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"You Can't Change What You Were": Liminality and the Process of Role Exit Among Former Amish

Kathryn Foster
The College of Wooster, kfoster16@wooster.edu

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"You Can't Change What You Were": Liminality and the Process of Role Exit Among Former Amish

by Kathryn Foster

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Supervised by: David McConnell

Department of Sociology and Anthropology
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Abstract

Aside from reality television, which often depicts former Amish as raucous partiers, many documentaries and memoirs portray ex-Amish as runaways, leaving in the night with nothing but the clothes on their back. As the gap between "the world" and the Amish closes, how accurate is this portrayal of leaving the Amish for the roughly 15% who choose to leave? How do ex-Amish negotiate the transition from Amish to English (non-Amish) life? This study, based on interviews with former Amish, explores the difficult decision to leave the Amish church as well as the challenges of transitioning into English life and negotiating an ex-role. Drawing on Victor Turner's concept of liminality, Pierre Bourdieu's theory of capital, and Ebaugh's model of role exit, I explore the multiple and conflicting meanings of leaving an ethnoreligious group. The findings suggest that the current literature on ex-Amish fails to capture the diversity of former Amish experiences, as more liberal Amish in the sample typically had a smoother transition into English life. However, this study shows that issues of embodied cultural capital and a state of liminality persist long after one has exited a role in an ethnoreligious group.

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Chapter I: Introduction

The camera pans over the countryside, showing old, rustic farms, horses pulling buggies along a dirt road; then the screen flashes to images of young men and women staring wistfully into the distance. Their voices narrate while the camera focuses on each of them working and living in their rural homes: one young man dropped out of school to work at age 15, one woman believes in gender equality; another woman says she is "fascinated by the outside world." Each of these teenagers is dressed in traditional looking garb, with some form of bonnet or hat and plain clothing that covers most of their body. "A New Original Series," the screen reads. The young man narrates over images of the men and women walking away from the farms: "It takes somebody with a lot of balls to leave the Amish."

The above description was a trailer for *Breaking Amish*, The Learning Channel series that chronicles the lives of young Amish in their rumspringa as they transition from their rural homes into English (non-Amish) city life. However, instead of showing these young men and women getting jobs or furthering their schooling, learning how to drive, or making friends outside the Amish community, the producers throw them into New York City, giving them free reign to break all of the Amish rules. Later in the trailer, they are shown screaming out of cars, getting tattoos, and posing in bikinis for a photoshoot (TLC 2012). Two of the women are shown arguing loudly in a city street, wearing full makeup and English clothes (TLC 2012). The shock value of watching these young men and women deviate from their Amish upbringing in extreme ways makes for excellent television, but paradoxically, like most reality television, it fails to reflect the actuality of most ex-Amish experiences.

The recent boom of popular culture depictions of ex-Amish life are often sensationalized and focus on the most extreme cases. *Breaking Amish* is only one of many shows and films that

depict ex-Amish experiences. The 2002 film *Devil's Playground* shocked audiences with its depiction of extreme rumspringa experiences involving partying, drugs and drug dealing, and other illegal activities. The film follows real Amish youth through their rumspringa, but it shows the most extreme cases of rumspringa from one large settlement in Indiana (Walker 2002). It fails to acknowledge that these experiences are uncommon. *Amish in the City*, a 2004 series on UPN, follows the trend of filming ex-Amish experiences in urban centers, but is somewhat tamer. This show threw together young Amish and young English and placed them in a mansion in Los Angeles. While the show depicts some roommate drama and more Amish women in bikinis, it also shows some of the more important cultural aspects of English society to which most Amish are not exposed. For example, in one scene, a young Amish woman named Ruth marvels at art in a museum, noting that art is not a large part of Amish culture (UPN 2004). However, the contrived nature of the situations cannot be ignored, and it does not seem to accurately depict the experiences of Amish transitioning into non-Amish life.

Even recent documentaries and memoirs, while more accurate than the reality TV series, do not reflect the diversity of ex-Amish experiences. These accounts often focus on ex-Amish who are extremely vocal and public about their experience of leaving the Amish and who may feel jaded or have a chip on their shoulder. For example, memoirs such as *Crossing Over: One Woman's Escape from Amish Life* represent the Amish as "oppressive" and manipulative. It is hard to get an accurate picture of ex-Amish experiences from these few memoirs. Most documentaries tend to focus on those who have left from "lower" (stricter) churches, and some focus entirely on runaways from the Amish. The National Geographic series *Amish: Out of Order* and the PBS documentary *The Amish: Shunned* are examples of this. *Amish: Out of Order* tends to focus on young Amish runaways, whereas *The Amish: Shunned* tends to focus only on

excommunicated Amish. While these experiences are obviously important, not every case of leaving the Amish is so extreme. We still do not get a complete picture of ex-Amish experiences from these sources. What popular media representations of ex-Amish miss is the diversity of ex-Amish experiences, including those whose experience of leaving might not be as extreme or traumatic.

The Amish themselves are an extremely diverse group, made up of many varying religious views and lifestyles. Over the past decade, numerous scholarly studies have shown that popular conceptions of the Amish as peaceful, agriculturally-based, homogenous communities are inaccurate (Nolt and Meyers 2007; Hurst and McConnell 2010; Kraybill, Johnson-Weiner and Nolt 2013). Schisms within the Amish religious community are common, and defection and excommunication, though uncommon, happen with enough frequency to warrant the attention of researchers. Kraybill, Johnson-Weiner, and Nolt (2013) note that as of 2012, there are over 40 "affiliations" of the Amish, each with different "views and practices" (138). Though affiliations are defined by similar values and lifestyles, it is important to note that each church district has variation in rules and practices (Kraybill 2013:138).

Because the Amish are a diverse group, they also differ in the ways they treat those who have left the Amish community or religion. There are several different ways one can leave the Amish church: leaving before baptism, and leaving after baptism. Only in the latter case does one face formal excommunication and shunning. Another portion of Amish leave their communities to join "higher" churches (which tend to be less strict, but still Anabaptist), and in some of these cases excommunication is lifted. Young adult Amish go through a "rumspringa" ("running around" years) in which they must decide whether or not to be baptized, and thus, committed to the Amish lifestyle. There is variation in rumspringa experiences from each

settlement and church district to the next, with some being more extreme than others; in every case, however, young Amish must decide for themselves whether or not to stay Amish (Stevick 2014). Most choose to stay (approximately 85%), but for those who do not, the road to English life can be rough. They may not be exposed to other ways of living, or may face criticism from their family for leaving. Another (smaller) group of Amish have left their community through excommunication, being expelled or leaving the Amish after baptism. Those who are excommunicated face shunning, a practice that also varies between communities, but generally involves limited contact. The rate of retention tends to be higher (over 90%) in more conservative affiliations, which Kraybill, Johnson-Weiner, and Nolt note may be due to their sharper separation from the world and harsher shunning practices (2013:153). However, there could be a myriad of factors that influence a person's decision to leave the Amish church.

The Amish have often been the focus of studies by anthropologists and sociologists, but more literature on ex-Amish experiences is needed. Ex-Amish and excommunicated Amish have sometimes been consulted as part of broader studies on the Amish, but only a few studies focus explicitly on ex-Amish themselves (Stevick 2014; Hurst and McConnell 2010; Pollack 1981). Even scholarly studies on the ex-Amish tend to have limited samples, with participants coming from one affiliation, settlement, or group of ex-Amish (Pollack 1981; Hurst and McConnell 2010). The literature also tends to focus on Amish from strict communities (Reiling 2002). These studies are vital to our understanding of former Amish experiences, but it is difficult to draw sweeping conclusions from such limited samples. Therefore, studies need to draw on a wider sample. With my research, I hope to add more to these fields in addition to providing a study of a diverse group of ex-Amish.

Why do some Amish choose to leave? What are the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral experiences of transitioning to English life? What are the biggest difficulties ex-Amish face in adjusting to non-Amish life? Do some ex-Amish have an easier transition into Amish life? How do they reconcile their internalized cultural beliefs and practices with a non-Amish lifestyle? In my research, I hope to explore these questions. The focus of my study will be ex-Amish: those who have been excommunicated and those who have defected before baptism. Henceforth, I will use ex-Amish and former Amish interchangeably to refer to both these groups. Learning about the complete experience of leaving the Amish will require studying their decisions to leave and transition into life after the Amish. By analyzing in-depth interviews with a diverse sample of former Amish, we will to have a better understanding of what it means to leave an ethnoreligous group and how that informs cultural identity when transitioning into a different culture.

In this study, I will examine ex-Amish experiences from different areas of Ohio, looking for themes in experiences and analyzing these experiences through different theoretical lenses. In Chapter 2, I frame my study of the ex-Amish through the lens of three theorists: Victor Turner's theory of liminality, Pierre Bourdieu's theory of capital, and Helen Ebaugh's theory of role exit. Chapter 3 reviews anthropological and sociological literature on those who have left ethnoreligious groups, surveys documentaries and memoirs that try to capture former Amish experiences, and finally, assesses scholarly studies of the ex-Amish. In Chapter 4, I describe my methods and how I collected data using in depth interviews with former Amish. In Chapter 5, I present my data and identify themes that emerged from the study. Finally, in Chapter 6, I discuss the scholarly significance of my study and its strengths and limitations.

Chapter II: Theory

The Amish present the rare case of a minority culture with a rite of passage that ends with an option to exit the culture. Around age 16, young Amish men and women enter into their "running around" years. Rumspringa is a period of "implicit cultural prescriptions for deviance" in Amish society (Reiling 2002: 147-148). Though this practice is not always openly accepted by parents and ordained church leaders, there is a clear pattern across the Amish of relaxed parental supervision (Reiling 2002:148). During this period, Amish teenagers must decide whether they want to join the Amish church. While they are making that decision, they often deviate from Amish culture in a variety of ways, from wearing English style clothing, to driving, to drinking and partying in some extreme cases (Stevick 2014). Much variation exists in rumspringa practices across gender, affiliation, and region, and some rumspringa experiences will be more extreme than others. This period is one of great ambiguity, in which a person in not technically Amish but not English either. If one chooses not to join the Amish church or to leave after joining, this ambiguity may persist into non-Amish life.

The ambiguity of leaving the Amish, and the experiences of the ex-Amish as a whole, can be explained using a number of anthropological and sociological theories. In this section, I will examine rumspringa and ex-Amish experiences through Victor Turner's theory of liminality. Then, I will discuss how Bourdieu's theory of capital, particularly cultural capital, can help explain the advantages and disadvantages of an Amish upbringing in mainstream society. Finally, Ebaugh's theory of role exit can give us a framework for analyzing the stages of leaving one's former culture and the creation of an ex-role. A study of former Amish can make contributions to anthropological theory on liminality, cultural capital, and role exit due to their uniqueness in coming from a minority culture with a completely immersive religion.

A. Victor Tuner's Theory of Liminality

Victor Turner's concept of liminality provides a useful framework for examining the ambiguity of rumspringa as well as the ex-Amish experience. A symbolic anthropologist, Turner is famous for his examination of rituals and ritual symbols, particularly his analysis of the Ndembu milk tree ritual. He draws on Van Gennep's theory of the three stages of rites of passage, which include rites of separation, the liminal period, and rites of reincorporation (Turner 1969: 94). Turner applies these stages to rituals of the Ndembu, in particular focusing on the liminal stage.

Turner focused particularly on the second stage, the liminal stage. In his book *The Ritual Process*, Turner says that during the liminal stage, "the characteristics of the ritual subject (the 'passenger') are ambiguous; he passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state" (Turner 1969:94). The Ndembu have a word for this transition period, "mwadi," which can mean anything from someone undergoing circumcision to a chief undergoing "instillation rites" (Turner 1967:95-96). The liminal period also forces the ritual subject to "reflect" on their culture due to the many different symbols arising from the ritual (Turner 1967:105). During this liminal period, there are many dangers, and through humiliation and submission to a ritual of authority, it creates a bond between the people of the ritual called "communitas" (Turner 1969:96). Indeed, this element of humility is characteristic of the liminal phase because a person is brought to a low status. In this stage, however, he is also put on an equal level with his peers, which creates a sense of comraderie, or communitas. As Turner puts it, "lowliness and sacredness" bring about "homogeneity and comradeship" (Turner 1990:148).

