybody like that at all. There are still *many* good Mennonites. (interview)

Again, the notion of establishing balance arises. When homogeneity is venerated, it can lead to internal disputes over who is and is not living an appropriate Mennonite lifestyle. Taken to this extreme, brethren begin to lose sight of the religious and social value of *Gelassenheit* and general submission of the individual for the good of the group.



## DISCUSSION

To further draw out the interplay between social control and change, this chapter has examined some of the specific forms of social control that are in place to manage change. Although the previous chapter introduced the role that rules play in managing change, and described how the clergy interact with the laity to prescribe change, it was necessary to investigate how rules are reinforced and enacted. In doing so, this chapter has analyzed how the Old Order perceive and deal with deviations and act to reinforce compliance. More specifically, this chapter has examined: (a) the Old Order perception on deviance; (b) certain issues considered deviant from the Old Order point of view—youth problems and member defection in particular; (c) how the community acts to handle deviance so as to ensure their way of life; and, (d) the role played by homogeneity as a social control mechanism fortifying the Old Order's lifestyle against change.

This chapter has considered certain issues which the Old Order label as deviant and more importantly how deviance is socially controlled so as to maintain their culture. I say “maintain their culture” because deviance, by its very definition, represents an affront to what a group's members view as proper, and to turn a blind eye to it and allow it to persist would mean that an alternative viewpoint or way of doing things would be condoned. If such things are then condoned, there is the fear that they could be more widely accepted as normal. Should that happen, then the culture would be seen as having changed. Deviance becomes a particular threat to cultural continuity when it is deemed to challenge social order, the smooth running of the group,

the way in which people understand the world, and their place in it (Bereska, 2008). Deviance has thus been considered here from the perspective of those whom define particular beliefs, behaviours, and appearances as abnormal in order to protect the group's social order. Defining something as deviant represents a reaction, with the ensuing or culminating action being to institute social control measures to bring the deviant individual(s) back in line with group standards. It was argued that for a group that highly values homogeneity among brethren, having mechanisms to ensure compliance with group standards is essential for resisting change.

As discussed, the younger generation, for the Mennonites and non-Mennonites alike, has been cited as the source of much social deviance and cultural upheaval in many a society throughout history. In 469 BCE Socrates bemoaned the problems of youth:

[T]he children now love luxury. They have bad manners, contempt for authority, they show disrespect for adults and love to talk rather than work or exercise. They contradict their parents, chatter in front of company, gobble down their food at the table and intimidate their teachers. (in Hogeveen, 2007: 210)

As Hogeveen (2007) points out, “This statement could just as easily have been typed on a computer as scribbled on a parchment” (p. 210). The Old Order identify the problems of youth in terms of adolescent vulnerability to lusting after worldly things, challenging tradition, and succumbing to peer pressure. When the pressure to deviate from the brethren's lifestyle is reinforced by exposure to those outside their culture, the Old Order lose the benefit of their group being the only or most influential reference group. Informal and formal social control measures, and other aspects of social boundary maintenance

such as isolation, interaction rules, and homogeneity act as social boundaries for alternative, conflicting ways of life that challenge the Old Order's culture. Defection ensues, some members feel, as a result of, typically, their younger members being tempted by such alternatives. Following from their religious beliefs they institute their own form of social control that is meant to bring wayward ones back in line. In doing so, the community acts to reinforce the boundaries of the group and ensure continuity.

In one way the loss of members represents a significant threat to the continuity of the Old Orders' culture as without members it would be more than difficult for a way of life to persist. This is a somewhat overly simplistic rendering of the situation, however. Considering the alternative—i.e., that the exiting of members from the community is beneficial to cultural continuity—brings into perspective the complexity of the issue. For instance, if a member decides to buy a car, and that member is permitted to remain within the community, the community's emphasis on simplicity is not only disrupted, but others may feel inclined to buy vehicles as it is permissible for another member of the group. As was argued in this chapter, the Old Orders must strike a balance between striving to keep their members and letting the discontent go.

While this chapter has emphasized the difficulties of leaving the Old Order community and the problems to be faced should one consider reinstatement, separating from the Old Order Mennonite community does not necessarily involve forgoing all aspects of one's former culture. For this reason, we can see that if there are opportunities for sustaining some aspects of

one's former lifestyle (e.g., dress, language, religion), some of the barriers to defection may be overcome. Driedger's (1977a) notion of the "Anabaptist Identification Ladder" sheds light on the target groups for conservative Anabaptists such as the Hutterites, which he points out are typically Anabaptists churches on the more liberal end of the "ladder" or continuum. In doing so, he illustrates how a somewhat familiar world is opened up to defectors. He writes:

Assimilationists have been too quick to assume that any change within ethnic groups means assimilation into the larger society; the assimilationists have not examined the new targets with which these groups often identify. In this study I plan to show that they join more liberal groups of the Anabaptist tradition. (1977a: 278-279)

Knowing that there are other more liberal—and more conservative groups—that an Old Order Mennonite may join upon exit from their former group, may very well make the prospects of defection more palatable. When Old Order members leave their group, they tend to end up joining the more liberal, car-driving Markham Mennonites. In this regard, Driedger's points regarding assimilation are on firm ground.

Two worthwhile points, however, are not emphasized in Driedger's (1977a) article. First, leaving and becoming part of another group in the Anabaptist identification ladder still constitutes at least some assimilation, either into the more liberal or conservative culture of the target group. That said, his observations are still quite useful; assimilation does follow a continuum and it is worthwhile to examine the groups which ex-members join in order to better understand assimilation. The second point is that, while

perhaps rare, individuals do defect in order to join more *conservative* groups, a point not emphasized in Driedger's work. It was common for my participants to discuss how members of the Old Order have splintered off to form and join more conservative groups of their religion.

Disengaging from a group and one's former role as a member of that group is problematic (Ebaugh, 1988). Some key obstacles in this regard are that the individual's role finds meaning within the group context and new norms must be learned to accompany new roles in new contexts (Ebaugh, 1988). The disengagement process is made easier when one has the opportunity to join a new group where a former role can be continued or a similar role can be developed. In sum, these insights suggest that defection is made more viable for those that choose to leave for a similar group, because leaving does not have to constitute complete assimilation into mainstream society. Should alternatives be constructed by potential exiters as not so foreign to them, then one area of social control wavers and the difficulties of departure no longer serve as such a significant social boundary.

It is apparent that a consistent approach to how people are dealt with and maintaining uniformity in all things throughout the Old Order group is imperative to controlling change. There is the temptation to follow suit when others are treated differently or are allowed to step outside the boundaries of the group without repercussions. Particularly problematic are instances where church leadership fails to reprimand others within their group, especially those that hold positions of power. Failing to do so undermines the group's respect for those whom they are to offer complete submission. Limiting social

comparison to within the group is part of maintaining homogeneity, as comparisons to alternative sets of perspectives have the potential to threaten the Old Order point of view and lead to change. In a group that values homogeneity among brethren and strives to maintain a sense of *Gelassenheit*—complete submission to God and their brethren—the Old Order way of life is challenged when there is disunity.

As this and previous chapters have highlighted, the ideology of brethren is one which is very much divinely inspired. The next chapter explores the Old Order ideology and its influence on maintaining separation.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **RATIONALIZING SEPARATENESS: GROUP PERSPECTIVES AND THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE SIMPLE LIFE**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Steve: I guess that (i.e., having customs different from the rest of society) relates to the Bible passage that speaks to staying separate.

Edwin: A separate and a peculiar people, I hear that.

Salina: Well, that is a Bible verse.

Edwin: And I don't think that means that we have to look peculiar to anybody else.

Salina: It means being Christians and different from the world.

Edwin: A Christian will look peculiar to someone that's not.

Steve: You could use that to justify a lot of things.

Edwin: Yup. (Old Order Mennonite couple)

As has been emphasized throughout this dissertation, the Old Order work hard to maintain their separation from the outside world. Segregating themselves allows them to practice their own distinct, simple way of life. Their perspective on separation is highlighted in the opening quote, which speaks to the Bible as the theological cornerstone upon which their mindset towards being “separate” and “peculiar” is based and how it serves to justify their

simple way of life. A group's perspective or ideology represents the social psychological framework underlying not only how its members view the world, but also the rationale supporting the group's way of life. Previous chapters have touched on issues pertaining to the Old Order perspective and the social construction of difference. This chapter makes these ideas its focus.

I argue that a particularly powerful way of maintaining culture is by developing a vocabulary of motive (Mills, 1940) that justifies its existence. Unable to rationalize separation, the Old Order way of life would disappear. In fact, as members have sought to integrate more or less liberal ideas into their perspective, there have been many schisms resulting in the formation of new groups where their ideas are able to find a home. If members decide that the existing Old Order community fails to serve as an adequate reference group in terms of promoting a perspective that meets their own viewpoints, alternative arrangements may be sought. When the group is able to rationalize change as consistent with their existing beliefs or necessary for their cultural survival, it is integrated into the group's way of life. When change is viewed as inconsistent or irreconcilable with their existing belief system, it is resisted or begrudgingly adopted. This chapter explores how the Old Order rationalize separation, justify change, and ultimately socially construct a simple way of life for themselves.

I begin by exploring the way in which separation from the outside world is socially constructed. More specifically, I argue that the Old Order construct an ideology of difference and separation based on what I term "divine rationalizations" – a religious-based vocabulary of motive which



reifies scriptural interpretations as guidelines and justifications for living a particular way of life. I then explore how the threat of persecution is constructed by the Old Order. I maintain that the group engages in *defensive structuring* (Siegel, 1970) as brethren continue to revisit their history of persecution and construct the possibility of future persecution. Defensive structuring has the impact of reinforcing the legitimacy of their leaders and bonding the community together in a common plight to preserve their culture from perceived external threats. I then examine evidence of the internalization of the group's ideology of separation. Perhaps most interesting in this regard is that when the rules of the group are unclear or when members encounter alternative viewpoints, they experience a sense of guilt and confusion that is very much akin to Durkheim's (1951 [1893]) concept of anomie. Throughout this chapter I present illustrations of the claims-making process and the impact of power on the social construction of the Old Order sense of reality.

### **DIVINE RATIONALIZATIONS AND THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF "WORLDLY" THINGS**

For a community that measures deviance against their religious scriptures, institutes social control measures based on Biblical interpretations, has its clergy as the key arbiters of social control and change, and emphasizes *Gelassenheit* (i.e., self-surrender to the community and God's will) as the guiding principle of its ideology (Martin, 2003), it is hard to overlook the role that religion plays in structuring the Old Order way of life. In this section I explore just how consequential religion is to Old Order ideology by examining how they infuse their vocabulary with Biblical terms and passages which serve

as signposts for how to live a good life and, in turn, guide their understanding of the world. In doing so, they construct various external practices and objects as “worldly” and “evil.” Such claims make clear distinctions between in- and out-group culture. What is and is not too worldly or evil arises out of a claims-making process whereby members of the group offer up competing viewpoints on what is good and bad for their community.

### **Divine Rationalizations**

Living separate requires a certain mindset towards viewing one’s way of life as positive and the right way to live. This way of thinking provides a social-psychological barrier to living differently. The most important aspect of the Old Orders’ ideology is a strict interpretation of the Bible which they use as the basis for living well. In turn, Biblical scriptures serve as a benchmark against which social reality is framed and acted towards. A very strong and strict belief in the Word of the Lord offers justifications for how to live “properly.” One of the strongest tenets of their belief system is that they are to live separate and be different from those in the outside world.