Turner also uses the terms liminal and liminality to describe people and events, not just the phase of the ritual itself. Turner defines liminality as being "betwixt and between" states of being, which means that people can potentially be liminal figures (Turner 1990: 147). Similarly, in *The Ritual Process*, Turner explains that "Liminal entities…may be represented as possessing nothing….As liminal beings they have no status, property, insignia, secular clothing indicating rank or role, position in a kinship system – in short, nothing that may distinguish them from their fellow neophytes or initiands" (Turner 1969: 95). The distinction between a liminal period of a ritual process and a liminal entity is important to make for the application of the theory to ex-Amish experiences. Liminality can therefore be applied to the experience of rumpsringa, and former Amish individuals can be described as liminal.

The concepts of liminality and three stages of rites of passage are useful in analyzing the phenomenon of rumspringa, specifically the sense of danger and uncertainty in that time period. If we split the rumspringa period into the three separate stages of rites of passage, the rites of separation would be when a young Amish person turns 16 and is suddenly allowed greater freedoms. The liminal period would be the entire "running around" period, in which the person must reflect on their culture and decide whether or not to join the church. There are two interpretations of when reincorporation occurs; one could be when the person decides to join the church, and the other is when they are married within the Amish church (Kraybill 2001:117). Kraybill notes that romantic ties give young people an "incentive" to join the church, because they cannot be married otherwise (Kraybill 2001:117). Therefore, marriage can mark the end of rumspringa. Of course, the person could also decide to not to join the church. During rumspringa, young Amish are in between "states;" they have not yet joined the church, so they are not technically Amish. As Turner would say, they "possess nothing," no rank or role yet in Amish

society (Turner 1969: 95). As soon as they join, they will have a role and a place in Amish society, but until then, they are not expected to marry or take positions of authority within the church.

Liminality can be used to describe the period of rumspringa in several ways, but in other ways rumspringa does not fit neatly into Turner's framework. For example, Amish people in their rumspringa period are not beaten down and humiliated in the same way that Turner describes in the liminal period. While Amish during rumspringa might not possess a long-term role yet in their church or community, they are not stripped of their identity in the same way that Turner describes. While they might have to submit to an ordained church leader or parent if they do something wrong, because they are allowed more freedom, they do not have to submit to a ritual authority. Rather than intensifying cultural values and norms, rumspringa could have the opposite effect by introducing young Amish to English life. In this way, rumspringa represents a ritual of inversion more than a rite of passage, because it temporarily suspends cultural values and norms.

A ritual of inversion can be defined as a "release from the accepted order of things," or as a "'safety valve' by which groups avoid actual conflicts that might threaten the society itself" (McMahon 2000:329). Some rituals of inversion that have been studied by anthropologists include Halloween and German carnivals (Clark 2005, McMahon 2000). One study on Mardi Gras proposes that the chaotic celebrations, which are a form of "improvised drama" and "deep play," serve to "reaffirm the status quo…instead of undermining it or threatening it with genuine chaos" (Ancelet 2001:144). The cooperation and commitment required for Mardi Gras reinforce traditions (Ancelet 2001:144). Similarly, rumspringa may work to reinforce traditional Amish culture. As a ritual of inversion, rumspringa could work to weed out troublemakers, or

individuals who would create tensions in an Amish community. By acting out during rumspringa or after being baptized, Amish may also be better prepared to settle down into church membership. In my study, I hope to explore a spectrum of ex-Amish rumspringa experiences, and ask whether they could be interpreted as a ritual of inversion.

Another drawback of the application of Turner to the Amish is that there are no defined rites of reincorporation at the end of the rumspringa period. The end of the rumspringa period is not clear, as it would be in the rites of reincorporation rituals that Turner describes. For example, some Amish may leave for a period of time before coming back and being baptized into the church. Also, some Amish might define getting married as the end of rumspringa. For other individuals, there is no rite of reincorporation, as they might defect from the Amish and never marry into the community.

In applying liminality to former Amish experiences, several axes of liminality emerge: from cognitive liminality (figuring out ones identity) to religious liminality (the fear of being "caught out") to more practical issues of legal and educational liminality, we can see many ways in which ex-Amish may feel conflicted between English life and their upbringing. By defining different types of liminality among former Amish experiences, we can provide a more organized framework for the application of Turner's theory.

Cognitive liminality can be described as a struggle between two separate identities: Amish and English. In memoirs and documentaries, ex-Amish describe themselves as neither Amish nor English ("Amish: Out of Order"). Leaving a minority, conservative culture and entering a different culture could certainly cause some tension between one's upbringing and their new environment and lifestyle. This theory has been applied to other situations of individuals transitioning into a different culture, particularly in the cases of migrants and

refugees (Hynes 2011; Cohen 1984; Menjivar 2006; Mortland 1987). Ybema, Beech, and Ellis propose that there are two different social contexts for using liminality to describe an individual's identity: one is "actors who experience going through a transformational change from one 'identity position' to another," and the second is the "actors' sense of being in-between two identity positions for a prolonged period of time" (Beech et. al. 2011:21). In the second situation, the individual feels that they are constantly being pulled in two different "circles of loyalty," and may feel conflicting allegiances (Beech et. al. 2011:24). Instead of reconciling the liminality, such as in a ritual setting, the liminality persists "at the centre of their organizational lives" (Beech et. al. 2011:24). It seems that both situations might apply to former Amish. Some ex-Amish may have reconciled their identity and feel that they have fully transitioned from an Amish identity to a non-Amish one. Others, however, might feel constant strain between their Amish upbringing and their new non-Amish identity. My study will explore whether ex-Amish feel a split identity, and why they feel torn between "circles of loyalty." One reason we can speculate that they would feel torn could be the fear of the negative consequences of leaving the Amish, including being "caught out."

The rumspringa period and the period of transition from Amish life to English life is a time of religious liminality. This period in which there is greater deviance is also a dangerous time. Some Amish have a fear of being "caught out," which is a term used for those who have died during their rumspringa and thus are at risk of going to hell (Reiling 2002: 159). The fear of being "caught out" is strong among both the parents and their children. One researcher has stated that this fear contributes to an attachment with adult Amish culture because young Amish are suddenly confronted with their own mortality (Reiling 2002: 168). Perhaps this allegiance to Amish culture, and the shared fear of being caught out, may help facilitate the camaraderie

Turner describes as "communitas." Not everyone in their rumspringa may fear being caught out, but it does seem to be a common topic in the literature on former Amish. This sense of liminality could bring importance, and possibly danger, to a person's decision of whether or not to join the church. In the case of a young person joining the Amish church, the religious dimension of liminality has been reconciled or eliminated.

In the case of someone not joining the church, we may see this sense of liminality persist through their transition into non-Amish life. In the documentary "Shunned," a former Amish woman, Anna, talks about how she "never thought about dying before leaving the Amish. If I die, I want to be Amish. Otherwise I might go to hell" (Wiser, 2014). For some individuals, the fear of being caught out does not subside after leaving the Amish. The emotional impact of this fear can perhaps create a permanent sense of liminality, as the ambiguity may never be resolved. There have been other studies that have examined the moral and emotional dilemma that may be involved in leaving one's religious upbringing, such as Carla de Meis's study of suicide among prostitutes in Brazil (de Meis 1999). When Catholic women from Brazil deviate from the "good woman" ideal to become prostitutes, they feel extremely conflicted. Although the study of prostitutes examines an extreme example of conflicting behavior and religious ideals, leaving one's religious group could bring about an incredible amount of emotional distress. My study will explore this concept of being "caught out," and whether or not that fear and liminality persists after leaving the Amish.

More practical issues of legal, social, and educational liminality can also be found in former Amish experiences. For example, many former Amish individuals may not have the legal documentation to begin working, or may not have a social security number or birth certificate to even prove their existence to the government. For these individuals, their experience might be

comparable to an illegal immigrant's experience waiting for documentation in the U.S.; In one study, the effects of not having a proper legal status created a state of constant state of liminality among immigrants (Menjivar 2006:999-1000). Similarly, because Amish typically only have formal schooling until 8th grade, many ex-Amish may not have the proper education or training required for jobs, creating a state of educational liminality. Finally, many Amish may not have connections outside of their community, or may find it hard to connect with people who do not share the same background. On the other hand, ex-Amish may still have friends and family in their community, once again pulling them between two spheres (Beech et. al. 2011:24). The feelings of conflict or isolation that may come from social liminality would create great strain among former Amish.

B. Pierre Bourdieu's Theory of Capital

The former Amish transition into English life can also be effectively analyzed using Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the forms of capital. A philosopher, sociologist, anthropologist, Bourdieu was one of the most important postmodern theorists of the 20th century. Bourdieu's work focused on power relations and the way hegemony begets poverty and social order. One focus of Bourdieu's work is the way one's upbringing and background plays into larger social structures, such as status or income level: "[Bourdieu] maintained a balance in the focus of his work between culture and lifestyle, on one side, and social class on the other. His analysis of cultural life maintains a strong focus on class, prioritizing it in a way that is unusual today" (Grenfell 2012:85). His theory can give us insight into how forms of capital among ex-Amish can be an advantage and a disadvantage from an economic and social perspective. First, a discussion of Bourdieu's important concepts is necessary before we can relate capital to ex-Amish.

Two of Bourdieu's concepts that make up a large part of his theory about upbringing and economic and social status are habitus and forms of capital. Habitus consists of the "dispositions," personality, values, habits, and lifestyle that are acquired throughout a person's lifetime according to one's social group, gender, social class, etc (Bourdieu 1977:107, 113). In other words, habitus is one's demeanor that is developed according to larger social structures. This demeanor is "transposable," meaning it can be applied to certain situations, for example, determining one's social interactions (Bourdieu 1977:107). Habitus relates to culture because there is "homogeneity" among class groups and social groups (Bourdieu 1977:115). Because habitus is similar among groups, it also relates to Bourdieu's theory of capital. Bourdieu argues that people accumulate capital, which is the sum of their life experiences that hold value (Bourdieu 1986:83). Capital can translate to economic value and social value. There are three types of capital: economic, social, and cultural capital.

Economic capital is the wealth and assets that a person has acquired (Bourdieu 1986:84). It can be wealth that they have earned or wealth that they have inherited. Either way, it has an immense impact on a person's status and well-being. Economic capital could have a huge impact on an ex-Amish person's transition into English life. The typical image we have of former Amish is of them running away in the middle of the night with only the clothes on their back, however, this might not always be the case. Sometimes, Amish have had jobs for years before they start to leave, and some might have been able to save money for themselves. Especially if a person is leaving after joining the church, he might already have savings or even property. If someone already has savings before leaving, he might not need to rely on others for basic necessities such as shelter. This would make the transition into English life more comfortable.

Social capital consists of the connections and networks that a person is involved in, which could have a tremendous impact on an Amish person's decision to leave. Social capital is not only dependent on how many people you know, but who you know and what advantages certain networks can provide you: "The volume of social capital…thus depends on the size of the network of connections he can effectively mobilize and on the volume of capital (economic, cultural, or symbolic) possessed in his own right by each of those to whom he is connected" (Bourdieu 1986:89). Thus, the advantages of social capital depend on the economic and cultural capital that the networks possess. For a person trying to leave the Amish, having English connections would be a huge advantage because they possess the cultural capital necessary to help guide Amish into mainstream society. They can assist Amish with finding a place to stay, getting a license, finding a job, and more. Perhaps, if they have wealth, they can also assist those who have left by providing them with shelter, clothes, and more. Bourdieu also defines social capital as "membership in a group" (Bourdieu 1986:88). Thus, having English friends can also provide former Amish with a sense of belonging outside of their Amish community. Without English acquaintances or friends, navigating English society would not only be extremely difficult, but also lonely.

Cultural capital is "cultural wealth" that has been transmitted over a considerable period of time (Bourdieu 1977:173-174). Bourdieu defines it more precisely as "the different pedagogic actions which are carried out within the framework of the social structure, that is to say, those which are carried out by families from different social classes as well as that which is practiced by the school, work together…to transmit a cultural heritage" (Bourdieu 1977:174). Thus, cultural capital comes not only from one's family and culture but from different social institutions.

Cultural capital consists of three forms: the "embodied state," the "objectified state," and the "institutionalized state" (Bourdieu 1986: 84-85). The embodied state of cultural capital are "dispositions" of people that are acquired over time through their everyday life, such as their values, their speech, and their way of thinking (Bourdieu 1986: 84). It is important to note that Bourdieu believes these dispositions are transmitted "without conscious intent;" therefore an individual has little agency over the embodied state of cultural capital (Throop and Murphy 2002:187). The objectified state are the objects that they value or own, such as artwork, instruments, tools, and media (Bourdieu 1986: 87). Finally, the institutionalized state is a person's acquired capital through institutions that are recognized, such as their education (Bourdieu 1986: 88). In each of these cases, and especially the institutionalized state, cultural capital can be converted into economic capital. For example, in the last case, Bourdieu says, "By conferring institutional recognition on the cultural capital possessed by any given gent, the academic qualification also makes it possible to compare qualification holders and even to exchange them" (Bourdieu 1986: 88). Thus, one's cultural capital is extremely important in the labor market.

Converting cultural capital into economic capital depends on the hegemonic structure of the dominant society. It depends not only on what is considered economically valuable in a society, but what is considered socially valuable:

> Thus the capital…depends for its real efficacy on the form of the distribution of the means of appropriating the accumulated and objectively available resources: and the relationship of appropriation between an agent and the resources objectively available, and hence the profits they produce, is mediated by the relationship of (objective and/or subjective) competition between himself and the other possessors of capital competing for the same good, in which scarcity – and through it, *social value* – is generated. (Bourdieu, 1986: 86, emphasis added).

Thus, in the context of larger structures of inequality, one's social value is dependent on their economic and cultural capital. In this system, a social structure emerges in which some people are valued more than others based on their cultural capital.

Many groups face discrimination or marginalization because their cultural capital may not be considered valuable in the dominant hegemonic system. For example, one recent study focused on how cultural capital was gained and leveraged by students from Mexico who had just transferred to U.S. schools (Hopkins et. al. 2013). These students came to the U.S. with poor English language skills, no exposure to rigorous academic courses or college preparation, few school relationships, and they had to navigate a new culture and school system (Hopkins et. al. 2013:286). To succeed, they had to gain cultural capital, which meant learning English, gaining school-based relationships, and being exposed to more college-prep curricula. If students acquired the proper cultural capital, they were more likely to feel a "sense of belonging" (Hopkins et. al. 2013:287). Another study of cultural capital include those on migrant experiences, such as how cultural capital can translate to new settings (Hirabayashi 1993). Hirabayashi's study focuses on how Zapotec migrants adapt and revise their cultural associations in a new environment. The author argues that aspects of cultural capital are used to a greater or lesser degree depending on their setting, and that cultural identity is not static (Hirabayashi 1993:105-106). Similarly, studies of low-income urban groups, such as Puerto Ricans in East Harlem in New York City, include in-depth discussions of cultural capital and how it puts many people at an economic and social disadvantage (Bourgois 1995). In that particular study, those involved in the crack dealing business often tried to branch out of their life of crime, but struggled because they did not have the cultural and linguistic capital necessary to succeed (Bourgois 1995:28-29, 134-135, 256-57).

In many of these studies of cultural capital as it pertains to minority groups, there is a racial or ethnic dimension to the discrimination they face. However, the Amish present a unique case because they are predominantly white. Whereas other cultural groups might face discrimination because of immediately visible markers such as darker skin color, with the Amish, dimensions of cultural capital may be more salient. Despite being white, a former Amish person's cultural capital, such as speech, dispositions, and lack of schooling might still make the transition into English life difficult. In this respect, a case study of former Amish can provide new contributions to anthropological literature on cultural capital. By exploring cultural capital as it relates to former Amish more thoroughly, we can examine how an Amish upbringing could put one at an economic and social disadvantage immediately after leaving the community.

Cultural capital relates to ex-Amish experiences because it helps us explain the potential difficulty (social, mental, and economic) of leaving the Amish and adjusting to non-Amish life. In terms of embodied cultural capital, Amish have grown up speaking Pennsylvania Dutch, so their English can be accented and their speech patterns might make the transition into English life difficult. But on a deeper level, embodied cultural capital is also the behaviors, worldviews, and ways of thinking that are, quite literally, "embodied" in the person so that they cannot be changed without a significant "investment" of time in another culture (Grenfell 2012:107). This means that an Amish person will still retain the behaviors and worldview acquired through their upbringing for a long time after leaving. Some gender roles are deeply engrained into Amish life, with most women taking the role of a mother and most men being the head of the household. These values might create problems in the transition into English society. For example, some women might leave with no aspirations to work, but instead to get married, or perhaps they would choose to keep wearing a head covering after they had left. Similarly, the value of living

simply and frugally, one that ties into objectified cultural capital, is one that might persist after one has left the Amish. Perhaps some former Amish do not own electronics, or they choose to continue to live on farmland. These would be examples of objectified and embodied cultural capital influencing one's life even after leaving the Amish. Coming from a completely immersive religion that encompasses all of its community's rules and behaviors for living, it may be hard for a former Amish person to abandon some of these beliefs and behaviors. The struggle, then, of trying to assimilate into a society with different rules, social norms, and ways of thinking would be immensely challenging for an ex-Amish person.

The biggest economic difficulty of adjusting to English life would most likely be the institutionalized cultural capital (or lack thereof) of an ex-Amish person. With only an 8th grade education, being formerly Amish would be a major drawback in the job market. Also, many former Amish might not have the legal documentation necessary to begin working in English society. Though a driver's license might not be essential after leaving the Amish, birth certificates and social security numbers are necessary forms of institutionalized capital, especially when obtaining a job.

However, there might be some aspects of an Amish upbringing that could be useful in English society. For example, a common English perception of the Amish is that they are hard-working, which might give them an advantage in that sense. Additionally, some Amish might have background in a trade such as construction, masonry, wood-working, agriculture, and more that could be useful in helping them find a job after leaving the Amish.

Overall, though, if they have very little recognized institutional cultural capital, including no license, birth certificate, etc, ex-Amish would be at an economic disadvantage. Their embodied cultural capital would also be different from English society and would make it hard to

adjust socially. Undervalued cultural capital could contribute to feelings of inadequacy among former Amish, who might find it hard to find a job or find their place socially. Applying Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital to the ex-Amish allows us to ask questions about how an Amish upbringing informs the transition into English life, as well as the difficulty in adjusting to a different culture.

C. Helen Ebaugh's Theory of Role Exit

Turner and Bourdieu help to explain the ambiguity of leaving the Amish as well as how one's Amish upbringing informs their transition into English life. However, their theory does not focus heavily on identity as it relates to social roles. Turner and Bourdieu cannot explain, for example, how one disengages and withdraws from a role, particularly one that has been very ingrained and important in one's life. They also cannot answer the question of how one reconciles their former role as an Amish person with their present role in non-Amish life. However, a third theory, and a second disciplinary perspective, offers some answers to these questions.

Sociologist Helen Ebaugh's theory of role exit helps explain how individuals disengage with a former role and create a new identity that incorporates their present roles with their past experiences. Ebaugh, a former nun and sociologist at the University of Houston, specializes in organizational sociology and sociology of religion. For her book *Becoming an Ex*, she interviewed 106 people who had exited many roles, including former nuns, divorcees, ex-convicts, people who had changed careers, transsexuals, and more. She has also conducted a study that focus entirely on role exit in from a religious order, namely nuns leaving convents (Ebaugh 1984).

In *Becoming an Ex: The Process of Role Exit*, Ebaugh outlines a framework for role exit, which she defines as, "The process of disengagement from a role that is central to one's self-identity and the reestablishment of an identity in a new role that takes into account one's ex-role" (Ebaugh 1988:1). Disengagement is the disassociation with the ideas, values, and practices of a social role (Ebaugh 1988:10). Ebaugh shows the gradual process of disengagement and the creation of a new role through four stages.

As a stage theory, role exit can provide us with an outline for analyzing how an Amish person might come to reject their role and find a new identity. Ebaugh defines Role exit in several stages: first doubts, seeking alternatives, the turning point, and creating the ex-role. The doubting stage is one of "reinterpreting and redefining a situation that was previously taken for granted" (Ebaugh 1988:41). The individual weighs the "costs and rewards" for meeting the demands of the role and starts to doubt their commitment (Ebaugh 1988:41). The next stage, seeking alternatives, is one in which the individual compares their current role to other roles, determining whether these other roles will be viable options (Ebaugh 1988:87). The turning point marks an individuals final decision to leave. This decision could be gradual, but in the case of a turning point, Ebaugh identifies five instances that may occur: specific events, "the straw that broke the camel's back," time-related factors (such as taking too long to make final vows among nuns), finding an excuse to exit, and either/or alternatives (Ebaugh 1988:125). These events are occurrences that cement one's doubt toward a role and make one's decision to leave clear. Finally, the last stage of role exit is the creation of an ex-role. Ebaugh defines the ex-role as "a unique sociological phenomenon in that the expectations, social obligations, and identity associated with it do not so much consist in what one is currently doing but rather stem from

expectations, social obligations, and norms related to one's previous role" (Ebaugh 1988:149).

The reconciliation between one's past and one's desired future role, then, is the ex-role.

Such neat and defined stages of role exit are not always the case across different examples of role exit. Ebaugh acknowledges this issue herself: "…I am not assuming, in any way, an organismically based process. The very fact that the frequency of role exit varies by historical period, cultural group, and even for individuals in the same society is evidence enough that there is nothing biologically based or 'normal' about role exit" (Ebaugh 1988:24). She also says that there may not be a turning point at all; rather, the decision may be very gradual, with no single event sparking the decision to exit a role (Ebaugh 1988:124-125). However, in analyzing the data that she collected, she did find clear patterns related to the stages that she presents (Ebaugh 1988:25). While she presents a general theory of role exit, it is important to note that these stages will not fit perfectly across all ex-Amish experiences. Rather, they provide a framework for which we can analyze how one disengages from a role.

Ebaugh's theory not only sets up stages for leaving the Amish, but also develops terms for explaining how an Amish person creates a new identity. Perhaps, for example, an Amish person's narrative does fit the stages of role exit. The doubting stage might be as a person gets older and starts to question Amish practices and values; perhaps they start to become dissatisfied with Amish life, or perhaps they start to question whether following strict Amish rules is necessary for their salvation. The question of why they doubt and what they become dissatisfied with is one I will be exploring further in my study. In the seeking alternatives stage, a person weighs their other role options. This stage could be rumspringa for former Amish, when they start to be more exposed to English life and can catch a glimpse of the things they might be able to do after leaving. Another example might be an Amish person has family members who have

left, who provide the person with a view of English life. Being influenced by other members who have left is a fairly common phenomenon in former Amish experiences (Garrett 1998:1-2, 21). In fact, Ebaugh notes building relationships with other people in ex-roles as a fairly common phenomenon in other role exit experiences, using the word "bridges" to describe these relationships (Ebaugh 145-147). The role of bridges is also something I will be exploring further, as it seems like a common phenomenon in Ebaugh's work. The turning point stage could be many different types of occurrences; perhaps an Amish person never decides to be baptized in the church, and after a while they are assumed to have defected from the Amish. This would be an example of Ebaugh's time-related factors (Ebaugh 1988:129). One example of a turning point was gathered from a survey of ex-Amish; in that case, a woman left after a debate over the size of her countertop: "'I [thought], Well, if this little piece of countertop is going to take me to Hell, I'm going to leave the Amish and drive a car and have some fun and go to Hell'" (Hurst and McConnell, 2010: 85). This could be an example of "the last straw" that Ebaugh describes as a turning point in one's decision to leave (Ebaugh 1988:128). After the turning point, one has cemented their decision to leave, and then begins the actual process of leaving the Amish.