Perhaps the Old Order Mennonite’s group perspective emphasizing separateness is most observable in the rationalizations offered for living the way they do. In both their literature and everyday conversation they will point to specific Bible passages to offer rationalizations as to why things are done a certain way. Given that their ideology is tied so directly to the Bible, which is in turn bolstered by a community of like believers, the social boundaries upon which their society is built is not simply man-made, but rather divinely ordained. Bible passages are objectified (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) as the

standard against which to assess the social world and achieve a worthwhile life.

Throughout my interactions with members of the Old Order community I was frequently quoted Bible passages, by memory. I noted that it was common for scriptures to be cited in conjunction with describing why it is that something is done a certain way within the community. I came to the conclusion that what I was witnessing was how this group rationalized their way of life and socially constructed a sense of place within the world. Hence, I dubbed their justifications for their way of life and, in particular their separation from modern society: *divine rationalizations*. Divine rationalizations can be defined as: a religious-based vocabulary of motive which reifies scriptural interpretations as guidelines and justifications for living a particular way of life. These rationalizations present a moral frame (Goffman, 1974) for understanding reality and lead to admonitions that are much like claims drawing on religious moralities discussed by Loseke (1999) in her writing on the social construction of social problems.

As has been suggested in previous chapters, Old Order separation from secular society is maintained by such things as dress, horse drawn transportation, farm-based lifestyle, rules of interaction, and church-based social control. But what is the underlying rationale for such cultural choices? In all instances we can find evidence of divine rationalizations. For example, in terms of dress, Saillour (1984) notes that, along with traditional reasons for wearing distinctive clothing, the Old Order make “precise references to the

scriptures” (p. 57) as reasons for how they dress. Note Saillour’s analysis of comments offered by an Old Order Mennonite man:

Isaac Horst said in an interview: “The main object of clothing is to cover the nakedness from the eye. We must wear no clothes that attract others to the exposed part or anything that accents the body.” He refers to Adam and Eve: “Before the fall of man no clothing was worn” (Genesis 2: 25) and mentions the story of Rebecca veiling her face, to justify the women’s covering of their heads. (1984: 57)

A couple of other Bible passages cited by the Old Order as justifications as to why they dress the way they do include:

The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman’s garment: for all that do so are abominations unto the Lord thy God. (Deuteronomy 22: 5)

Any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled dishonours her head. (1 Corinthians 11: 5)

As Biblical literalists, believing that they hold claim to apostolic succession (Jager, 1983), the Old Order justify their cultural choices on the basis of scripture. Interpretations of the Bible serve as guidelines for everyday living. Note some additional examples of how brethren put their faith into practice:

Bankruptcy is one thing that’s just not allowed in our church because the Bankruptcy Act would say the fella owes a \$1,000,000, and he’s only worth \$500 and he declares bankruptcy. Legally he doesn’t have to pay that \$500. Well, Biblically I guess we would say you’re supposed to pay your debts. That’s the way the Mennonites have always felt about it. It should still be paid. Therefore, if a fella does go under and he owes \$500,000, the church is responsible for it. (Old Order Mennonite, interview)

I spoke to [a Mennonite father of a pupil] and he says, “There were dinosaurs, we acknowledge the idea. There are skeletons in museums and that. But, I don’t believe that Noah took them two-by-two on the Arc and saved them from flood. That’s when the dinosaurs died. They were left behind.” (public school principal, interview)

Sometimes when people do things, it's hard not to feel resentful. But a good thing is, when you repeat the Lord's Prayer, and you repeat that part where it says, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." It shows that if we don't forgive people for what they do against us, the Lord won't forgive us either. That's quite a humbling and frightening thought, you know. (Old Order Mennonite, interview)

There are certain things that are definitely taboo and you wouldn't dream of doing it because you know it would hurt somebody. You yourself might not think that would be all that bad to do, but like the apostle Paul says, you don't do it because you don't want to hurt somebody who has a strong feeling against it. And it would hurt the church body. (Old Order Mennonite, interview)

The following Bible verses are quoted as justifying their segregation from mainstream society:

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? (2 Corinthians 6:14)

Come out from among them, and be separate, says the Lord. (2 Corinthians 6:17)

You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people. (1 Peter 2:9)

Be ye not conformed to the world. (Romans 12:2)

As interpreted, and put into action by the Old Orders, the scriptures suggest that living a life as God intends, means living as close as possible to the "Word of the Lord" and not according to the types of appearances and practices promoted in the modern, secular world. Jager (1983) argues that, "In contemporary Anabaptist life, the Bible continues (especially among the more conservative Anabaptists), to remain the ultimate authority on all issues of life and living" (p. 65). His argument most certainly finds validation in the data presented here. The next section continues to explore how religiosity enters



into the Old Order's everyday life by exploring how they interpret and actively construct their lifestyle in contrast with the outside world.

### **The Social Construction of “Worldly” Things**

Mennonites dismiss certain outsider objects and practices as being “evil” or “too worldly” for Mennonites. The term “worldly” is an all-encompassing concept used to denote modern or secular aspects of outsider culture that have no place in Old Order society. The assumption being that if worldly things or practices are brought into the Old Order community, it would diminish their separation and simple lifestyle by bringing them closer to the secular world.

Worldly things are profane and have no place in the sacred culture of the Mennonites. Note the following comments made by an Old Order gentleman discussing why it is that the group does not permit the use of cell phones:

I guess you would say that it is based on Biblical reasons simply because they feel that you don't want to have everything. They would put it in these words, I guess: “Everything that the world has to offer.” And anything new that comes along, they would consider that as worldly. (interview)

As indicated in the previous chapter, for those that end up leaving the Old Order church, the rationalization is that: “They're just lustful after worldly things and they want more worldly stuff” (interview). Seemingly these social constructions aim to dismiss alternatives to the Old Order perspective and way of living as inappropriate as they are either unholy in and of themselves or have the potential to threaten the sanctity of their simple lifestyle.

What is too worldly is not determined in any straightforward, objective way. Rather, there is a claims-making process (Loseke, 1999) that occurs as individuals attempt to persuade others within the group on what is and is not

acceptable for their culture. Consider the following comments offered by an Old Order gentleman regarding the group's perspective on the telephone.

What is of interest is how the telephone is resisted and problematized as too worldly and the alternative argument that what is "too worldly" is temporal—i.e., that it is only a matter of time before group ends up adopting more advanced telephone devices:

One of our deacons told me one time, "We should stick with the dial phones." I says, "Why do you want to do that?" He said, "Oh well, you know, these touchtone phones they are just so modern." I says, "Look. Before we were allowed to have the phones, we messed around with having the payphones every so many farms." They'd have a payphone every so many farms. Well that did not go over. The people at the church said they did not want to have anything to do with it. Then when we put the phones in, I remember what [the telephone technician] told me. He says, "We're putting a touchtone line in here." I says, "What's that?" I didn't know. I think touchtone had just begun not too long before that. He says, "It's this thing that's coming in the future. Everybody's going to be touchtone." But this deacon told me, "I think we should put a dial phone in. We should make it a church rule that we should all have dial phones." I said, "Look, you've given Bell [the telephone company] kind of a ride all these years by saying we should have the payphones and all this. Now, you're making it difficult for them again putting in these old phones." He said, "Well, there's a place in [the city] where you can buy all these dial phones." I says, "Now you want to make a big hassle for them again because touchtone is coming and the dial phones are going to be obsolete." "Oh, oh," he didn't know. I says, "Well, that's what's coming." Well now it's the cell phones and I think there's going to be a time when these things here [motioning to a landline phone] are going to be obsolete. I may be wrong, but I think so. (interview)

This type of claims-making and moral entrepreneurship (Becker, 1963) can be seen with regards to the various issues that come up for debate within the church and as people discuss the issues on an everyday basis.

Another issue that has been contemplated on and off over the years by the Old Order Mennonites is that of government subsidies. Note the following discussion regarding the reasoning behind banning government subsidies:

Years ago, when they first made these rules [disallowing government subsidies], they [i.e., church leaders] tried to tell us that if we take government money, then the government will be able to tell us what to do with whatever. Whether it's our children or whatever. They feel that if we don't take the government money, then the government won't be able to tell us that our children have to go to war. That's another thing the Mennonites are non-resistant. In the Second World War, the soldiers actually came into our churches and took the young men out. They tried to make them go into the army, but they refused because they didn't feel it was right to go and kill anybody. So, they had to do service for the country. And I know David, he was sent way up north—that's when they built the trans-Canada highway—and a whole bunch of our church people were sent to help build the trans-Canada highway. And they had to do this as a service for the country. So, now they're saying that if we take all this government money, someday if there's a huge war and they need all our young boys 25 and under, then they'll just come in and say, "Hey, we helped you, now you help us!" (laughter). So far they've refused the subsidies. We used to take our milk subsidy and our hog subsidy and there was nothing ever thought about it. But in the last 10 years I guess there's been people that think we shouldn't be doing it so they made it a church rule that if you take these subsidies you can't be part of the church. (Old Order Mennonite, interview)

The concern for the Old Orders in not taking government subsidies is maintaining their autonomy from the outside world. Their belief in non-resistance or pacifism and the potential for them to be forced to violate this belief by their host society is a compelling claim within the Old Order community because it appeals to their religious and organizational moralities (Loseke, 1999) pertaining to separation.



The notion of power and the hierarchy of credibility (Becker, 1967) within the Old Order community is evident in some of the material presented thus far, but is made even clearer in the next interview excerpt. Within the Old Order hierarchy of credibility, the clergy, and more specifically the bishops, are afforded the greatest influence. Recall that Old Order clergy are chosen by lot, a process that brethren view as being guided by the Holy Spirit. Claims made by these individuals hold particular sway within a community of devout Christians. In the following example, an Old Order gentleman describes the influence of the clergy in deciding on what the appropriate forms of medical treatment are for brethren:

Whether it's health care, or whatever, it costs so much. So far the church has been paying our health bills, if it's medical. Now the case with Mary and John, she was very sick when she was young, and it was drug-related what caused some of her problems, and she simply cannot take drugs so she has to work with more natural things. It costs them a lot of money, but they don't get a cent. Our church will pay our medical bills, but if it's anything natural they won't pay it. About 5 or 6 years ago a guy told them that it's all witchcraft. Anything that isn't medical is all witchcraft and the church shouldn't be supporting it anymore. So, they stopped that. They actually told Mary that if she doesn't quit going to the naturopath she can't be part of the church anymore. So what do you do? I said, "Well, I guess you don't have a choice." That's her life. And our bishop is really one of the hardest guys to deal with on that subject. A lot of people are feeling that it's not right what he's doing. So, therefore, I don't know if we're going to have a split or what. A split, I don't think it's anything nice, but it could happen. But, they simply will not allow us to go out on OHIP [i.e., the Ontario Health Insurance Plan] because they say it's government money. But, my chartered accountant tells me that I pay for it (laughs). (interview)

A few interesting observations regarding the social construction of the Old Order way of life can be noted based on the comments made by this gentleman. First, the issue of power arises. Naturopathic medicine is

problematized by influential claims-makers socially constructing it as witchcraft. Brethren, who are to yield to the direction of their leaders, are to fall in line with this perspective to the point where religion trumps the preservation of life. Secondly, the interviewee discusses the possibility of a split or schism in the community. Splits occur within the group for ideological reasons. For instance, those who disagree with the perspective offered up by church leaders may decide to leave and form a community in which their perspective on certain issues is adopted. The same Old Order gentleman argues that a group that split away from the Old Order over the adoption of the telephone, "...moved out so that they can feel that they can live their lives the way they want to live it" (interview). Finally, the last sentence of the interviewee's remarks is worthy of note in that we see the type of interaction that the Old Order guard against. Interactions with outsiders (e.g., a non-Mennonite chartered accountant) have the potential to offer up competing viewpoints; viewpoints which, in the right circumstances, might challenge existing perspectives. Times of financial difficulty provide the social context in which financial claims become increasingly persuasive.