Ebaugh's final stage of role exit, the formation of an "ex" identity, identifies several issues which former Amish might encounter in their transition into an English role. The first issue is that of "cuing behavior," or signaling to others that they are leaving the Amish (Ebaugh 1988:150-151). For Amish, this not only means telling those around them that they have left; it can also mean wearing English clothing, changing their hair style, physically leaving home, etc. They do this not only to signal to Amish that they have left, but also to fit into a new role. A change of appearance was also integral to ex-nuns' transitions into mainstream society (Ebaugh 1988:153-155). Ebaugh also discusses social reactions, and the emotional impact of the negative

connotations that can come with an ex-role (Ebaugh 1988: 155). Obviously, if one has been excommunicated, shunning would be a huge emotional ordeal for an Amish person. But even if one hasn't been placed under the Bann, Amish might face misperceptions or stereotypes about their upbringing, as discussed earlier with Bourdieu and cultural capital. These social misconceptions are something I hope to investigate further.

Developing intimate relationships, romantic or friendship, was also a major issue in adjustment that Ebaugh identified across ex-roles. Certain social scripts might be different in Amish life than in English life. For example, nuns who had left had extreme difficulty with dating and romantic and sexual cues (Ebaugh 1988:164). It may be hard for an ex-Amish person to tell someone about their past, and forming friendships might be difficult at first, especially for someone without close ties in English society. Additionally, "friendship networks" may shift after someone has left the Amish (Ebaugh 1988:168). Some Amish people might keep ties with the community, but others might shift their social circle more toward English society. In my study, I will examine if social ties are kept more with the Amish community or with English, and how this can create conflict. As discussed earlier with Turner, these two circles of allegiances could cause emotional conflict within a person.

The final issue that Ebaugh identified across all exes in the creation of a new identity was "role residual," defined as "the identification that an individual maintains with a prior role such that the individual experiences certain aspects of the role after he or she has in fact exited from it" (Ebaugh 1988:173). Role residual could involve the values and practices that an individual keeps from their Amish upbringing, such as family, hard work, traditional gender roles, or simplicity, or it could be practices such as keeping the same hairstyle or using technology as infrequently as possible. Role residual could also overlap with embodied cultural capital, as Bourdieu described,

such as a reserved nature and personality or an accent. But Ebaugh also describes role residual as "nostalgia," a fondness for one's previous role that works almost as a defense mechanism: "…Nostalgia is experienced in a positive sense…pushing aside those negative experiences which occurred. This helps in coping with the fear and uncertainties that the future holds while believing that one's present self is the same as it was in the past" (Ebaugh 1988:174). In essence, a person can better move on in creating a new role with the knowledge that they can maintain their positive ties with the previous role. Of course, not everyone who leaves the Amish will have a positive attitude or an appreciation of their upbringing; but for some, a positive outlook on their Amish background could influence how they proceed with their life after leaving the Amish. For example, if an Amish person appreciates their rural upbringing, they might continue to live in the country or on farmland. In this way, role residual can be embodied, but it can also be the aspects of a previous role that one chooses to keep. The issue of which aspects of Amish identity ex-Amish have kept and which they have discarded, as well as which aspects they feel they have control over, is a question that I will analyze in my study.

Chapter III: Literature Review

Before analyzing data from my study, some background on other firsthand studies

relating to ex-Amish experiences is necessary to explain where my study fits within

anthropological and sociological literature. I will be analyzing three different types of literature:

studies of ex-believers and those who have left an ethnoreligious group, memoirs and

documentaries, and scholarly studies relating to the ex-Amish. Studies of exes can contribute

more to the theory presented in Chapter II and can offer interesting comparisons and connections

to the ex-Amish. Memoirs and documentaries, though not scholarly studies, give voice to the ex-

Amish, and offer data that I will gain through my study. Through analyzing studies of ex-Amish,

I can give background to my study and explain how it will expand on current anthropological

literature. Additionally, examining these studies can give us a framework for analyzing the data

from my study, offering different areas for comparison.

A. Anthropological and Sociological Studies of Exes

Studies of exes in different contexts, whether they be ex-believers or those who have left

an ethnoreligious group, can offer useful comparisons and parallels to ex-Amish experiences.

General studies of exes not only give us a background for analyzing and comparing ex-Amish

experiences, they can also be applied to the theories of liminality, role exit, and cultural capital.

In this section, I not only analyze studies of ex-believers, but also look at role exit and liminality

in cross-cultural studies.

Looking at the experiences of former cult members can tell us more about leaving an

ethnoreligious group. The Amish are *not* a cult because they do not recruit outsiders, but the

intense socialization of their religious beliefs and the way it dictates all aspects of their lives can

be comparable to charismatic groups (Kraybill 2014:110, 142). In one study about difficulties of

adjusting to life after leaving a cult, Coates (2010), a sociologist with a focus on new religious

movements, interviewed seven former cult members about their feelings toward their cult

involvement (300-301). Participants came from several different charismatic groups. Although

Coates does not specify where each of these charismatic groups were centered or located, the

research seems to have been conducted in Australia (2010:297). Some common themes in her

study included a feeling of loss, particularly loss of social bonds, loss of meaning, self-esteem,

and innocence. Participants also felt a sense of guilt and said they had a very hard time adjusting

"normally" to society after leaving, and had difficulty with relationships (Coates 2010:306). In

fact, Coates said that they miss "the intensity of relating" to other individuals, and also said they

had intimate relationships that they'd left behind in the cult, including family (2010:308). Coates

concludes her study by discussing the long-term emotional effects of loss and guilt in the

participants, as some had experienced trauma or witnessed abuse (2010:307-308). Although

Coates' study does not go into detail about why participants left cults, it does offer interesting

insights into relationships among those who have left ethnoreligious groups.

Another study of women who have left a religious cult also focuses on difficulty

adjusting after leaving. Boeri, a sociologist and anthropologist who is also a former member of

the cult she studied, conducted interviews with 15 former female members of the Children of

God/The Family cult to determine how gendered roles changed after leaving and how their

former cult membership impacted their daily lives (2014:332). Boeri argues that the

stigmatization of a female "cult survivor" made these women feel oppressed and made it hard for

them to seek help after leaving, because the blame was often put on them (2002:354). Similar to

Coates' study, Boeri's participants also had a difficult time creating friendships and relationships

after they left (2002:346). Their lack of education, work experience, and their role as mothers also hindered their future prospects (2002:343-345, 350).

A study of a cult in Nigeria gives us further insight into reasons for leaving and reasons why some former cult members might have returned. Barrett (1979) interviewed 46 people who had defected from the closed community of Olowo from 1947 to 1972. His study focuses more on the dissipation of the "utopia" and why some members were encouraged to leave, as well as politics within the utopia; however, the study also gives us useful information about the experiences of the defectors, including their reasons for leaving and how they transitioned into life outside of the utopia. There were distinct differences, for example, in the roles that women and men had after leaving. Most women married after leaving and were supported by their husbands, but among men, success depended on the skills they had gained while in the community (Barrett 1979:3). Men who worked in technical jobs, such as mechanics and engineers, were much more likely to find success after leaving and were less likely to return to the community. Again, we see how success after leaving is also dependent on the skills and cultural capital one has acquired before transitioning into mainstream society. In this case, cultural capital gave some an advantage. The main reason why most people left the community was the severe physical punishment they received for committing adultery, considered a major sin in the utopia (Barrett 1979:3). The researcher also gives several case examples of people who returned after defection. Many of the individuals who returned were in a position of power or prestige in Olowo, and received social and financial support from the community (Barrett 1979:8-9). This suggests that one's likeliness to return could be dependent on the support they received from the community.

One group of exes that has been studied bears much resemblance to the Amish, and thus can give serve as a comparison to former Amish. Hartse's (1994) study of ex-Hutterites, an Anabaptist group that emphasize communal living as a means of salvation, discusses how "emotional acculturation" can contribute to one's likeliness to leave the religion (72-73). Hartse, an anthropologist, interviewed 21 former Hutterites about their reasons leaving the faith and their current religious beliefs. In particular, she focuses on three cases of Hutterite defectors that emphasize acculturation to mainstream society. Hartse concludes by saying that those who converted to conservative Protestantism left the Hutterites because they became "emotionally acculturated to the society outside their colonies" and thus wanted a personal relationship with Christ (1994:83). Hartse defines emotional acculturation as "the adoption by people from one society of the cultural constructs of emotion and self found in another society" (1994:72). Whereas normally Hutterites emphasize rational thought and communal living, these defectors were more emotional and emphasized individual relationships with religion (Hartse 1994:83). This study indicates that if other religious groups, such as the Amish, are more emotionally similar to mainstream society, then there will be more defectors.

Several studies of liminality in other ex-roles can give us a comparison on liminality among the ex-Amish. Other examples of religious liminality and cognitive liminality among exes can help us analyze these facets of liminality in ex-Amish experiences. As discussed earlier, de Meis' work on prostitutes and suicide in Brazil provides an example of religious liminality. She interviewed women from two red light districts in Brazil, focusing particularly on their early entry into sex work. De Meis' examines the moral and emotional dilemma that may be involved in leaving one's religious upbringing. In Brazil, the roles for women include the two extremes of the mother and wife ("the good woman") and the prostitute ("the wretched woman") (de Meis

1999:65). When women deviate from the "good woman" role to become prostitutes, their

conflicted feelings can lead to depression or even suicide (de Meis 1999:65). Although initial

entry into sex work causes the most emotional pain, it "never disappears completely" (de Meis

1999:66).

A study of a refugee transition center offers more discussion of liminality through the

transition into another culture. Mortland (1987), a cultural anthropologist, bases her study on her

participant observation in the PRPC, a place that transfers refugees to Western countries.

Although refugees have not technically exited a role, upon entrance to refugee camp programs,

they are expected to become acculturated to mainstream U.S. society (Mortland 1987:385).

Technically, they are being asked to forge a new American identity. Especially in the case of this

study, which focuses on Southeast Asian refugees who "have virtually no hope of returning to

their homeland or their previous patterns of living," we can infer that the refugees are entering a

new role, or at least a new culture (1987:378). Therefore, I have chosen to include this study here

because it highlights a period of transition. Before transferring refugees, the center hopes to

"transform" refugees: "The ultimate goal of PRPC staff is for refugees to *become* Americans by

practicing Americans ways and not isolating themselves in ethnic enclaves in the new country"

(1987:385). However, Mortland concludes that these programs are ineffective due to the

patronizing and dehumanizing treatment of refugees in the center (1987:394-396). The amount

of "regulation" in the center means that refugees live in a state of liminality because they feel

they are "enduring" the wait until they can move to the U.S. (1987:396). They are in a state of

forced transition, and Mortland argues that this liminality will persist through the first or even

second generation after arrival in the U.S. (1987:401).

Each of the above studies not only provide us with comparisons to the Amish, but also provide us more connections to the theories discussed in the previous chapter. For example, in Coates' study, women had difficulty forming close relationships after leaving the cult. This relates to Ebaugh's theory of role exit, in which she stated that a common difficulty after leaving a role is building "bridges" and having intimate relations. Boeri's study of women leaving cults relates to my research because it explores the stigma of being an ex-member of a religion, the socio-economic struggles one faces in the transition to mainstream society, and the gender differences in leaving a minority religion. This also relates to Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital because many women did not have the qualifications to get jobs once they left the cult, and found that their life experience was deemed inadequate (Boeri 2002:350). Similarly, Barrett's study of a Nigerian utopia connects with Bourdieu's theory capital, because a person's likelihood of success outside of the cult and inside the cult were determined by their connections, status, and skills.