Throughout this section I have explored how the Old Order use the Bible as their moral benchmark against which their social reality is judged and acted towards. The primacy of church leaders in the claims-making process was highlighted. The next section builds on these points by exploring how the perception of external threats reinforces the legitimacy of church leaders and promotes social solidarity among brethren, thus providing a further social-psychological barrier insulating the community against change.

## **DEFENSIVE STRUCTURING**

In 1970, Bernard Siegel wrote an article in the *American Journal of Sociology* entitled, “Defensive Structuring and Environmental Stress.” Defensive structuring represents the conception of an external threat to a group’s identity and the resulting way in which the group organizes community life and the group posturing it does to protect its culture against perceived threats. Authority figures in “defensive communities,” Siegel argues, are essential for formally guiding and buttressing the community against outside threats. According to Siegel, leaders in such communities act in a sacred or quasi-sacred capacity. The type of defensive structuring discussed by Siegel would appear to be characteristic of the Anabaptists of the past. But, does the concept hold true for more recent generations of Old Orders? If so, in what ways does it manifest itself? I argue herein that while there is evidence that defensive structuring might not be the same for Old Orders as it was for their pioneering Anabaptist brethren, defensive structuring is still a part of how they socially construct their identity and place within their host society.

In the past, a significant element of boundary maintenance for the Anabaptists was the threat of persecution. This threat had the impact of bonding the community together against the very real physical dangers of jail, torture, execution, and exile (Jager, 1983). The threat of persecution became imbedded in their perspective such that they are still suspicious of outsiders. As strict believers in non-resistance, physical forms persecution (e.g., jail, exile) only served to reinforce the fact that Protestants and Catholics were not being true to God. This perspective of “us” versus “them” further bolstered

the solidarity of the community. Knowledge of past transgressions against their people has been passed across generations through oral histories and texts. Note the following comments offered by an Old Order gentleman:

I heard my parents talk about the Catholics, but we never knew anything about them. Then I moved here and Dave Shantz lived across the road. He taught me a lot. He was a Conference Mennonite. Old Andrew Edwards was a Lutheran. Mark Smith's dad, Terry Smith, he was United. Trevor Johnson was Catholic. Jim Jacobs was Catholic. He was my next door neighbour. Some people told me, "You gotta watch those Catholics. If you get on the wrong side of them you've had it! You've had it!" Well, my experience with those people was that they were the *niciest* people I ever wanted to meet. I learned a lot from them. Now, why do people talk like that? I don't know. You probably have known some of those kinds of people, too. But I know when I moved here my dad told me, "You got all new neighbours and a neighbour is only as good as you make them." I believe in that. If you use a neighbour right, then he'll use you right. (interview)

This individual confronted competing insider viewpoints on outsiders of different religions. Consequential in his conclusion regarding non-Old Orders was the impact of direct experience with outsiders and positive outlook offered by a significant other in his father. However, we also see how the threat posed by outsiders is presented, with Catholics characterized as dangerous. Unable to offer up a similar contemporary enemy and current examples of injustice, the perception of persecution is not as real or imminent as it once was.

In a country and day and age where diverse cultural practices and religious beliefs are a common right, the Old Orders are, for the most part, accepted and in many ways admired. In his analysis of the Anabaptist resistance to modernization, Jager (1983) writes that, "Anabaptist persecution, for example, no longer exists to any great extent in the United States. It has

been replaced by a general attitude of public acceptance” (p. 71). Acceptance and admiration, however, raise a potentially new threat to the community. An Old Order remarks: “We used to be persecuted. Now people admire us. We are grateful for the freedom, but I’m scared we will not know how to respond.” As this individual suggests, members of the community have lost the sense of immediate danger that once existed for their ancestors. In its place, Mennonites have had to come to terms with their newfound freedom and reverence towards their community. As another Old Order describes, such admiration challenges the Mennonites’ sense of humility: “It’s uncomfortable being praised too much because we’re just people like anybody else. We all have to struggle with certain things” (interview).

In order to maintain the “outside threat” boundary as part of their ideology, brethren are reminded of contemporary threats to their way of life. For example, in the 1960s, the government of Ontario moved to amalgamate the small countryside schoolhouses into larger township schools. The Old Order debated how to respond to these changes and the prevailing perspective was to establish their own parochial schools. Consider the following remarks offered by an Old Order gentleman which illustrate his viewpoint on how the future of public school system was conceived by an influential member of his church:

That [i.e., the introduction of parochial schools] would have been late ‘60s or ‘70s. And it was about that time we had a meeting down here at the church about this. One of the speakers was a pretty good speaker from our church. He was an older guy. He claimed he knew a lot about what was going to happen in the future.... He told us that day, “Ahhh... these public schools... in another 10-15 years they’re going to keep the children there all

week. They'll go to school Monday morning and they'll stay there all week. You'll never see them home until the end of the week. It's just like in Russia." I said, "I don't know." This was back in the days of Davis. Bill Davis was the Education Minister and he had some pretty strong ideas. I remember that. This guy thought it would be like a boarding school. (interview)

If this was to be the future of the public school system, then it would be a future that the Old Order would not be a part of. The school system was becoming increasingly secular and the Mennonites sought to distance themselves from this change and the type of influence it would have on their young, impressionable members. The enemy was an outside secular society that sought to impose its ideology on new generations of Canadians. Instances such as the dramatic changes that were taking place within the school system permitted visible examples of the threat posed by secular society.

During times when threats are not as apparent, the Old Order community is reminded never to be too cautious. One Old Order lady describes how the idea of "never letting one's guard down" is reinforced:

Our ministers have said that we have to be careful right now because all-things "Mennonite" seem to be a popular thing and people think highly of us, but he said that public opinion is so fickle and just like that it could turn. Just like that the same people could think we're terrible people. (interview)

The Old Order are also conscious of the types of things that they do that have the potential to lead to renewed discrimination. For instance, they have increasingly turned to on-farm shops to supplement and, in some cases, replace their farming incomes. In doing so, they have a competitive advantage over some outside manufacturers as they offer relatively

inexpensive labour and can thereby sell their services for less than unionized factories. An Old Order gentleman points to the potential fall-out—in terms of renewed persecution—from such arrangements:

There are shops going up *all over* the place and bigger shops. And Travis Katz [a non-Mennonite businessman] said that Mennonites are going to have to do that because they can't make a living off the farms anymore. He said that they are going to have to do that. I guess my question is, "What are they going to do in the shops that isn't being done already?" They have to undercut these other people. There are other companies out there and they are actually undercutting the large factories that are unionized and that's one thing that I'm sort of afraid of for the Mennonites. Shawn Taylor [a non-Mennonite] told me one time—he was on the Martinstown agricultural committee for a long time—and he said this was discussed. All the [Mennonite] shops are manufacturing car parts and all kinds of stuff by the millions. They are undercutting other companies which are definitely unionized companies. Is that going to have an effect against the Mennonites? Like hate or begrudging them for being able to do this? I don't know. (interview)

The Old Order are wary of potential new forms of persecution. So, while not subject to the same forms of persecution as experienced in the past, they are still brought together by the possibility of persecution. It is conceivable that since the threat is more ambiguous than in the past, that this fear of the unknown is compelling enough to maintain the defensive structuring of the group. At the same time, although they are concerned about having persecution as a mechanism for reinforcing social solidarity, the Old Order are content with the freedoms their ancestors sacrificed so much to achieve.

The social construction of new threats to the survival of their culture is facilitated by their longstanding suspicion of all things worldly. Pointing to both past and contemporary examples of transgressions against their people serve to support their perspective. The combination of divinely ordained

rationalizations and claims-making regarding old and new threats to their culture contribute to a way of thinking and a vocabulary of motive (Mills, 1940) that justifies their way of life.

### **INTERNALIZATION OF THE GROUP PERSPECTIVE**

During their primary socialization years, children are indoctrinated into the culture of the group and begin internalizing the Old Order ideology. Of course, with no prior experience, little control over the socialization process, and limited contact with the outside world, the Old Order provide an ideal context for imparting their viewpoints on new generations. Moreover, the Old Order have a high degree of “institutional completeness” (Breton, 1964), meaning that they can meet most of the needs of the community internally, and thus do not have to turn to the outside world for such things as schooling, social and economic support, religion, entertainment, and justice. What this means for the internalization of the group’s perspective, is that intersubjectivity among brethren is achieved in a context where viewpoints can be shared and remain largely unchallenged.

When asked how children come to understand the rules of the church, I was told by an Old Order Mennonite teacher that, “Children get to understand the rules simply through what they are taught in the home and then through their formal reading” (interview). In the parochial school setting the Old Order still have to follow the province’s curriculum, but have greater control over how the curriculum is administered. Pupils learn about their own history, are able to fall back on their native language when necessary, are surrounded



by others similar in appearance and who they socialize with outside of school, and have elements of their religion as a regular part of their school day.

Leisure time is also mostly spent in the company of brethren. An interview I had with two Old Order Mennonites highlights the insular, simple nature of their recreational activities:

Steve: What about leisure time? What do Mennonites do for fun?

Edna: Well the hired man here, in the winter time, he sometimes goes to play hockey or to skate somewhere. The hired girls<sup>24</sup> all usually go away in the evening. They would naturally be off in the evening from work, so a lot of them are crocheting or knitting or embroidering.

Mary: Or just plain reading.

Edna: Last winter, some of the neighbour girls, one day a week, they would go and sing for some shut-in people. Sometimes during the winter there are quiltings. That's a real big thing for the girls. They really like that.

Mary: When you're 15 and ready to go out with the others, they'll say, "Mom you have to put up a quilt or something. Just something that I at least know how to do it." Because it would be *terribly* embarrassing not to already be able to know how to do this (laughter).

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<sup>24</sup> Who a hired girl is and what she does is explained by a former Old Order Mennonite:

As you know, instead of having a job outside of the home, we go around to different families and work as a hired maid. Either as a baby maid or housemaid. Every June 1, it's a different word in German but it's kind of like a hiring day of the next year where everyone decides for the next year if they wanna have a maid for the whole year, they go and ask all the single girls, anywhere from 16 years of age to 22 or whatever age they stop being a working maid, would you like to come to our house next year and be our maid for that year? Usually they say that they will think it over. Usually if there's a family with a whole bunch of girls they will get 20 or 30 phone calls asking if they want to work for them next year. So, the girl gets to choose where they want to go. She hires herself out to that family for that year. She lives as part of that family for that year. She just does whatever the wife tells her to do. She is the wife's right hand person and just does the baking in the cleaning and whatever all a woman does. It's the same way with the boys. They hire themselves out, too. (interview)

Edna: During winter times too there is singing school sometimes one evening in the different areas. Somebody will teach theory and some notes and so on. Then other times, not every winter, but sometimes we'll have school for people that want to learn how to do sign language. There are some people in our church that can't hear. There's always somebody that signs the sermon for them. That is just for certain weeks. There's the singing school, there's sign language school, and German school. But German school isn't so common anymore because we teach it more in the schools now. When we were younger they'd have basic German classes sometimes. It'd usually be Saturday afternoons or sometimes evenings.