Many of these studies also relate to liminality and emotional tension caused by constant liminality. De Meis's study discussed how when women deviate from their ideal religious role, it can lead to depression. This relates to the fear of being "caught out" among the Amish, because deviating from the ideal religious role could cause similar emotional tension. In fact, as discussed earlier in De Meis's study and with Turner, it's possible that this fear may persist beyond the initial stages of role exit. Mortland's study of refugees also connects with Turner's theory of liminality because it describes liminality as a constant throughout the transition period and beyond. As discussed before, among the Amish, liminality dominates the transition into English life, and can continue well after one has spent many years in a new society. Though the Amish might not be treated as second-class citizens like the refugees, their transition will also be

difficult because they might be expected to transform into an English lifestyle. The pull between expectations to transform and their Amish upbringing might create cognitive liminality, similar to what the refugees in this study felt in the center.

B. Memoirs

Before examining first-hand studies on ex-Amish, I will give an overview of the more common accounts of ex-Amish experiences in the forms of memoirs and documentaries. These are the sources on ex-Amish experiences that tend to get the most attention from the general public. Although these sources are not social scientific studies, they still give voice to ex-Amish who feel compelled to share their experiences, and thus are important to my research. Before analyzing the material, it is important to note that these sources come from ex-Amish who were willing to share their very personal story with the general public. They may be sharing their stories because they have a chip on their shoulder, or have had a very bad experience with the Amish. In any case, we must be careful to analyze the material with a grain of salt. With each of the following sources, I will analyze their how critical they are of the Amish as well as their reasons for leaving and transition into non-Amish life if applicable.

Two memoirs of ex-Amish in particular offer interesting contrasts in terms of views of Amish culture and reasons for leaving: *Why I Left the Amish* by Saloma Furlong, and *Crossing Over: Escape from Amish Life* by Ruth Irene Garret. Furlong's account is respectful of Amish life and its strong community, but it is not romanticized. She left the Amish because she grew up in an abusive family environment and became discontent with Amish life. Saloma was physically and sexually abused, along with many of her siblings, because the community where they grew up turned a blind eye to it (Furlong 2011:65, 83-85, 139-140). She also questioned the gendered power structure of the Amish, and found some rules unnecessary or sexist (2011:132, 158). At

age 20, Saloma had to run away from home to a shelter in Vermont after her father's abusive tendencies escalated (2011:176-177). She eventually reconnected with her family through her father's death. Though Saloma had an extremely difficult upbringing in the Amish, she also finds merits in Amish life, as this moment from her father's funeral shows: "This moment that my sisters and I had dreaded, in which we thought our reactions would be watched and analyzed by our original community members, was transformed. All those years of judgment fell away, and in its place I felt supported by this community of people who had been there when I was growing up" (2011:73).

In contrast, Ruth Garrett's *Crossing Over* paints the Amish as oppressive, manipulative, and cultish. When explaining why she did not tell her father she was returning home for a visit after being excommunicated, she said, "My father would have summoned a gaggle of ministers, and they would have confronted me with feelings of guilt, and hounded me into submission. Because that's what they do to fallen members of their flock. They badger them. Intimidate them. Shame them." (Garrett, 2003: 3). She ran away at age 22 to marry an English man, but she also found some Amish beliefs and practices absurdly restrictive, and disliked that there was no Bible interpretation (2003: 12). She believes that Amish are "kept in the dark" because they are discouraged from reading the Bible or learning too much (2003:18). After leaving the Amish, she joined a Lutheran church, where she felt the belief of God's "unconditional" love was in line with hers (2003:124). Her husband and his sister, Faye, helped her with the transition into English life, including helping her pick out clothes, helping her with shopping, and exposing her to new conveniences such as electric appliances, television, and cars (2003:96-97). Ruth also had to face shunning from her family as well as other Amish due to her exposure from magazine and

television interviews. Garrett calls the instances of shunning "rigid" and "punitive," causing her great emotional distress (2003:166-167).

A book by Garrett's husband, Ottie A. Garrett, also paints a negative portrait of the Amish. *True Stories of the X-Amish* focuses on several people's experiences leaving the Amish, including their upbringing, their decision to leave, and their initial transition into English life. Accounts are often romanticized, highlighting the positive aspects of leaving the Amish. Often the freedom of English life is contrasted with the stifling nature and harshness of Amish life: "An anguished man releases himself from a secluded life of oppression to embrace an outside world of opportunity. That is the story of Dan Beachy [an ex-Amish man]" (Garrett 1998:11). Garrett also portrays the Amish as abusive: "There are child labor laws in this country, but the Amish don't abide by them. Many Amish children work as hard as any adult, but aren't allowed to keep any of the money they earn" (Garrett 1998:49). Despite a clear bias on the part of the author, the book does give real accounts of ex-Amish experiences. Some of the reasons for leaving include wanting to live an English lifestyle, escaping an abusive environment, and not agreeing with Amish rules or religious views (Garrett 1998: 4-5, 12-13, 49). Several people in the book also converted to a more evangelical expression of faith (Garrett 1998:53, 82, 93).

One of the most honest and well-written accounts of leaving the Amish comes from Ira Wagler's *Growing Up Amish*. In this memoir, Wagler recounts his childhood through age 26, when he finally left the Amish church. At first, Wagler left because he wanted to experience "freedom" as a teenager, but his rebellion soon gave way to a dissatisfaction with Amish life and doubt about his religion (Wagler 2011:79-80, 250-251). Wagler struggled for years in the Amish church, feeling as though he was "lost" or "trapped in a box" (Wagler 2011:190). He first ran away from home at 17, but kept returning and leaving for years, even moving to different Amish

communities to see where he fit in, but not feeling a sense of belonging anywhere (Wagler 2011:90-91). After years of depression and dissatisfaction with Amish life, Wagler finally left at age 26. The book does not focus on Wagler's transition into English life, but it provides us with a compelling account of how feelings of frustration or discontent can drive one to leave the Amish. Wagler's memoir is also a fair account of the Old Order Amish, shedding light on the good and bad in his community, including their willingness to pull together funds to help his disabled brother but also their cruel bullying of a boy who did not fit into their social circle (Wagler 2011:152-153, 41).

The ten-part National Geographic series "Amish: Out of Order" gives us a glimpse into the transition from Amish to English life in a community of former Amish in Columbia, Missouri. Mose Gingrich, a producer of the show, stars as a leader in the community, helping those who have left the Amish find jobs, get a license, and more (Stick Figure Productions 2011). It is important to note that this show was produced around the time other Amish reality television shows were being created, such as "Breaking Amish," so it might have been influenced by those sensationalized series. While the show does dramatize many scenes, and possibly even stages some, people are sharing their real experiences of leaving the Amish and transitioning into English life. However, many people who star at the center of the show consist of very recent runaways. Many have left at a young age, even as teenagers, and tend to run wild after leaving the Amish, including taking up hobbies like cage fighting, drinking, getting multiple traffic violations, tattoos, and more (Stick Figure Productions 2011-2012). One of the main reasons these ex-Amish left is because they did not agree with the rules, and many have little to no contact with their families and former communities (Stick Figure Productions 2011-2012). It is interesting to note the support system that the community of ex-Amish provides, giving them not

only a network for finding a job or place to live, but also friendship and meaningful connections. As highlighted by Ebaugh, finding meaningful relationships can be difficult after exiting a role, but the community in Columbia can help give ex-Amish a sense of belonging with people who understand their background.

Finally, another source for personal accounts of ex-Amish experience comes from the PBS American Experience documentary "The Amish: Shunned." This documentary chronicles the lives and struggles of seven ex-Amish individuals. Some have just recently left the Amish, and are still in the midst of transitioning to English life, whereas others left the Amish decades ago. Each person left for very different reasons, which included wanting to go into nursing, becoming dissatisfied with Amish rules, wanting a more evangelical religious experience, becoming too old to marry and thus being labeled an "old maid" in the Amish community, and more (Wiser 2014). Some former Amish are able to return to their Amish communities and keep contact with their families, whereas others are strictly shunned and have not kept contact at all. Those who are allowed to go back generally were from higher order, more liberal churches (Wiser 2014). Most struggle with their decision to leave, and although they have their reasons for leaving, there are still conflicting emotions about the Amish that they discuss at length. The film also hears some of the voices of the Amish who have stayed with their community and faith.

The film is respectful of the Amish community while still revealing the harsh conditions set forth for ex-Amish; however, there are some points where the film has a clear bias. For example, they use an audio clip that compares shunning to stoning someone (Wiser 2014). The somber tone and dark lighting of the film also conveys a very dreary message about leaving the Amish. However, the film provides interesting, diverse, and deep personal accounts of ex-Amish experiences that I also hope to obtain through my research.

The memoirs and documentaries presented here represent a range of ex-Amish experiences, from relatively positive to very negative. My study includes participants' honest opinions about their upbringing and the Amish in general. However, I also want to present Amish life fairly, as experiences could differ depending on the strictness of the church, home life situations, whether someone has been excommunicated, and more. I also hope to move beyond these memoirs and documentaries by analyzing former Amish experiences through the theoretical lenses provided by Turner, Ebaugh, and Bourdieu. Instead of simply presenting ex-Amish experiences, I will use liminality, capital, and role exit theory to investigate them.

C. Rumspringa and Ex-Amish Studies

In the following section, I will analyze several studies relating to ex-Amish experiences. While not all of these studies focus on ex-Amish themselves, they offer reasons why people might want to leave the Amish or stay Amish (Pollack 1981, Reiling 2002) or they may analyze how outside influences such as tourism and technology change Amish society, and how they may affect the retention rate among the Amish (Hostetler 1964, Olshan 1991). I will also be looking at rumspringa studies because some defectors leave the Amish during this time instead of joining the church, making it an important period for ex-Amish. I will first be analyzing two studies that offer perspectives on change within the Amish, then will be analyzing rumspringa studies, including one on "exit costs" and how these play into rumspringa, then a study on acculturation agents, and will conclude with a study on the ex-Amish. With each of these studies, I will be summarizing the argument of the author, as well as how their study relates to the ex-Amish, and finally how my study expands on the literature in this section.

One study that highlights some of the changes in an Amish community that could lead to conflict and defection is Hostetler's "Persistence and Change Patterns in Amish Society."

Hostetler, a sociologist with a functionalist perspective who wrote extensively on the Amish, was born into an Old Order Amish family before joining the Mennonite church in his youth. For this study, Hostetler interviewed people who have left the Amish, asking what factors contributed to their decision to leave. The purpose of this particular study is to highlight inconsistencies within the Amish charter and discuss how some of the elements of the charter are challenged or called into conflict. For example, factory work has caused the Amish to move away from their agrarian roots (Hostetler 1964: 191). Hostetler talks about how education, "rowdyism," occupations outside of the community, and acculturation agents have created tensions within the Amish community (1964: 192). Hostetler dispels the romanticized notion of the Amish as an idealistic and harmonious society, and argues that influence from English society is giving rise to "anomie, fragmentation, and demoralization" among the Amish (1964: 196). Of course, it is important to note that this study is over fifty years old, and some of Hostetler's predictions for Amish society did not come true; Olshan's (1991) study of tourism is evidence of this.