The remarks made by these two ladies emphasize the role of leisure for members and the ways in which entertainment socializes their young into the group's perspective. They highlight the value placed on simple pleasures, the reinforcement of religion, and the group's goal of keeping members fluent in German, a language which is predominantly used only during church services. Having a high degree of internal consistency among institutions and the various agents of socialization acts to reinforce the group's ideological principles of separation and simplicity.

The years of secondary socialization provide greater opportunities for contact with outsiders and alternative viewpoints. It is at this point that brethren increase their dealings (typically for business purposes) and have greater freedom in their social interactions with non-Mennonites. Competing perspectives offered up by outsiders, however, are difficult to reconcile against that which brethren have come to accept as appropriate and true interpretations of reality. Although Old Orders do not become official members of the church until they are baptized (which typically occurs during late adolescence or early adulthood), they have been born into a religion and way of life and have

already practiced their culture for several years. Despite having a seemingly greater amount of choice over their beliefs and activities during their adult years, with each new viewpoint presented by non-members, they encounter the obstacle of coming to believe something that was previously thought unbelievable, incorrect, or inappropriate. The possibility is there, but is one that becomes difficult to reconcile against years of socialization that form the foundation of the person's map of social reality. Therefore, members are likely to be more receptive to ideas that fit into their pre-existing map and, consequently, more defensive against ideas that do not fit.

The data I collected point to how thoroughly religion is incorporated into their ideology and the difficulties members encounter when attempting to make sense out of competing perspectives and acting against the tenets of their beliefs. All of which suggest how consequential the internalization of their ideology is to maintaining their separation from the outside world and the continuance of their culture. For instance, one Old Order lady told me that religion has been so much a part of her upbringing that it becomes taken for granted in the various ways it manifests itself during her everyday life. For her, she feels that "it is sort of subconscious" (interview). When alternative perspectives are experienced or worldly objects are encountered, the *background expectancies* (i.e., shared interpretation of objects and events, as well as their resulting actions) underlying their everyday life are "breached" (Garfinkel, 1967) and made very much conscious for them. This manifests itself in a sense of social discomfort and, if taken further (i.e., having the opportunity to contemplate and relate to the competing perspective or

interpretation of a worldly object) it leads some to experience what appears to be a sense of anomie (Durkheim, 1951 [1893]).

The belief that certain forms of technology lead to sinful behaviour or thoughts has become so much a part of the Old Orders' socialization and, subsequently, their ideology, that coming into contact with forbidden technology can generate feelings of guilt and uneasiness. This is reflected in the following quote:

Of all my school years I was one time allowed to go to a school friend's house for the night that had a TV. Mom and Dad don't know to this day, but we watched the Anne of Green Gables movie until 3:30 in the morning (laughter). *Ahhhh* I felt so guilty! But I enjoyed every bit of it. But then I was allowed to go to the Snyder's because they didn't have TV. (interview)

Exploring this point a bit further, it can be noted that the way in which technology, and objects in general, are framed (Goffman, 1974) affects people's subsequent interpretations of and actions towards the technology. As demonstrated by many of the previous participants' quotes, the Old Order rely quite heavily on a moral frame to evaluate social reality. One firm and frequent imputation is that worldly things have the potential to lead to sinful acts or thoughts. Such a frame becomes incorporated into the group's ideology, so much so that when coming into contact with disallowed objects or, more broadly, engaging in acts that are viewed as wrong by their community, individuals tend to feel a sense of discomfort and guilt for breaching the agreed upon boundaries of their community; boundaries that they are frequently reminded of, but nonetheless become taken for granted and part of the background expectancies structuring their everyday behaviour.

Note the following remarks made by a former Old Order Mennonite who has since adopted some of the amenities of modern society and has had to reconcile her change in lifestyle with her “former” belief system: “You know, that’s one of the worst things I felt guilty with: a computer. For some reason I always had this thing in my mind that it’s the most worldly thing. It just scared the daylights out of me” (interview). Equally interesting is the rationalization process she develops in order to alleviate her discomfort and work towards re-framing her interpretation of the computer:

I got to talking about the computer with one of my husband’s bosses and I just expressed my concern about it. He held up this piece of wood that he was holding and said, “Look at the computer as this piece of wood.” I thought, what do you mean? There’s no comparison. He said, “I can use this piece of wood to make something good out of it or I can make something out of this piece of wood to kill you with. That’s the same with the computer.” He said, “You can use it for something good, or you can kill yourself with it.” In other words, do all bad things with it. That really helped me get over it. Computers are good, but you gotta control yourself. There are a lot of bad things on it, too. But a piece of wood can be harmful, too. (interview)

This participant’s remarks further illustrate the types of problems that may arise through contact with members of the outside world. In this example, the “outsider” aims to persuade the individual towards re-framing her viewpoint. Rather than interpreting the computer as a bad thing, his claims-making re-situates the meaning attributed to the object and allows her to be more at ease with her decision to adopt this once illicit item.

When rule changes are made within the community, there is a period of cultural lag as members of the group attempt to reconcile the change with their belief system. For instance, having not permitted the telephone for so



many years, community members described the confusion they encountered when they were now told they could use it. An Old Order lady offered the following observations about her community's adoption of new technologies that were seen as too worldly at one time:

It's sort of like what one friend was telling me—she is a Catholic—that for a long time they weren't allowed to eat meat on Friday, and then all of a sudden they could. And she felt confused. Because she said, *it had been a sin all this time, so why isn't it now?* And I think that's sort of the same idea. And the same thing happened when we got the electricity in. (emphasis added, interview)

Her commentary is poignant in that she points to how the group objectifies the Bible as its moral benchmark. If the scriptures are to be taken as absolute, the devout have difficulty coming to grips with decisions that re-interpret the scriptures, thus undermining the Bible's supremacy. How can something that was once evil, now be good?

Cultural lag is reinforced by the fact that, following changes, some members of the group are still at odds with, and openly challenge, the decision. For example, I was told that “Some people tried to talk some guilt into the people that put [telephones] in. But it wasn't very long until those same people had them” (interview). Even though it might take the Old Order a while to decide on a change, it would appear that this does little to prepare members both socially and psychologically for the change. People continue to resist the change and impose their viewpoint on others. Unable to convince the group of their viewpoint, and perhaps having also now come to terms with the rule change, those who at first opposed the change come to accept it. Or,

as has been mentioned elsewhere, the group of dissenters attempt to form a new group where their perspective is valued.

The fact that the Old Order are more deliberative about the changes they make, can leave brethren in limbo as to what the group's expectations might be. The debate surrounding the introduction of the automobile in the early 1900s was one that significantly divided the Old Order. Church leaders were indecisive as they were unsure whether the car was a good or bad thing:

It's a matter of opinion [whether a new piece of technology is good or bad]. I think that if you go back to when the cars first came in. This thing about whether they should be allowed and whether it's a good thing or a bad thing, that too, was quite a decision to make at that time because nobody knew. Nobody had any idea. *Is this going to be good or evil?* (laughs). (emphasis added, Old Order Mennonite, interview)

As the Old Order considered what type of impact the car might have on their culture, some members tested the waters, others were clear that no good would come from owning a car, while still others were undecided:

Back then [in 1917] there were hardly any cars. Whether there was old Model A's or Model T's I don't know what they were, but there was hardly anything like that. And once in awhile somebody bought a car because they were starting to come in you know. Some people would buy one and they were starting to come into our church. This David Martin [a member of the church ministry] said that, "There's no way we can allow this! We got to kick the people out that have them!" I guess they had a conference and the majority of the ministers and the congregation said, "We don't know whether this is something bad or good. We don't know." It was something new and nobody knew what it was going to be. They thought maybe we will give it some time and maybe it will reveal itself, whether we should allow this or shouldn't.... But nope, David Martin said, "We have to kick them out. Put them in the ban and shun them!" (Old Order Mennonite, interview)

Ultimately, the group decided not to allow vehicles. An Old Order gentleman describes one of the repercussions of this decision and the accompanying guilt

some brethren felt as they purchased cars and were unable to reconcile the change with their beliefs:

They [i.e., Old Order Mennonites in the early 1900s] didn't know about allowing the cars or not.... I guess some of the older people would not allow this whatsoever. They said, "No way! We cannot have a change!" There was a minister named Urias Martin and he lived right down near where the university is now. He was a minister for the Martin Church at Waterloo. He took his stand and decided that he is going to allow people to buy vehicles and put the telephone in. So, I guess that's when [1939] the other split was. That was before I was born, but this went on for years. And I remember when I was going to school one of our neighbour's boys was in my class and I was sitting one day and he said, "Well, my dad bought a car now." I could've been seven or eight years old. He had it for maybe half a year and then all of a sudden he didn't have it anymore. He didn't feel good about it so he sold it and he came back to our church for a while. That maybe lasted for a year and then all of a sudden he bought a car again (laughter). The people were confused and didn't know what they should be doing. Well, all of a sudden it was over and passed with. Either people went that way or they stayed where there were. (interview)

With the example of the automobile we are once again offered insight into how the Old Order engage in the social construction of reality. In this case we see how brethren attempted to make sense out of the situation, how members vied to persuade others through the use of moral frames, the power of church leaders, the formation of new groups to achieve a way of life consistent with their beliefs, and the eventual internalization of the belief that, for the Old Order, owning automobiles would not be part of their culture.

## **DISCUSSION**

This chapter has examined how the Old Order Mennonites rationalize separateness by analyzing the group's perspective and elements of the social construction process. Ideas that were explored centred on: (a) the use of



divine rationalizations to justify their lifestyle choices and guide their understanding of reality; (b) the social construction of worldly things (and outside society more broadly) as profane, which leads to distinctions between the in-group and out-group; (c) how the group employs defensive structuring by engaging in claims-making regarding old and new threats to their culture; and, (d) the internalization of the group's perspective.

It was argued that the Old Order socially construct a sense of identity and place within the world through direct and continuous reference to, and acting based on their interpretation of, the Bible. The notion of *divine rationalizations* (i.e., a religious-based vocabulary of motive which reifies scriptural interpretations as guidelines and justifications for living a particular way of life) was used to capture the way in which members' vocabulary of motive is aligned with the Biblical scriptures and how these interpretations guide their everyday understandings of group expectations, values, and sanctions. In effect, the language that group members use not only describes their reality, but also guides their understanding of it—a finding that is in line with the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis (Sapir 1929; Whorf, 1956).

Scriptural interpretation also acts as the cultural lens through which the Old Order evaluate the cultural practices and objects of their host society. That which is deemed too secular for their own culture is deemed profane, and described as “evil” or “worldly.” These distinctions reinforce the boundaries of the group by reinforcing in- and out-group distinctions. The way in which such bifurcated, black and white (e.g., good/evil) categorizations of social reality are arrived at is through a claims-making process with competing

definitions being offered up by members of the group. While the Old Order use the Bible as the moral benchmark against which they objectify their interpretation of social reality, data suggest that their resulting understandings are multiperspectival and when consensus does occur (giving the illusion of an objective reality), it is the result of an intersubjectively defined social reality.