A study by Olshan, a sociologist, concludes that although some cottage industries and English institutions might be encroaching on Amish society, it does not seem to be pulling people away from the Amish; Rather, it seems to be changing Amish culture from the inside out. Olshan interviewed Amish bishops and ministers in settlements in New York and conducted content analysis of Die Botschaft, an Amish newspaper. Olshan argues that the role of seller is in conflict with traditional Amish norms, and that the trend of cottage industries and "working away" is threatening the patterns of the Amish (Olshan, 1991: 381). However, he says that exposure to worldly things does not threaten the survival of the Amish: "Even a cursory examination of Amish history shows that Amish relations with larger society have been no more static than has been Amish society itself" (Olshan 1991: 383). Despite the fact that their survival

is not at stake, their traditional values seem to be threatened. This study offers an interesting comparison to Hostetler's work. Both agree that some traditional Amish values, particularly agrarianism, are at risk. However, Hostetler argues that these trends could lead to more people defecting from the Amish, whereas Olshan sees these practices as more of a threat to traditional Amish society itself. In hindsight, then, it seems that Hostetler's predictions for the increase in defection from the Amish were not accurate. Though Olshan's study seems to suggest otherwise, it is possible that conveniences of English society might still be attractive to Amish, so in my study I will be asking whether ex-Amish were enticed by any aspects of an English lifestyle.

My study will also focus on the rumspringa period, as this can be the time some ex-Amish choose to leave. As stated previously, rumspringa is a period of "implicit cultural prescriptions for deviance" in Amish society (Reiling 2002: 147-148). Studies by Stevick, an expert on Amish childhood and adolescence, offer quite a bit of detail on rumspringa. He notes that the typical portrayal of rumspringa as a period of "total freedom" is often false (Stevick 2007:13). While their focus may "shift to their peers" during this period, most communities do not have the type of partying or behavior of moving away as portrayed in film and television (Stevick 2007:13-14). In fact, there is much variation in rumspringa practices across gender, affiliation and region, but the practice of relaxed parental supervision once teenagers reach the age of accountability is nearly universal among the Amish. Stevick (2014) even notes that in recent years, more teenage Amish have become active on social media. He explains that these differences usually arise due to the size and seclusion of the settlements. Typically, the larger the settlement, the more deviant behavior will occur among teenagers (Stevick 2007:15). Stevick also makes distinctions between adult-centered communities and peer-centered communities, which dramatically change social interactions and the behavior of youth during Rumspringa

(2007:17-18). In my study, I will ask participants questions about rumspringa and how their experiences during their teenage years influenced their decisions to either leave the Amish or join the Amish church.

Overall, Stevick's work focuses on the transmission of Amish faith and values throughout one's adolescence, either through parenting or rituals and institutions such as school, singings, weddings, and more (Stevick 2007:61, 79, 129, 199). Singings are especially important because they are nearly universal among the Amish, and are usually a way for young Amish to socialize with the opposite sex (2014). Singings are typically held at a residence, where unmarried Amish youth gather to socialize and sing different hymns. At the end of the singing, dates pair up. Typically, Amish attend singings from age 16 until they are married. Many Amish parents stress the important of finding a marriage partner, which is one of the primary purposes of singings. Indeed, some could even say that finding a spouse is one purpose of rumspringa. Couples cannot marry until they have joined the church, which may entice some people to join.

Another study focuses on mental health during the rumspringa period. Reiling, a medical sociologist, studied various groups of Old Order Amish through participant observation and interviewing three sets of people associated with the Old Order Amish, including those who had not yet been baptized, baptized Amish, and those who had left the Amish ("defected coethnics") (Reiling 2002: 149). Her findings show that the accepted deviance in Amish youth culture causes high levels of anxiety and depression as well as an allegiance to adult Amish culture. She argues that Amish have a fear of being "caught out," which is a term used for those who have died during their rumspringa and thus are at risk of going to hell (Reiling, 2002: 159). The fear of being "caught out" can create great anxiety among young Amish, and affects their decision to stay Amish. Instead of tempting young Amish to the outside world, as some people would

believe, Reiling's study shows that perhaps rumspringa works as a fear tactic to encourage young people to join the church. While Reiling's study offers an interesting perspective on why some people chose to stay Amish, it needs more appraisal. It is possible that Amish who have had more exposure to other religions that believe in salvation through faith (such as those in Hartse's study) might not believe in being caught out. In my own study, I will ask about whether participant's believed in being caught out, and how that influenced their decision to leave.

Similarly, a study by Maize (2005), a political theorist, examines the "exit costs" of defecting from the Amish. Maize argues that rumspringa is an ineffective exit option for young Amish. Maize examines the film "Devil's Playground" about four young Amish men and women in their rumspringa. Though capturing the extreme end of the rumspringa experience, he argues that their stories show that exposure to the outside world is not enough to create a liberal state, in which there is a fair choice to leave the Amish. The reasons he offers for why rumspringa is ineffective are that it offers a "materialistic" view of English culture, it does not expose people to other ways of living (such as different religions or cultures), and the "exit costs" of leaving the Amish are too high (2005:752). "Exit costs," according to Maize, are the negative consequences of leaving one's minority culture (2005:752). Some of the primary exit costs include leaving one's family and the fear of going to hell (2005:752). Because the exit costs outweigh the potential benefits of leaving the Amish, Maize argues that rumspringa is not a good exit option, inferring that Amish have little agency in their decision to join. The implication that rumspringa is not an effective exit option is one I will explore in my study, by asking participants about exit costs and the benefits of leaving. It will also be interesting to ask excommunicated members why they initially joined the Amish, and whether or not they felt they were given a fair choice.

In addition to the rumspringa period, it is useful to study possible acculturation agents that might influence some Amish to engage in English society, or might aid ex-Amish in their transition to English life. As stated earlier with Hartse's study of Hutterites, acculturation is "cultural change that is the result of sustained contact between two or more social systems" (Hartse 1994:71). Instead of looking at emotional acculturation, however, the following studies focus on other religions, technologies, or institutions that might either lead one away from Amish life, or dramatically alter Amish society.

In her study on the community of Plain City, Ohio, Pollack (1981) argues that the Mennonite church is an acculturation agent that allows former Amish to transition into the English lifestyle. In the town that Pollack studied, a staggering number of Old Order Amish converted to the Mennonite church over the course of a few decades (1981:56-57). Pollack interviewed many former members of the Old Order Amish and Mennonite converts to discover why there was such a sudden shift to the Mennonite church. Her results showed three main reasons that people left the Old Order Amish church in this community. The reasons included the belief that strict rules of the Old Order Amish were unnecessary, that people's stance on evangelicalism differed from the Amish church (they wanted a more personal religious experience), and that they wanted to use automobiles and other technologies/conveniences (1981: 58). The result of this dissolution was mass emigration in the 60s and 70s to more strict churches in other regions, as they were "having a great deal of difficulty keeping their children within the church" (1981:58). Pollack argues that Mennonite churches serve as acculturation agents because they ease the transition into English life:

> It is difficult to leave such a strict, relatively isolated culture and enter mainstream American culture without any family or community support. The New Order Amish, Conservative Mennonite, and Mennonite churches, however, provide cultural stepping stones that ease this transition process. It is possible to leave the Old Order Amish church

and yet remain within the Amish-Mennonite community with people of similar backgrounds and beliefs. From one of these more liberal churches, it is then relatively easy to leave the Amish-Mennonite community entirely, since the cultural characteristics of Mennonites are similar in many ways to those of their non-Mennonite neighbors (1981:59).

According to Pollack, then, some ex-Amish join Mennonite churches after leaving to ease themselves into English life, while still keeping community support and some of the same values of the Amish. The idea that these defectors have a "social cocoon" that exists outside of the Amish, from either non-Amish sympathizers or Anabaptists, means that their transition into English life is much easier (Kidder and Hostetler 1990:914). In my study, I will explore social and religious groups that ex-Amish join, and how these groups can ease their transition into non-Amish life. I will also ask about any acculturation agents that might have influenced them to leave, such as a higher religion.

General studies of the ex-Amish have included Hurst and McConnell's (2010) survey of fifty ex-Amish individuals, which focused on their decisions for leaving and various experiences with shunning. According to their survey, the two main motivations for leaving the Amish include wanting fewer restrictions and rules and wanting a more personal and "intense" religious experience (2010:84-85). Several people claimed that the rules of the Amish church seemed nitpicky or unnecessary. For example, one man questioned why they were allowed to use cars and phones, but not own them (2010:85). For others, furthering their education, the freedom to wear whatever clothing they want, ownership of cars and other technologies were what appealed to them (2010:84). The second reason for leaving, looking for a more personal religious experience, was very common in their survey. In fact, a majority of their respondents claimed to be "saved" or "born again" (2010:85). The Amish view self-interpretation of the Bible as a strange practice, and there is no personal relationship with God in the Amish faith (2010:85). For

ex-Amish converts into Evangelical Christianity, then, their religious upbringing is quite
different from their current religious views. Finally, McConnell and Hurst's survey analysis of
the decision to leave concludes with a statistic showing that most Amish (67%) said that
dissatisfaction with Amish culture was their primary reason for leaving, rather than the
attractiveness of English culture (2010:86). Although many might confuse leaving the Amish
with wanting to be English, it seems that most ex-Amish decided to leave because they felt
discontented with an Amish lifestyle. However, as we can see, another common reason for
leaving was disenchantment with the Amish view of religion. Many who leave the Amish seek a
more intimate religious experience.

Of course, the decision to leave the Amish is only part of the ex-Amish experience; many
others who are excommunicated must face harsh consequences. McConnell and Hurst discuss
differences in excommunication practices across different churches and affiliations based on
their survey. For example, they found that historically, most churches do not place a ban on an
individual if they join a "higher" church for a while before either leaving or rejoining their old
church (2010:88). Some ex-Amish have avoided excommunication this way. Other affiliations,
like Swartzentruber and Andy Weaver, will place a ban on anyone who joins any other affiliation,
Amish or not (2010:88). Old Order Amish and especially New Order Amish tend to be more
lenient with placing a ban, and will not always place a ban if a member joins a different church
(2010:89).

For people placed under the ban, most survey respondents said that the severity of their
punishment was dependent on the strictness of the church and the willingness of the bishop to
"turn a blind eye" to questionable interactions between ex-Amish and family members (2010:
90-91). Some families also reacted more emotionally and severely than others, with many

parents warning their children that they will go to hell if they leave or are excommunicated (2010:91). Generally, if excommunicated members comply with the church and show remorse, they are much more likely to be invited back for family events (2010:91). Although rules for excommunication vary, two-thirds of McConnell and Hurst's survey respondents said that shunning was "enforced completely and consistently" (2010:92). Therefore, the costs of leaving after baptism will generally be very high, as most excommunicated members are shunned. Shunning can be an emotional and severe experience for an excommunicated person, as they will likely have to distance themselves from family and the Amish community and in some cases will be treated as an outsider.

In my study, I will be exploring some of the questions that were addressed by these studies. For example, how does rumspringa vary across affiliations, and is the fear of being "caught out" as common as Reiling's study seems to suggest? Were former Amish acculturated to English life, and what are some possible acculturation agents that could influence them to leave the Amish? Is the phenomenon of leaving the Amish for a more personal religious experience common? How strictly is shunning enforced? Of course, because my sample is different from these studies, the answers to these questions will not necessarily be the same. But it will be to note areas of similarity and differences among the studies I have reviewed in this section and my own study.

Chapter IV: Methods

In dealing with the complex and potentially sensitive nature of ex-Amish experiences, research design and methods are of the utmost importance. I planned my research design according to my research questions, which focused on variation in ex-Amish experiences, particularly with the difficulty of transition into English life. I wanted to capture the diversity of ex-Amish experiences while also getting substantive and in-depth data on each person's experiences. To answer these questions, I interviewed 14 ex-Amish around Ohio. In the following section, I provide a rationale for my methods, discuss how I conducted the study, and give an overview of my sample, and reflect on the strengths and limitations of my study.

To answer my research questions, I needed detailed, in-depth answers to my questions, so I chose formal interviews as my method of data collection. I wanted a complete picture of people's experiences of leaving the Amish, including why they left, what they did after leaving, what some of the positive and negative consequences were, and how they felt now about their cultural identity and their upbringing. A survey is the best tool for capturing variation within a sample, but as Finan and Willigan (1991) remark, "Questions that demand reflection, opinions, and attitudes are very difficult to standardize…because the quality of responses is so varied" (3). Additionally, surveys tend to "standardize" answers, and to generalize a personal experience would produce shallow or incomplete data (Gray 2002:95). Therefore, I felt that interviews would be my best methodological option. Although I would not get the diversity of data or a large sample that a survey would provide, the data offered by interviews is more detailed and reflective, and nuanced than answers from a survey.

Most interviews were conducted around Wayne and Holmes County, Ohio, although a few interviews were conducted in other counties including Geauga County and Tuscarawas

County. Holmes County is home to one of the world's largest Amish settlements, so this area of Ohio was an ideal place to conduct interviews with ex-Amish. I conducted interviews in public spaces such as coffee shops and restaurants. Generally, I avoided interviews in crowded or busy spaces to allow more privacy in case the participant felt uncomfortable talking about their experiences amongst strangers. In addition to asking for oral consent before starting the interview, the contributors signed a consent form to indicate that they understood the procedure and risks of the study. This form also explained how I would change names to keep their identity confidential. Interviews generally lasted about an hour, and I recorded audio for nine out of ten of the interviews. I always asked permission to record the interview. The Amish have many restrictions and taboos on technology, including not wanting to be photographed. Because of these restrictions, I anticipated that participants would not be comfortable with recording the interview. To my surprise, most participants were fine with audio recordings. In only one case, a married couple seemed uncomfortable about being recorded. Although they initially said they were okay with it, I could sense that they were hesitant about it, so I offered to take careful notes instead. They said they would prefer if I took notes.

Interview questions generally probed reasons for leaving, the initial transition into English life, and the long-term transition. Most of these interview questions were questions that I came up with, or that came out of discussions with my advisor. Some also were added on as I continued the interview process, because new questions arose as I wrote my theory and literature review sections. A list of interview questions is provided in Appendix A. While these questions guided the bulk of the interview, I did not ask these questions alone; rather, they served to structure the interview so that the interview would move chronologically from reasons for leaving to initial and long-term transition. These questions also helped me remember to touch on

various topics such as religious views, number of siblings, other ex-Amish friends or relatives,

schooling, and more. I took the approach that Ann Gray (2002) calls an "active interview," one

in which the respondent is a producer of meaning, and the interview takes the framework of a

"structured conversation." While survey questions tend to be more "standard," interview

questions are more "reflexive" (95). This means that I expanded on questions and asked different

questions based on the respondent. For example, if a respondent left the Amish with their

children, I asked about how their children felt about the transition, where they went to school

afterwards, and whether they were upset about leaving the Amish or were in agreement with

their parents. Additionally, some respondents had trouble voicing their frustrations with Amish

life, so I asked more about what specific rules they disagreed with or what practices they disliked.

Thus, in spite of a common set of questions asked, each interview was different based on the

respondent and their answers.

I found most of my contributors through snowball sampling. Since the topic was

potentially sensitive, I believed it was best to be introduced to new contributors through other

members of the Wooster community and the ex-Amish community. I initially got my

contributors through two "gatekeepers" to the ex-Amish community. The first gatekeeper was

one of my participants, whom I had met earlier when he came to speak at my college. I was

taking a class on the Amish, and he came to talk about his experiences growing up Amish and

leaving the Amish. I emailed him at the beginning of my study, asking him if he would be

interested in potentially helping me with the study or being interviewed about his experience of

leaving the Amish. He agreed, and after being interviewed, gave me the name and contact

Table 1: Characteristics of Ex-Amish Interviewed for Study

Name	Age	Gender and Marriage Status	Excommunicated or Defected	Length of Time since left Amish	Occupation	Former Affiliation of Amish	Education	Church
Isaac Yoder	49	M, married to Miriam	Excommunicated	28 years	Manages a ministry	Andy Weaver	N/A	Born Again Christian
Miriam Yoder	48	F, married to Isaac	Excommunicated	28 years	Manages a ministry	Andy Weaver	N/A	Born Again Christian
Abram Miller	36	M, married	Defected	16 years	Roofing business owner	Old Order	Amish schooling	Mennonite
Sam Lehman	39	M, unmarried	Excommunicated	9 years	Farrier	Old Order	Amish schooling	Christian, nondenominational
Sarah Schrock	38	F, married	Excommunicated	3 years	Mother/ Homemaker	Old Order	Taking GED classes	Born Again Christian
Mark Miller	28	M, married to Katie	Defected	7 years	Franchising	Andy Weaver	Amish schooling	Mennonite
Katie Miller	26	F, married to Mark Miller	Defected	6 years	Franchising	Andy Weaver	Amish schooling and public school	Mennonite
Waneta Graber	24	F, married	Defected	6 years	Mother/ Homemaker	Swartzentruber	Amish schooling	Christian, unspecified denomination/ church
Barbara Bontrager	27	F, married	Excommunicated	5 years	Mother/ Homemaker	Swartzentruber	Amish schooling	Christian, unspecified denomination/ church
Wayne Yoder	29	M, married	Will be excommunicated (had not received letter at time of interview)	7 months	Network marketing	Old Order	Has GED	Christian, nondenominational
Levi Miller	25	M, unmarried	Excommunicated	8 months	Landscaping, tile and flooring	Old Order	Taking GED classes	Born Again Christian
Dan Hershberger	40	M, married	Excommunicated	7 years	Cleans homes, marketing	Swartzentruber	Amish schooling	Born Again Christian
Ruth Hostetler	40	F, married to Marvin Hostetler	Formerly excommunicated, ban was lifted	~3 years	Mother/ Homemaker	Old Order	Amish schooling	Mennonite
Marvin Hostetler	37	M, married to Ruth	Formerly excommunicated, ban was lifted	~3 years	Works at cabinet company	Old Order	Amish schooling	Mennonite

information of other former Amish he thought would be interested in my study. Several of these people became contributors to my study, including Sarah and Levi. Sarah then put me in touch with Wayne, who put me in touch with Dan. The other gatekeeper was my horseback riding coach, a member of the Wooster community, who was acquainted with many ex-Amish in the area. She put me in touch with several of her former Amish friends, Sam and Abram. Abram then put me in touch with Mark and Katie, who introduced me to Waneta and Barbara. Finally, I met one couple, Marvin and Ruth through my advisor, whose friend gave him their contact information to pass along to me.

My contributors are a fairly diverse group of both excommunicated Amish and Amish who left before baptism. They consist of a mix of males, females, and couples that I interviewed together. Additionally, I interviewed Waneta and Barbara together. Interviewing the couples and friends together could be considered a disadvantage, because they would give different answers together than separately. However, I tried in my interviews to give equal time to each participant and to let them both answer questions. My participants ranged in age from early 20s to mid-50s, and some had left the Amish months ago whereas others had left decades ago. This meant that each was in varying stages of transition from Amish to non-Amish life. Seven participants were formerly Old Order Amish, three were Swartzentruber, and four were Andy Weaver Amish. Each varied in their current occupation. The background information of participants is in Table 1. I have given pseudonyms to all participants to protect their identity.

My positioning as a young female college student impacted the data I collected. Because I am a woman, this may have helped me get a fair number of female participants. At the same time, my positioning as a college student and as a researcher conducting a study might have been intimidating to some participants. Nearly all my participants had fewer years of schooling than

me, and might have been resentful of my privileged position as a college student. However, my age might have made up for this fact, as all my participants were older than me. This might have given them more authority, especially since I was ignorant on some matters relating to the Amish. I took a course previously on the Amish, so I had some background knowledge while I was conducting interviews. Sometimes, I found participants explaining something to me that I already knew, such as some Amish not having a birth certificate, or how Amish schooling works. However, much of the information that I collected was still a surprise, particularly related to leaving the Amish and how it worked in different situations. Most of my participants reacted well to me, and were very generous in answering my questions. I rarely had a contributor shy away from questions, although the quality of the answers varied in terms of length and depth of reflection.

In some ways I was able to relate to participants, but I was also guarded about some of my own beliefs that might have conflicted with my participant's ideals. In some cases I was able to relate to participants through a shared knowledge and love of horses. I have been horseback riding for 11 years, and am no stranger to barn chores. Several of my participants worked as farriers or had owned horses at some point, and I was able to discuss horse-related matters with them. This might have had the effect of putting them more at ease with me. One topic that never came up in interviews was my religious beliefs. I am an atheist, and since most of my participants were very passionate about religion, I did not want to bring up my own beliefs as to offend or upset them. If someone had asked me about my religious affiliation, I would not have lied, but also would have mentioned that I am respectful of others' religious beliefs and am fascinated by the different ways in which people make sense of their world. I also never disclosed my political beliefs with participants, as it would have conflicted with their

conservative ideals in many cases. For example, one participant went on a small rant about gun control. While I disagreed with what he said, I was there to record his beliefs and experiences as a former Amish person. I would not have lied had I been asked about politics, but I did not feel the need to inject my own opinion into the conversation. It is hard to say how my participants would have reacted had I disclosed my religious and political beliefs, but they never came up, and I was able to keep a good rapport with my contributors.

There are several limitations to the methodology that I have chosen. One is that the sample size is fairly limited, so the results will not be as generalizable as a survey. However, themes can still be pulled from the data. Another limiting factor to my study is that I was not able to interview any former New Order Amish. All of my sample was Old Order, Andy Weaver, or Swartzentruber Amish. Although some Old Order churches are stricter than others, and there is much variation between them, interviewing someone who left a New Order church would have contributed to the diversity of my sample. On the other hand, New Order Amish make up only 12% of the Holmes County Settlement (Hurst and McConnell 2010: 36). Another limitation to my study is the use of snowball sampling to get participants. Because some of my contributors introduced me to new participants, they were part of the same ex-Amish network, and it is possible that their opinions or experiences may have been similar. Also, because I used snowball sampling to get participants, my sample was not as diverse as it could have been. For example, most of my sample was excommunicated instead of leaving before baptism. However, since the topic was potentially sensitive, and since I did not have many ex-Amish acquaintances, snowball sampling was the best way for me to recruit participants.

My methodological approach was complicated by the fact that I was still reviewing the literature and reviewing theory as I was collecting data. Gray argues that the "ideal" research

model consists of a literature review, getting a research topic or question, collecting data, analyzing that data, and writing the findings (2002:58). In my research, I was writing and reviewing both theory and literature as I collected data. Although I had done some research on the subject before collecting data, I still found myself coming up with new questions and lines of inquiry throughout data collection. Therefore, some questions were asked in later interviews that were not asked in the first few interviews. Although this changed the data that was collected, as Gray (2002) notes, no part of the research process is ever finished. She also says that writing and reading are "activities that are important in reflecting on and, possibly, rethinking approaches in the light of new or newly discovered work" (58). Therefore, reviewing literature while collecting data might have actually been helpful to my study. Although there were drawbacks to my methodological approach, I still believe that it provided deep and rich data.

Chapter V: Findings

In this chapter I present important themes and patterns that emerged from interviews with former Amish, some of which are in keeping with the experiences of former Amish in the literature, and some that differ. Both the academic and popular literature on former Amish tends to portray their transition away from Amish life as fraught with struggles and internal conflicts. To my surprise, while some of my participants match this image, many seemed to have a comparatively easy transition away from the Amish. My study therefore suggests that former Amish have far more diverse experiences than those portrayed in the literature.

The key variation in former Amish experiences lies less in the motivations for leaving than in the transition into English life. While many would believe that the Amish, with their values of separation from the world, would have an immensely hard time being successful in the English world, my results demonstrate that this is not always the case. In fact, experiences of my interviewees differed in some areas and were very similar in others. For example, in my study, participants seemed to share similar reasons for leaving, but some seemed to have a more smooth transition into English life than others. In this chapter, I explore these important themes and differences, moving chronologically through the following stages: the decision to leave, the initial transition into English life, and finally, long-term transitions and reflections on Amish identity.