The process of defensive structuring, where the group constructs an outside threat and socially organizes its life-world around protecting members from that threat, acts to make clear the boundaries of the group, reinforcing the Old Order identity, and binding the group together through in- and out-group distinctions. Compared to the type of physical and religious persecution their Anabaptist forefathers experienced, the latest generation of Old Orders have more or less only known outsider acceptance and admiration of their culture. Jager (1983) suggests that even after the Mennonites immigrated to Pennsylvania in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries they continued to be bound together by persecution from outsiders and the pioneering effort that was required to establish a livelihood and community in the new world. He indicates that this reinforced a reliance on God to see them through the inequities of their corporal existence, which in turn added strength to the legitimacy of church leaders as those that would guide them through difficult times. This was done primarily through reminding brethren of their cultural sanctity and establishing and reinforcing rules that would help keep the group on the right path.

It follows then that if the perception of an outside threat is diminished, there is the potential for members to begin questioning the utility of rules and

traditions which were once seen as necessary for the preservation of the group.

In his analysis of the Hutterite community, Boldt (1985) argues that:

If one accepts that defensive structuring is an important source of legitimation for Hutterite leaders, then it follows that these otherwise happy circumstances will have an eroding impact on their authority. A more relaxed climate is created, one that affords members the luxury of taking their continued existence for granted and redirecting their attention to ways of making this existence more meaningful and satisfying. Rules that were previously unquestionably obeyed gradually become subject to more thoughtful scrutiny and discussion. Preachers are increasingly called upon to justify the maintenance and enforcement of these rules, not on grounds of external exigency, but on moral grounds or on the basis of their intrinsic merit (p. 98).

In “a more relaxed climate” group members have the opportunity to contemplate the legitimacy of rules and the leaders that enforce them. A former Old Order lady illustrates this point well:

Just lately somebody asked my husband a question about how it was that we used to do things. He said, “I really don’t know.” There were many things like that that you didn’t really know why you had to do it a certain way, but you just knew you had to. It was a rule and you didn’t question it. Years ago maybe they made that rule for a very good reason, but they kept on with it in later years and the new generations have no idea what it is good for and it makes no sense. (interview)

Without a conceivable outside threat to legitimize its necessity, church-lead social control—a key organizational aspect of defensive structuring—may very well falter. To help ensure that their authority remains and defensive structuring persists, church leaders and influential members of the community point to new contemporary threats, remind brethren of their heritage of persecution, and suggest that members never let their guard down. The social construction of the “enemy (although a more ambiguous one) on the doorstep”

is one that continues to be applied by the Old Order and one that fosters a sense of identity and separation from the outside world.

The Old Order community offers up ideal conditions for members to internalize the group's ideology. Throughout their early years of socialization, children have little contact with competing perspectives and parents, teachers, and church leaders are absolute authority figures guiding the socialization process. Brethren come to understand that while secular society presents alternative ways of living, these choices are not the best choices. By the time they join the church during their later years of adolescence, a strong ethnocentric viewpoint is established. This perspective is internalized to the point where it becomes part of the background expectancies guiding their everyday living (Garfinkel, 1967). When individuals confront forbidden objects and encounter competing perspectives, their taken for granted understandings of reality are challenged or breached (Garfinkel, 1967). The result, described by some individuals who have tested the secular waters (e.g., by watching television, driving a car), is a sense of guilt and confusion.

Arguably, for those that have attempted to exchange their lifestyle on a whole scale basis, such as leaving to join a more liberal Mennonite or non-Mennonite church, a sense of not only culture shock is felt (see Chapter 6), but also a feeling of anomie arises – i.e., a feeling of disorientation and alienation from society caused by the perceived absence of a supporting social or moral framework (Durkheim, 1951 [1893]). Having internalized and lived by the Old Order ideology their entire life, individuals who attempt to seek alternatives face the very real possibility of being unable to reconcile new

perspectives and ways of doing things. Encountering outsiders who are able to rationalize a secular way of life presents the possibility of coming to understand how alternatives are possible; developing the ability to incorporate these alternatives into one's life may very well ensue if such interactions and relationships are sustained. That said, perspectives that are in competition with what an individual has known his or her entire life come up against that person's foundational years of socialization and, as such, can be very difficult to adopt.

In closing, I feel that I would have been remiss in not exploring how the Old Orders rationalize separation. To have done so would mean missing out on a most powerful feature of social boundary maintenance. The group's perspective forms the lens through which all brethren view the world. Their ideology, while interpreted by members, impacts not only how they view the world, but also how they act towards it (Blumer, 1969). While it is conceivable that years of socialization can be undone and an Old Order could experience life from an entirely new point of view, to do so would mean the individual would have to experience some form of cultural amnesia. Remnants of their cultural heritage persist and are forever embedded in the mindset of the individual. It is particularly true in the case of the Old Order, and other relatively closed societies, that the internalization of the group's ideology is strong and enduring.

## **CHAPTER 8**

### **CONCLUSION**

This dissertation began with the question, “How are the Old Order Mennonites able to maintain their distinct way of life?” I have argued that it is largely through social boundary maintenance that they are able to do so. In developing my argument, I have combined symbolic interactionist and social constructionist ideas to offer an interpretivist understanding of how social change is constructed and negotiated. In the sections that follow I offer a summary of the findings, consider contributions made by this dissertation, and suggest directions for future research.

#### **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONTRIBUTIONS**

What is the “simple life?” For the Old Order Mennonites, a simple life is one that is pious, humble, and uncomplicated by the complexities, luxuries, and embellishments of “the world.” It means a commitment to following a literalist interpretation of the Bible, being plain in appearance, living off the land, emphasizing a family and church-centred lifestyle, and placing the group and future generations of Mennonites before the individual. In many respects these values have remained the same throughout the lineage of Old Order brethren. But, the Old Order have changed. There has been acculturation, particularly in the direction of accepting less simple things. What is simple,

though, is relative: certain aspects of today's simple are yesterday's complicated.

For Old Order Mennonites, the idea of simple is only made possible in contrast with other cultures. Even the first Anabaptists of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, who sought to distance themselves from Catholics and Protestants, offering a purer interpretation of the Bible, found a sense of identity in contrast with their enemies (Jager, 1983). Today's Old Orders (or the members of any group for that matter) know who they are, and thus develop a sense of identity, in juxtaposition with other groups, including their ancestors. Social boundaries distinguish insiders from outsiders. Whether physical, interactional, institutional, or ideological, the establishment, enactment, re-enforcement, and even altering of boundaries make clear to members what the expectations of the group are and who is and is not part of the group. Loomis (1960) writes, "Without boundary maintenance, social groups would be indistinguishable among a mass of individuals and interaction would be haphazard..." (p. 33).

Boundaries are interpreted and enacted by individuals, but the meanings attached to the group's boundaries are intersubjective rather than wholly subjective. It is within the group context that individuals acquire and share their understandings. The context set by late- or post-modern societies, however, has given rise to ongoing reflexivity on the part of individuals as they reflect on their sense of self and continually reconstitute their understanding of social reality (Giddens, 1991). As a traditional community, surrounded by the culture of a modern society, the Old Order are arguably able to establish a more coherent sense of group identity because of the effort that



they devote to remaining separate and not conforming to the culture of their host society. Their traditional culture and cultural boundaries stand in stark contrast against the culture of their modern neighbours.

Throughout this dissertation I have argued that it is through social boundary maintenance that the Old Orders are able to preserve their way of life. In the sections that follow I summarize the findings and contributions made by this dissertation by discussing the varied forms of social boundary maintenance that the Old Order engage in. As I have argued, the social boundaries are intertwined with one another and enmeshed within the cultural fabric of Old Order society. The social boundaries enacted and maintained by this community are both a means and an end for them. That is, the social boundaries *serve to maintain* their culture and *are* their culture (e.g., language, dress, belief system, social control measures).

### **Isolation**

The greatest degree of separation is established through techniques of isolation. These techniques create social distance between the Old Order community and secular society. Within the social domains of religion, family, work, education, and leisure Mennonite social life is largely self-contained. In this way, the Old Order community attempts to meet the basic needs of its members, thus limiting the need for interaction with outsiders. Even within the Mennonite world, conservative groups attempt to segregate themselves from their more progressive brethren (Fretz, 1976). Fretz (1976) points out that schisms within the Old Order community are done quite purposefully in order to isolate new “intentional communes” from the larger Mennonite



community. Such isolationist practices, from the viewpoint of Old Order leaders, are valuable in instilling a greater sense of commitment and discipline among members. Technological barriers such as the absence of motorized transportation, television, and the Internet further limit contact with the outside world.

Within the Old Order community most work is carried out on their farms, which are found in the countryside on the peripheries of towns and villages. As Jager (1983) argues, farms isolate the group from outside interaction, which serves to preserve the community's way of life by avoiding frequent contact with alternative viewpoints. He suggests that those communities in closer proximity to cities are more likely to experience acculturation than groups that are more isolated from urban areas. In 1977, Driedger predicted that Hutterites "located near larger urban centers such as Winnipeg and Edmonton, will be increasingly influenced by these centers. Since the city tends to dominate the surrounding rural area, it will become increasingly more difficult to deal with the influence of radio, newspapers, television, and movies" (1977a, pp. 280-281). As urban areas encroach on conservative Anabaptist territory, these conservative groups confront issues surrounding how they will adapt to perceived external pressures to change.

### **Interactional Boundary Maintenance**

Despite their best efforts, social life for the Old Order does not happen in complete isolation. Without total "institutional completeness" (Breton, 1964), the Old Order have established "systemic linkages" (Loomis, 1960) with other cultures. Such connections provide for the exchange of goods and services not

readily or wholly offered within the Old Order community (e.g., work opportunities, health care, banking services). At the same time, the Old Order have concerns about the possible acculturative effects that arise from contact with outsiders. As Barth (1969) notes, however, the continuity of a group's culture is not dependent on the absence of contact. On the contrary, he maintains that outside contact can serve to reaffirm the group's culture and its boundaries. What is important in terms of preserving culture, according to Barth, is that boundaries are maintained through dichotomizing groups into insiders and outsiders. During interaction, individuals signal the criteria for membership and exclusion through their self-presentation and by sharing and enacting rules pertaining to how they are to interact with outsiders.

### ***Dress and Language***

The Old Order's distinct style of dress and language serve as barriers to intergroup contact as they signal difference and limit interaction with non-Mennonites. Barth (1969) indicates that the perception of such difference further implies differences in shared understandings, and thus serve to restrict interaction to areas where there is an assumed commonality or sharedness of understanding between the members of the two groups. Symbols are given meaning within the group, and these understandings may be at odds with the meanings attributed to these cultural elements by outsiders. How we appear to others offers up symbols which are interpreted in a way that tells people how they might interact with us. Thus, dress becomes part of a person's identity. How we dress communicates to others who we are, is taken into consideration when defining the situation, offers symbols as to how you might expect to be

treated, and presents information on what our social status, beliefs, norms, and values might be.

Dress, and other elements of interaction such as language, also signal to other Old Orders that they are members of the community. Therefore, sharing a common language and style of dress that are unique to insiders serve to restrict interaction with outsiders on the one hand, while conferring insider status and reinforcing commonalities with in-group members on the other. As Barth (1969) puts it, commonalities signal that members are “playing the same game” (p. 15). Based on survey data from Canada’s four largest urban ethnic minority groups, Reitz (1985) concludes that: “ethnic language retention is a cornerstone of the ethnic communities themselves. Failure to learn the ethnic language leads to failure to participate in the ethnic community...” (p. 120). Shared cultural symbols have the impact of binding a group together while distancing them from those who do not share a common understanding.

### ***Interaction Rules***

Further to self-presentation through dress and language, culture is preserved during intergroup contact through interaction rules. Interaction rules structure the types of encounters that members have with outsiders by delimiting the types of things that are permissible during interaction. Barth writes:

Stable inter-ethnic relations presuppose such a structuring of interaction: a set of prescriptions governing situations of contact, and allowing for articulation in some sectors or domains of activity, and a set of proscriptions on social situations preventing inter-ethnic interaction in other sectors, and thus insulating parts of the cultures from confrontation and modification. (1969: 16)

Formal and informal rules governing interaction with outsiders represent the expectations of the group. The rules of the group limit possession and meaningful exposure to worldly things and thought, but only as such rules and expectations play themselves out on an interactional basis. For instance, children are socialized to appreciate the lifestyle of their group and not be envious of worldly things. When in outsiders' homes, children are instructed to stay clear of technology such as televisions and computers. During business transactions, informal rules of interaction suggest that outsiders be kept at arm's length and socializing restricted to the business deal itself.

Outsiders who are in frequent contact with members of the Old Order group, such as teachers and principals in certain public schools, have an informal understanding regarding the rules governing exposure to worldly objects and thought. As such, teachers, through conversations with the principal, other teachers, and occasionally from children's parents come to learn that their Old Order pupils should not be exposed to secular topics such as space travel and evolution. Teachers will also censor material that conservative Mennonite children might read. These rules further restrict meaningful interactions in areas that have the potential to cultivate alternative perspectives and competing constructions of reality.

### **Prescribed Change**

The *Ordnung* represents the Old Order's set of rules that establish order for members during their everyday life. Within the Old Order community, church leaders act as the main arbiters of change by overseeing changes to and compliance with the rules of the group. While the group as a whole has a say

in decisions surrounding changes to be made to their way of life, it is the clergy that ultimately decide what changes will be made. In deciding on changes, the clergy consider the potential implications of change. Some changes are seen as more significant than others and therefore the decision-making process is quite deliberate and happens slowly. Clergy weigh changes in terms of the benefit of the change versus the ways in which the change will bring them “closer to the world.”

Eaton’s (1952) concept of “controlled acculturation” was employed as a sensitizing concept as it seemed applicable to the way in which the Old Order carefully attempt to manage change. The notion of controlled acculturation represents the admittance of some progressive change, but attempting to control it so as to reduce its impact of change on the group’s culture. Building off the notion of controlled acculturation I made the case that “prescribed change,” a new concept arising out of the data analyzed for this project, better captures how the Old Order use control to manage change.

Prescribed change represents the process by which the designated leaders of a social group decide on, implement, and enforce the changes to be made to their culture. Potential changes are negotiated among members of the community, but are ultimately dictated or prescribed by its leaders, and put into practice by members of the group. Prescribed change can involve the controlled incorporation of another group’s culture (controlled acculturation), but might also involve two additional dimensions which promote separation: (1) boundary reinforcement which represents changes that fortify the pre-existing boundaries of the community (e.g., establishing or re-instituting

formal rules to enforce expectations); and, (2) cultural reversion which represents changes that further remove group members from the culture of the outside society (e.g., greater conservatism in such areas as dress, possession, and belief). Prescribed change, like controlled acculturation, only becomes possible when the group submits to the authority of its leaders and the leaders have the support of the community. Prescribed changes may not always have the support of the group, but social control mechanisms are in place to encourage conformity. A key difference between controlled acculturation and prescribed change is the recognition that change need not always be in the direction of modernization. Rather, changes from time-to-time lead to greater conservatism, either as a defense mechanism against acculturation or a re-evaluation of societal values. The word “prescribed” also helps to capture how, in a group like the Old Order Mennonites, changes are seen as premeditated and directed by those in positions of authority. These observations are at odds with other theoretical conceptions that depict change as unidirectional and deterministic.

### **Rhetoric of Necessity**

Instead of viewing change as deterministically thrust upon the Old Order community, I have argued that it is important to examine the interactive and minded ways in which change is conceived. When change occurs, how is it enacted, socially constructed, and rationalized within the group context? The data presented throughout this dissertation point to a common viewpoint surrounding the enactment of change: change is necessary if the culture is to survive. Contact with alternative lifestyles and the adoption of more worldly

things are deemed *necessary* for the Old Order so as to ensure the viability of the most fundamental aspects of their culture. In rationalizing change, the choices that are made are often presented as the lesser of two evils.

When the Old Order contemplate and adopt a change, they attempt to reconcile the change within their existing belief system and make an effort to ensure that they retain as much separation as possible from the outside world. Should the change not be fully justified under the pretenses of religion, then a common way in which the change becomes rationalized is that it is for the survival of God's people. In this way, necessity becomes tied to religion. If the culture of God's people is to survive, then certain aspects of the group's lifestyle must be sacrificed so that higher order values can be maintained (e.g., to meet the demands of competition, on-farm shops are permitted as an alternative to young men seeking jobs in non-Mennonite communities). A degree of simplicity is sacrificed to maintain separation.

The deviance literature points to the generic nature of the rhetoric of necessity. Sykes and Matza (1957) argue that young offenders "appeal to higher loyalties" in order to rationalize deviant acts to themselves (and others). Offenders maintain that their illegal actions are necessary in order to meet more important obligations (e.g., to family and peers). Similarly, in describing veterinarians' deviance and accompanying neutralization techniques, Gauthier (2001) illustrates how veterinarians use a "defense of necessity" to justify billing ploys and substandard care. Veterinarians claim that their deviant behaviour is necessary in order to keep their business financially viable. Such claims are appealing because others can relate to having to meet higher

obligations. For Old Order Mennonites, a rhetoric of necessity rationalizes change by pointing to the potentially more significant repercussions for not changing.

Examples of the rhetoric of necessity abound throughout this dissertation. Such rationalizations typically arise in situations where members claim that a change is essential to remaining competitive within their vocation of choice: farming. As discussed in chapter five, the telephone, once seen as “too worldly” for Old Order Mennonites, becomes a “necessary convenience” as it is adopted in the 1980s. Individual families begin moving to other parts of Ontario (and elsewhere) as farmland is seen as becoming scarce and farms unaffordable. What is of interest is not so much that a change is made, but how the change is framed either as consistent with the lifestyle and viewpoints of the group or, barring that, how it can be incorporated in a way that members find justifiable.

Another analyst might take these data as evidence of the deterministic nature of change and the unidirectional nature of assimilation. The argument might go something like this: “There are forces acting on the Old Order community which are beyond their control. The host society, by virtue of its cultural dominance, eventually ends up imposing change on smaller groups. Acculturation and eventual assimilation are inevitable.” From my perspective, however, such an analysis is neither cognizant of the dynamic nature of change nor offers much in terms of understanding how change actually takes place on an everyday basis. Change is constructed, promoted, resisted, and enacted within a group context whereby individuals influence one another’s



perception on what change actually is—at least as it is intersubjectively known, how it should be viewed (e.g., good, bad, indifferent), and how it should be enacted. How groups respond to and impute meaning to the actions of others, and how they arrive at decisions offers a more complete understanding of social change. By investigating the social-psychological ways in which change is reconciled within the group's ideology we come to better appreciate how social change is achieved. Macrosociological understandings can only take us so far. If we want to understand how cultures change and persist it is important to go to the people and consider how they perceive, resist, and enact change. By examining discussion surrounding why a change is being made—particularly one that is seen as an affront to group values—we find that the rhetoric of necessity presents a formidable justification.

### **Deviance and the Old Order Perspective**

As deviance within a community represents an internal threat to the continuity of the group, I have argued that it is important to understand how members define and control deviance. Working from an interpretivist (Becker, 1963; Erikson, 1962; Kitsuse, 1962) understanding of deviance, I examined how the Old Order perceive deviance. It was argued that brethren objectify the Bible as an absolute source in defining right and wrong. Certain expectations regarding lifestyle choices follow. Despite the contention that the Word of the Lord is absolute, we find that the most literal of readings are open to differences in interpretation and application. Differences arise among brethren in terms of who is able to resist the application of labels, with people in

positions of power or good standing with the church more apt to elude Old Order justice.

Mennonites openly concede that they are prone to falter. Here, discussion is aligned with Biblical teachings indicating that all people are sinners. As Erikson (1966) found with the Puritans of 17<sup>th</sup> century New England: rules establish the preconditions for deviance and sanctioning deviance serves to reinforce the boundaries of the group. I concur with Becker (1963) that, “social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance...” (p. 9). Such an understanding helps account for the relativity surrounding which behaviours are defined as deviant within a given social group. Moreover, interpretivism positions us to understand how deviance becomes constructed as a threat to the continuity of the group’s culture. With the knowledge that the Old Order community treats the Bible and submission to fellow brethren as paramount, we can come to understand the ideological framework justifying the condemnation of certain forms of beliefs and behaviours.

### **Managing the Problem of Youth**

As with many other cultures across time (Bereska, 2008; Hogeveen, 2007; Tanner, 2007), the Old Order view youth as a significant source of deviance within their community. The Old Order identify the problems of youth in terms of adolescent vulnerability to lusting after worldly things, challenging tradition, and succumbing to peer pressure. This places youth in a particularly susceptible position to defect as they are seen as more likely to be drawn in by the temptations of secular society. With greater prosperity, such temptations

become more viable as young people have the ability to earn more than they did in the past and are also afforded more leisure time.

To manage the problems of youth, children are raised to respect their parents and authority figures more generally. They are taught a strict sense of discipline and understand that there are repercussions for deviation. Although Old Order interviewees made the case that their young people are prone to fault and present challenges to the traditions of their culture, they also had a strong sense that separation ensures that their children do not cause the same sorts of problems as youth in neighbouring non-Mennonite communities. In line with Boldt, (1985), Eaton (1952), and Shaffir's (1985) observations on Hutterite and Hassidic community's attempts at cultural preservation, focusing Mennonite youth's attention inward is necessary in maintaining cultural continuity.

### **Dealing with Defection**

In one sense, defection of members from the Old Order community represents a direct loss of their culture, which taken to the extreme represents the complete dissolution of the community. In another sense, however, the loss of personnel represents a significant way by which the community continues to persist. For those that are discontent with the Old Order way of life, it is likely better for both parties that dissatisfied members choose to leave. Remaining in the community might only serve to undermine the viewpoints of others in the group and challenge the legitimacy of authority figures. As such, the exit of those that are at odds with the values of the community represents an acceptable loss.

Some participants characterized the departure of members as not significantly impacting the relationship between ex-members and the rest of the community. The reality of defection is not as constructive or optimistic as this. There are a series of barriers to defection which function to keep members from leaving. The process of leaving imparts a stigma on exiters and, by extension, their families. The difficulties encountered once outside the community serve as further impediments to defection as making adjustments to a foreign lifestyle can be overwhelming. Similarly, Boldt (1985) writes that an awareness of the difficulties one will face outside their closed community can be a very powerful control mechanism keeping individuals from defecting. He points out that research findings indicate:

Hutterite socialization practices do not result in any greater internalization of core values than is the case in other groups. Rather, what prevents potential defectors from actually leaving is their awareness of the barriers that await them should they do so; and what leads temporary defectors to return is primarily the difficulties they experience in adjusting to life in the larger society. (p. 93)

Old Order Mennonites face similar circumstances. Perhaps one of the biggest changes to deal with is the loss of the social support offered by the community. Exchanging the familiar for the unknown can result in a culture shock for those that defect. The barriers to rejoining the Old Order church can also be quite humbling as reinstatement involves a public confession of the member's sincere interest to being brought back into fellowship. Knowing of these difficulties in advance may well serve to offset the lure of establishing a new life.

Problems of defection are lessened by the fact that ex-Old Orders will often go on to join a slightly more modern branch of their faith such as the Markham Mennonites. Driedger (1977a) indicates that the loss of membership in this way does not lead to full assimilation for Anabaptists. Rather, individuals find themselves in somewhat familiar territory in terms of norms, beliefs, and values as they establish a new life for themselves along the “Anabaptist identification ladder” (Driedger, 1977a).

### **Handling Deviance**

Old Order clergy are responsible for applying formal social control measures to keep members in line with the rules of the church and punish those that deviate. The goal of the group’s reparation practices is to ensure the well-being of their community as a whole. Differing levels of punishment are applied to suit the gravity of the delinquent act. For those that continue to not conform or are unwilling to demonstrate that they are truly sorry for their behaviour, they will be excommunicated from the church. This is seen as a severe punishment as it places the disobedient outside of the church community and thus can have a significant impact on their relationship with family and other group members. At the same time, excommunication forces them to seek alternatives in a relatively unknown world.

Justice is seen as best served by applying their interpretation of Biblical scriptures to those that choose not to conform. Therefore, the group attempts to manage deviance internally so as to avoid outside intrusion by law enforcement who might well apply sanctions that are not in keeping with the Old Order belief system. When clergy do things that lead members of the

group to question the theological legitimacy of their decisions, disagreements in the community arise regarding the preservation of a separate “justice” system. Agreement reaffirms the group’s boundaries and the legitimacy of leaders, while disagreement can have the opposite effect.

### **Reinforcing Homogeneity**

In choosing to be baptised, individuals acknowledge that they are accepting of the Old Order lifestyle, are willing to put the group and God before the individual, and are willing to defer to the guidance of their brethren. The essence of this outlook, which is the cornerstone of the Old Order ideology, is captured by the German word *Gelassenheit*, which refers to “...an attitude that is ready to yield, abandon, or surrender personal desires before God and the community” (Martin, 2003: 364-365). In a community that places such strong value on putting the group before the individual, solidarity among brethren is essential. In this regard, social control measures act to promote group solidarity by helping to ensure homogeneity among brethren.

To a great degree, the continuance of Old Order culture relies on members’ homogeneity in dress, language, possession, and perspective. This point is echoed by Jentsch (1976) in his study on the role played by Mennonite parochial schools in reducing change. Jentsch (1976) maintains that Old Order insistence on uniformity “effectively blocks differentiation and in so doing maintains congruence within its social system and thereby wards off social change” (p. 133). As the rules dictate the limits of possession and establish a common set of expectations, maintaining uniformity reduces the need to compete with fellow group members. Establishing the Old Order



community as the group's sole reference group helps to further bolster an inward focus and lessen the possibility of social comparison to external cultures. A negative consequence of establishing such an insular focus is that it has the potential to spur internal conflict as members may become hyper-vigilant in assessing their brethren's commitment to leading an appropriate lifestyle. In the extreme, if brethren become overly fixated on maintaining such a strong degree of homogeneity, the potential exists for members to lose sight of the value of *Gelassenheit* and commitment to the group and God.

### **Divine Rationalizations**

A very strong and strict belief in the Bible and teachings of Jesus offers justifications for how to live "properly." Perhaps one of the strongest tenets of the Old Order ideology is that they are to live separate and be different from those in the outside world. Bible passages are referenced to support why things are done a certain way or justify their beliefs. Again we see how the Bible is taken as absolute. Therefore, in order to understand the Old Order perspective it is necessary to consider the role that their interpretation of the scriptures plays in their understanding of everyday life. In doing so, one finds that "divine rationalizations" represent a way of thinking and talking about the world that justifies the Old Order lifestyle.

Divine rationalizations can be defined as: a religious-based vocabulary of motive which reifies scriptural interpretations as guidelines and justifications for living a particular way of life. Such rationalizations present a moral frame (Goffman, 1974) through which reality is understood and acted towards. A belief in being part of a sacred or divinely ordained community

gives members of like perspective a sense of purpose. As Jager argues, such a strong belief in this purpose can serve as a very powerful impediment to social change:

It is this author's contention that one of the reasons the Anabaptists originated, persisted and resisted modernization is because they came to regard their beliefs, folkways, rules and structures as sacred... It was the Anabaptists' belief that they had a God-given obligation to reaffirm and re-establish a facsimile of the original sacred New Testament community, and then to inhibit change from that sacred model. (1983: 3)

### **The Social Construction of Worldly Things**

Certain outsider objects and practices are dismissed by the Old Order as being “too worldly.” The term “worldly” is an all-encompassing concept used to denote modern or secular aspects of outsider culture that have no place in Old Order society. It is felt that the integration of such things into the Old Order community would reduce the group's overall separation from secular society. Therefore, Old Orders typically choose to either reject new inventions or at least approach the invention with caution “until the cause and effects of the invention have been proven over time” (Martin, 2003: 273).

How something comes to be defined as “too worldly” happens through a claims-making process (Loseke, 1999) whereby members of the community offer competing claims and attempt to construct objects in ways that would persuade their audience to adopt a similar standpoint towards the object.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Iorio's (1991) work offers an exemplary illustration of how Biblical interpretations are reframed in the case of progressive groups of Mennonites to justify the adoption of new technologies. Interpretations are resituated so as to justify the incorporation of once worldly objects and ideas into everyday life. What was once considered too worldly, secular, or modern has trickled into the Old Order community. The “success” underlying the adoption of “worldly things” appears to have a great deal to do with the persuasiveness of claims-makers in convincing members that such change is either consistent with their religious beliefs or necessary for their survival.



Such claims are made within a hierarchy of credibility wherein the clergy's claims hold a great deal of sway as they are not only the leaders of the church, their leadership role is thought to be ordained by God. After a certain amount of time or under pressure from outside competition or the laity, once forbidden objects may be reconstituted by the clergy as permissible. The previously described "rhetoric of necessity" often enters the claims-making game at this point to rationalize changes.

### **Defensive Structuring**

Siegel's (1970) notion of "defensive structuring" was employed as a sensitizing concept for examining the role that persecution, or the threat thereof, has on shoring up the boundaries of the Old Order community and resisting change. Defensive structuring represents the conception of an external threat to a group's identity and the resulting way in which the group organizes community life and the group posturing it does to protect its culture against perceived threats. Siegel (1970) suggests that authority figures in religious communities, due to their sacred role, play an essential part in identifying external threats and directing the group against such threats. I have argued that while defensive structuring might not be the same for Old Orders as it was for their pioneering Anabaptist brethren, defensive structuring is still a part of how they socially construct their identity and place within their host society.

Major sociological works (e.g., Coser, 1956; Durkheim, 1951 [1893]; Simmel, 1955) have highlighted the boundary setting and identity-reinforcing role played by ethnic conflict and the perception of external threats. The

threat of persecution has bonded conservative Anabaptists together for centuries. Today's Old Orders, however, do not face the same imminent physical threats (e.g., execution, imprisonment, exile) that their forefathers did. In many ways, Mennonites are praised for their simplicity and have experienced a never before seen degree of tolerance and acceptance from their host societies. Surrounded by the culture of a modern or late modern era, pluralism is glorified and the practicing of religious and ethnic beliefs and activities are societal rights. The Old Order are able to maintain the threat of persecution as part of their defensive structuring by claiming that such privileges and freedoms might very well come at a cost (e.g., as repayment for the provision of societal benefits, people may be called on to go to war) and by pointing to secular changes within their host societies that challenge the Old Order way of living (e.g., the introduction of more secular township schools). Members are reminded that they should not let down their guard; they are to be prepared for the possibility of renewed persecution. Such claims further reinforce the legitimacy of their leaders as the protectors of the community and bolster separation by continuing an "us" versus "them" mentality. This further has the impact of highlighting the boundaries of the group and guarding against change. Without this type of defensive posturing, members may lose sight of what led them to be separate in the first place and why it is necessary to remain separate, thus questioning the utility of such a stance.

### **Internalization of the Group Perspective**

Old Order primary socialization occurs in a relatively closed context.

Children have little access to competing outside perspectives and are

dependent on family, teachers, and the church who maintain a significant level of control over the child's acquisition of culture. It is within this environment that the Old Order are so successful at instilling their ideology. Although more voluntary, secondary socialization also takes place within the context of the Old Order community. That said, it is during the years of secondary socialization—particularly late adolescence and adulthood—that members come into more frequent, meaningful contact with outside culture.

Evidence of internalizing the group's perspective can be seen in research participants' reactions to and discussions surrounding "exposure" to worldly things. Such encounters with outsiders and their objects (e.g., cars, television) have been described by some as leading to feelings of guilt or confusion. A strong ethnocentric viewpoint sets the stage for difficulties in coming to understand how and why other groups do what they do. Brethren rely on the group's cultural teachings for guiding everyday life such that their norms and values structure their interpretation of reality and become "background expectancies" (Garfinkel, 1967). In the extreme, breaching these expectancies—especially when done on a whole scale basis such as when members leave the community and attempt to integrate into modern society—can lead to feelings of culture shock and a state of anomie (Durkheim, 1951 [1893]). Hasty transitions can sometimes lead individuals to question their taken for granted understandings of right and wrong as they attempt to become culturally acclimated to their new social structure and come to grips with competing perspectives. Such a situation is not surprising given the strong,

insular socialization they have experienced and the many polarized social constructions that are presented by secular society.

### **Social Boundary Maintenance as a Generic Social Process**

Emphasizing Blumer's (1969) call for social scientists to better understand the generic qualities of social life, Prus (1996, 1997) has developed a series of generic social processes for researchers to validate. Prus (1996) uses the term generic social processes to refer to:

...the transsituational elements of interaction; to the abstracted, transcontextual formulations of social behaviour. Denoting parallel sequences of activity across diverse contexts, generic social processes highlight the emergent, interpretive features of association. They focus our attention on the activities involved in the "doing" or accomplishing of human group life. (p. 142)

Studying multiple social worlds (e.g., Old Order Mennonites, biker gangs, and corporate executives) simultaneously or drawing parallels between different research projects on diverse subcultures allows one to accomplish such a task. While this dissertation has focused on the Old Order Mennonite community to better understand the interpretive features of social change and social boundary maintenance, it can be argued that the findings made herein have generic application beyond this particular case study. In this regard, some worthwhile parallels can be drawn between the Old Order Mennonites and other groups as they go about constructing, promoting, enacting, and resisting social change and maintaining a particular way of life.

As I have indicated throughout this dissertation, other conservative religious communities (for example see Boldt, 1985; Eaton, 1952; Shaffir, 1987, 1995, 2004; Siegel, 1970) engage in similar boundary maintaining

practices as the Old Order Mennonites. A good example of this can be seen in Shaffir's (1987, 1995, 2004) research on the Hassidim of Montreal. Despite some differences between the groups studied by Shaffir and I, practices revolving around social distancing, social control, and constructing a group perspective based on separation are still present. For instance, the isolationist practices of the Tasher of Broisbriand Quebec are similar to the Old Orders described in the present study. Instead of placing themselves directly in the midst of cosmopolitan Montreal, as other Hassidim have chosen to do, they elect to segregate their community so as to help avoid the acculturating influences of the city. Shaffir (1987) points out that the group is particularly interested in shielding their young. The rules put in place by school administrators to avoid pupils' contact with secular material are congruent with tactics described to me by Old Order Mennonites and public school principals and teachers. An emphasis on viewing the group's religious leaders as the key arbiters of change within ultra-Orthodox communities also points to the transcontextual nature of prescribed change as an approach to preserving a distinct way of life. Other groups, such as the Hutterites described by Boldt (1985) and Eaton (1952) and the various ethnic and religious communities studied by Siegel (1970), engage in similar practices, further highlighting the generic qualities of boundary maintenance as a way of preserving culture.

Prus' (1996, 1997) work takes the generic aspects of forming and coordinating associations a step further. His writing on subculture (see Prus, 1997) suggests that the types of subcultural practices described in this dissertation are likely characteristic of *any* group wishing to sustain a

particular subculture. While the specific strategies employed might differ from group-to-group, the abstract qualities of resisting change and sustaining culture will be the same. He maintains that, "...a sense of 'identifiable differences' or a recognition that 'something' distinguishes these associations from other associations is consequential for promoting continuity" (1997: 57). One might study the culture sustaining practices of any group and find that all subcultures have ways of distinguishing themselves from others so as to maintain a sense of identity and enable continuity of a particular lifestyle.

Examining research on other communities without such a distinct religious social structure as the Old Order, we come to find that the Old Order emphasis on separation and accompanying boundary sustaining mechanisms, while perhaps unique in the group's specific approach, certainly appear generalizable in abstract form to diverse social worlds. Take for example Yuan's (1963) research on the self-segregating practices of New York's Chinese population. He argues that intentional isolation has served to protect this group from outside prejudice, and indicates that, "Voluntary segregation does not curtail assimilation but delays the process to some extent" (Yuan, 1963: 264). Yuan (1963) also notes that the community applies social control measures, specifically the communal sanctioning of people that wish to leave Chinatown, to sustain their community. As this community has experienced an increased level of acceptance within American society, the members of New York's Chinatown continue to segregate for business purposes. That said, Yuan (1963) notes that the original function of voluntary segregation for this group "...had been for defensive purposes" (p. 263).

To further illustrate the diverse communities into which social boundary maintenance research is being done, consider: Vallas' (2001) study on the social construction of cultural boundaries in the workplace; Espiritu's (2000) examination of Filipino families' use of moral claims-making to distinguish themselves from the dominant group within the United States; and, Gieryn's (1999) writing on the boundary-work performed by scientists to stake claim to knowledge and scientific authority. These studies highlight the differentiation process social groups engage in to distinguish "us" from "them," develop and maintain a particular identity, and help establish the continuity of a given group's subcultural practices and perspectives. Furthermore, such research points to the generic applicability of observations within this dissertation and the need to tease out the more abstracted processes of social boundary maintenance.

Lamont and Molnár's (2002) review of the study of boundaries in the social sciences lends further credence to the idea that social boundary maintenance, and the various practices underlying it, can indeed be abstracted to other social groups and settings. In their article they call for an even greater emphasis on the part of social scientists to study the generic features of boundary work. They suggest that researchers "undertake the systematic cataloguing of the key mechanisms associated with the activation, maintenance, transposition or the dispute, bridging, crossing and dissolution of boundaries" (2002: 187). The type of research highlighted in this dissertation provides another instance of the specific culture sustaining practices of the Old Order Mennonites and the generic nature of social boundary maintenance.

## **DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Social change is typically explored as a macrosociological process. I submit that there is also much to be gained by investigating this process at the micro level. Stolte, Fine, and Cook (2001) argue that, “social psychology permits the examination of large-scale social issues by means of the investigation of small-scale social situations” (p. 388). This dissertation has sought to contribute to our microsociological understandings of how social change is negotiated. More specifically, it has examined the everyday perspectives and actions of individuals in an Old Order Mennonite community to explore the intersubjective and interactive features of group life that form the basis of social boundary maintenance. In this way, I have attempted to help fill a gap in the literature pertaining to our knowledge of ethnic groups’ “direct experiences” with broader society (Buchignani & Letkemann, 1994). Buchignani and Letkemann’s 1994 survey of Canadian ethnographic literature suggests that there is still much to be learned about the micro dynamics of ethnic relations, and of course, even with the small contribution made by the current project there is still much to be understood.

Some of the data collected pertaining to outsiders’ views on and interactions with the Old Order community have been presented. I was able to develop some cursory insights regarding face-to-face encounters between Mennonites and non-Mennonites (e.g., pupils on the playground and in the classroom, clients at Old Order businesses and stock market kiosks, and people in other public places such as medical facilities). These opportunities, while promising, could be examined in much greater depth. To further



explore the interactional aspects of social change I hope to develop this component of my ongoing research with the Old Order. Brubacher's (1984) thesis on the "Dimensions of Social Interaction between Old Order Mennonites and Non-Mennonites in the Mount Forest Area" is relevant here, but to take work like his even further, it would be worthwhile to build on interviews by directly observing the interactions between insiders and outsiders. The research question of interest being: "In what ways do face-to-face interactions between insiders and outsiders influence social change?" As the data for this dissertation suggest, social change occurs through interaction. I have insightful interview data on people's descriptions of direct encounters between Old Orders and non-Mennonites, but this is one area of participant-observation that could be expanded on. The sharing of ideas and rationalizations across community boundaries represents a worthwhile focal point for study. In this way, one is permitted an up-close "as it happens" look into the type of interaction that takes place as individuals not only negotiate an understanding of the immediate situation, but also how both sides influence one another and create boundaries and linkages between different cultures.

My own future research on this group will help address other limitations of the current project by (i) examining Old Order parochial schools as a significant institution for socialization, (ii) meeting with younger people to better understand their commitments and viewpoints on the types of boundary maintenance their community engages in, and (iii) further investigating the exiting process by considering the relationships ex-Old Orders have with their former community and their experiences in adapting to

a new social world. These issues were partially explored in this study and were found to be areas that are accessible to sociological exploration and have much to offer in terms of our understandings of the role of education and youth in closed communities, the exiting process, and the social ramifications of defection.

Although social change researchers have tended to study groups (e.g., ethnic minorities) that have very observable cultural characteristics which separate them from the larger community, we should also consider the ways in which people with less visible or distinct cultural markers and social boundaries maintain small group cultures (e.g., family traditions among dominant groups). By incorporating such an analysis into the broader literature on social boundary maintenance and change we will be able to more completely understand the generic qualities of these social processes. Likewise, a more concerted effort on the part of qualitative researchers to conduct meta-ethnographic research would also lend itself to understanding the generic, microsociological aspects of boundary maintenance and change. Prus (1996, 1997) notes that efforts such as this are essential if we are to bring islands of disconnected studies together in understanding the generic social processes of everyday life.

Driedger (1977a) and Eaton (1952) once claimed that the pull of the modern world might well serve to be too much for conservative groups of Anabaptists. They surmised that with highways penetrating the countryside, ever-expanding urban sprawl, and stiffer agricultural competition, groups like

the Old Order would eventually be forced to assimilate. However, several years later we see that the Old Order lifestyle is still viable. While incremental change has been deemed necessary to adapt to perceived internal and external pressures, the Old Order have indeed found ways to change without engaging in complete acculturation or assimilation.

I, too, began this project with the distinct, personal impression that it was only a matter of time until the Old Order community that I had lived beside, would not be able to sustain its way of life for much longer. In fact, my preconceived notions of the Old Order Mennonites represented the intellectual curiosity that served as the impetus to conduct the research in the first place. I wondered: “How could a group like this keep their young from the temptations of the outside world? How could their relatively small farming operations compete? How could such a simple lifestyle hold up to the various complex challenges heralded by modern, secular society?” Despite being in close proximity to their community, I quickly discovered that I was an outsider to their lifestyle and knew little about the ways in which they continue to not only sustain their culture, but grow and thrive. This—i.e., the way in which outsiders are able to observe the Old Order community from a distance, but not come to intimately know their culture—it turned out was indicative of their isolationist practices and efforts to maintain separation.

For those assuming that the various challenges and perils presented to a community such as the Old Order’s would *cause* it to change, the lived reality of social change is lost. Social change is a dynamic, interactive process. People interpret, mediate, negotiate, promote, and resist it. Even

when change would appear as a monolithic deterministic “entity” somehow overpowering human beings, we are not truly fully contemplating the *social* dimensions of change. When change is considered from a humanistic perspective, one finds that the “threat” of an outside culture can serve to reinforce social solidarity and the desire for continuity among insiders. In the final analysis it might be argued that the Old Order’s simple life will continue because a group of people believe in it, act on their beliefs, and enable it to persist. The Old Order offer a viable alternative to the culture of their host societies, and their culture will be preserved as long as there are those for whom the simple life, as they practice it, is attractive.

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## **APPENDIX**

### **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND THEMES OF INTEREST**

#### **OLD ORDER MENNONITES**

##### **Questions of Interest**

- Do you see your community as having changed at all?
- What sorts of things have changed?
- How do you think these changes took place?
- What sorts of things do you appreciate as a Mennonite?
- Are there things that you think should be changed in the Mennonite community?
- Are there any changes that you are aware that are occurring now?
- Can you think of any traditions your community works hard at maintaining?
- What types of strategies are used to maintain these traditions?
- In what ways has your community remained the same?
- How do members of your community help to ensure that your community does not change?
- What is your perspective on the world outside the Mennonite community?
- How are children taught about the moral code of your community?



- What role does the church play in your children's upbringing as Mennonites?
- What role does education play in your children's upbringing as Mennonites?
- What role does your family play in your children's upbringing as Mennonites?
- What role does religion play in your everyday life?
- Can you think of a time when someone broke a rule of your community?
- How did your community handle this?
- Have you ever known of anyone who has left the Old Order community?
- How did this happen?
- How does the community feel about this person now?
- Do you know what this person is doing now?
- Is there anything else you would like to add or discuss?

#### **Themes to be Explored**

- Personal background and family history
- Changes in the Old Order community
- Keeping Old Order traditions
- Views about the non-Mennonite world
- Everyday life
- Church, education, family, work, leisure

- Handling misbehaviour
- People that leave the Old Order community
- Other areas of interest to you

## **PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS**

### **Themes to be Explored**

- Interviewee background
- First experiences in working with conservative Mennonites
- Differences and similarities in treatment between Mennonites and non-Mennonites
- Differences and similarities in activities and involvement between Mennonites and non-Mennonites
- Working with Mennonites
- Rules that teachers are to follow in working with conservative Mennonites
- Meeting and interacting with conservative Mennonite parents
- Handling misbehaviour
- Change (e.g., in the conservative Mennonite community; educating conservative Mennonite pupils)
- Challenges and advantages in having conservative Mennonite pupils
- Situations: in the classroom, on the playground, in the library, working with technology
- Community context: learning, religion, family life

## **HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS**

### **Themes to be Explored**

- Background of interviewee
- Role of the [health care provider]
- Expectations in working with conservative Mennonite clients
- Types of clients
- Experiences in working with conservative Mennonite clients
- Advantages and difficulties in working with conservative Mennonite clients
- Change and continuity in working with conservative Mennonite clients