A. The Decision to Leave

As stated previously, there was not much variation in the reasons why participants left the Amish. Most stated frustrations with Amish rules, with religious views, or with both. In this section, I will describe their reasons for leaving, events or turning points that triggered their departure, and fears and hesitations before leaving the Amish.

<u>Frustrations with Amish Life and Religion</u>

Participants were virtually unanimous in admitting that while there might have been

"perks" to English life, it was mainly their frustration with Amish life that pushed them to leave.

Of my 14 interviewees, 12 people said they were mainly frustrated with Amish life, 1 person said

that she wanted to live an English life, and 1 person said it was a combination of frustrations

with Amish life and wanting to live an English life. These frustrations represent Ebaugh's

"doubting stage" in her theory for role exit; participants have not left the Amish yet, but are

"redefining" the way they see the Amish. For some, it was the massive number of rules that

governed their everyday life that started to grate on them. For example, Levi, a 25-year old, who

had left and been excommunicated, said:

> I just didn't understand why there were some things that I couldn't do…. I was in
> one of the more stricter churches in this area. Every little aspect of your life is
> governed by these set of rules. Everything from the way you dress to your mode
> of transportation, to the way your house is built to what kind of job you have, and
> it just goes on and on.

Levi also explained that he has always loved music, but was not allowed to play certain

instruments and could not listen to certain types of music. Another participant, Marvin Hostetler,

said his main frustration was the way his community shunned people.

Many contributors also said that they felt Amish religion and rules were "man-made."

For example, Wayne Yoder, who had left the Amish with his wife and children only 7 months

previously, said, "The Amish, in my opinion, is just another man-made religion taking from the

same gospel, same bible, as all the others, and somebody added to it." This feeling was echoed

by many other contributors, who felt that the rules were not entirely based in scripture. Dennis

Miller said that the Amish rules are "man-made rules," and that these rules caused disagreements

because they are not based in the Bible, which is why there are so many Amish affiliations. After

reading the Bible more in-depth, many of the participants felt compelled to leave because they

realized the rules were not Biblical. For example, Dan Hershberger described a passage he read

that caused him to question the Amish faith:

> That was one of the events that took place that I saw that got me to…I guess,
> somebody showed me the Bible where it says, "Do not follow traditions of men,"
> and when I saw that I really took that to heart and realized that in the same
> context it says if people want to hold men's traditions as high as God's
> commandments, hold men's commandments as high as God's commandments,
> that's not the way it should be.

Dan's story also suggests that someone showed him the Bible passage, perhaps someone with a

different religious stance. This person might have had an evangelical stance, since Dan

eventually became a Born Again Christian. One person who left because she wanted to live an

English life, Waneta Graber, reflected back on her time in the Amish and felt the same way

about the role of man in the Amish rules: "I think I see now that they [the Amish] listen to men

instead of God. It seems like it. Like the preachers, they have such a hold over people because

they have to abide by their rules." These feelings clearly represent the doubting stage because the

participants "redefined" the way they saw the Amish, from a legitimate religion into a "man-

made" religion. Many of their frustrations with Amish life and religious views are in keeping

with the literature.

Seeking Religious Alternatives

After questioning the Amish rules and practices, several participants sought religious

alternatives to the Amish. For example, four of my contributors became Born-Again Christians

before leaving the Amish. Those who became Born-Again before leaving already felt

dissatisfaction with Amish life. Their conversion fits in with Ebaugh's stage of seeking

alternatives to a previous role. After becoming Born-Again, many felt the need to completely

leave the Amish lifestyle due to differing religious views with their church district. Isaac was one

of these converts:

> Well we left the Amish about 28 years ago, and the reason we left is because we had gotten saved, and this was obviously, the Amish community that we lived with looked at it as a new belief. They didn't believe that you could be saved and have assurance of your salvation, they believed that you were, wherever you were planted - this is how they say it - however you're planted, that's where you are to bloom. So we were planted in the Amish culture, we were expected to bloom in that culture. When we got saved, it did not line up with what they believed in.

For the Amish, the belief in assurance of salvation is a threat to their principle of salvation

through works, or as many of my participants called it, "workspace salvation." Workspace

salvation is the belief that if you work hard enough, you could possibly earn your salvation.

Salvation through faith, or the assurance of salvation, means that you are pardoned from sin and

are saved through faith alone. Workspace salvation and separation from the world are at the core

of many of Amish practices. Therefore, becoming a Born-Again Christian would be grounds for

scorn from the deacons and ordained leaders in the more conservative Amish church. Sarah

Schrock also said that when she and her husband became Born-Again Christians, tensions rose in

the community and they felt the need to leave: "Once we believed in salvation through grace,

they believe in a workspace salvation, things kind of got hot and heavy in the community,

between us and our ministers." Later in the interview, she expanded on this tension:

> Well, at the time of leaving, it was such a feeling of oppression. Because you knew what you believed, but you were getting so much…I mean, the gossip, and the ministers were coming down hard on you [saying] "You cannot believe this! You cannot believe this! You cannot know that you're going to heaven when you die." It was to the point where you just wanted to get out of that. You didn't think of the perks that English life was going to have because it just wasn't in my mind.

Many other participants mentioned the "perks" of English life, such as having more

conveniences and freedom. However, most emphasized that they left because of religious

disagreements, like Sarah, or dissatisfaction with Amish life.

Turning Points

In keeping with Ebaugh's stages of role exit, four participants listed other events or turning points that spurred their decision to leave. For Wayne, this event was a crackdown on smartphones in his community, which he had been allowed to use initially for work. He and his wife were frustrated with Amish rules before the ministers came to talk to them about getting rid of the smartphone, but afterwards they decided, "It's time to make a change." For Abram Miller, deciding to marry his girlfriend, who was Mennonite, prompted his decision to leave. Abram decided to join the Mennonite church instead of the Amish church. For Dan Hershberger, the event that ultimately spurred his decision to leave took place many years earlier. After a split in the church when he was young, Dan's view of Amish life completely changed:

> Well, when I was 18 there was a split, and it just took people from…you know, people that I'd joined church with, youth that I'd run with, and joined church with, their parents decided to go to the different church than what my dad did. And so that separated us. And it hurt, it really hurt my feelings…. And I had a really good friend who, his parents went to the other church, and we just, me and him, we continued to be best friends, but we had a lot of pressure from our parents to not be associated with each other like that. So I guess if you could find one single event that started all my reasons to look, it was 15 years before I actually left. From there on, it was just like my foundation got shattered.

While Ebaugh's "turning point" usually suggests an event that pushes one to leave, the "straw that broke the camel's back," this event in his teens had a huge impact on Dan, changing his worldview and causing him to question his Amish upbringing.

Fear of Shunning and Leaving Friends and Family

Though everyone in my sample who left said they did not regret their decision to leave, participants said that leaving their friends and families made the decision to leave very difficult. Those who left after baptism also said that they feared shunning if they left. For many, contact with family stopped for a while, although it gradually improved after several years, as I will

discuss in the next section. At the time that I spoke with him, Levi had left the Amish only 8 months prior. His only contact with family had been a few letters, but he had not heard from them for a while. Levi said, "The biggest challenges have probably been family, and knowing that they don't agree with my decision." He continued: "I had a wonderful family, an awesome group of friends, and that's one of the toughest decisions. The toughest decision to make in leaving the Amish is you're kind of leaving your family and friends behind." Family also caused Katie to hesitate before leaving the Amish. She said, "I wasn't on board right away. Nobody in my family had left. I knew it would disappoint my parents." Although her relationship with her parents eventually improved and is now "better than ever," Katie said that her parents did express disappointment when she left. Ruth Hostetler also said that "knowing that they [their family and community] were going to shun us" was what made her hesitate from leaving for a while.

Fear of Being Caught Out

Surprisingly, the fear of being "caught out" and going to hell was not a huge factor in many people's decisions. Nine people said they did not believe that they would go to hell if they left the Amish, and three said that they had this fear, but worked through it after leaving the Amish. This pattern of responses significantly diverges from the literature on ex-Amish experiences, which cites fear of being caught out as a huge deterrent from leaving the Amish. While many participants were taught that they might go to hell if they left the Amish, by the time they had reached adulthood they did not believe it. Mark Miller said that, "When I was 12, 13, 14, leaving the Amish was not close to an option. The way we were taught was that it was the way we were supposed to grow up." As he got older and started asking questions, that was not a fear anymore. By age 16, he thought it was "baloney." Sam Lehman similarly said he was raised to

believe he would go to hell if he left, but at the time he decided to leave, he was "more scared to stay Amish than to leave the Amish." Waneta was one participant who did have a slight fear of being caught out. She said, "I didn't really, *really* believe it, but they ingrained it in you so much that I kind of believed it sometimes, right at first." She said that joining a new church after leaving the Amish helped this fear disappear. The two other participants who said they feared being caught out also said that attending a new church assured them of their salvation.

B. Initial Transition into English Life

Participants had a variety of experiences transitioning into English life. While many faced practical issues, my sample had a fair distribution of both very difficult and major transitions and easier transitions with fewer lifestyle changes. About 6 participants had a difficult adjustment into English life, whereas 8 said that they did not face as many challenges. Although I have split my sample into two groups, it is important to add that there was a range of challenges; some individuals in the less difficult transition group still faced many changes, but on the whole had a smoother adjustment into English life. In this section, I explore the varying experiences of the initial transition into English life, including where participants moved, where they worked, their education, and experiences with excommunication.

Practical Issues

My contributors faced surprises and practical adjustments in their initial transition into English life. For example, Dan explained that one of the hardest things for them to figure out initially was how to dress English, and how to match certain clothes. Indeed, dress and appearance were an important part of the transition for many participants. Most of my participants wore English-style clothing, such as jeans and a t-shirt, and a few men wore mustaches or facial hair that would have been prohibited in the Amish. However, Ruth Hostetler,

who converted to Mennonite, still wore a head covering and long skirts. Sarah noted that getting

a haircut was a big deal to her kids when they left the Amish. Another practical issue was driving.

All of my contributors got their driver's license after leaving, but some of them had no idea at

first how to get it. Waneta said, "I guess what I thought was really frustrating was I had no clue

how it goes, or what you all need to know for the driving part, the license. You're basically all on

your own." Abram said that when he got his first car, he didn't know how to pump gas, or even

where to find the gas cap. It was only after observing others at a gas station that he found the gas

cap and figured it out. Dan also said that "the reality of getting pulled over by a cop" was a shock

to his system. 12 out of 14 of my participants had some form of legal documentation (social

security number or birth certificate), so this was not a prominent practical issue in my study.

<u>Difficult Transitions</u>

For some participants, however, there were much more challenging obstacles to

overcome than just practical changes. Levi, for example, missed his friends and family

desperately. If it had not been for his newfound faith, he said he might have gone back to the

Amish:

> I accepted Jesus Christ into my life. And I can say that if it wouldn't have been
> for that step that I probably wouldn't have made it this far. That's the only thing
> that I cling to during these times where my family won't accept my decision and
> my friends reject me. That's just the thing that keeps me hanging on, is my
> relationship with Christ…. It's probably been the toughest time in my life. The
> first few months were obviously much harder.

Levi faced much emotional turmoil in the first few months of transitioning into English life, but

was starting to feel more at ease with his decision. Isaac and Miriam had left 28 years previously,

but had struggled with their initial transition into English life. While most of my participants had

a job that they were able to keep after leaving, Isaac had to navigate English society to find work:

"I didn't even know what a social security number was. I had never applied for a job." Luckily,

Isaac said, there were people along the way who helped them with the transition. For Dan, one of his main frustrations in the transition were financial constraints that kept his family from exploring certain facets of English life:

> Probably one of the biggest challenges was financial, control of your finances. Because now all of a sudden you had car payments, you had insurance, you know, so financial. And then going along with that, there was so much to explore and so much was within an hour of home that you never experienced, and you were always trying to do stuff like that with your family, but financially you could only do so much.

Despite not having any religious constraints to stop him from exploring new things, going to the zoo or to a museum or taking a trip to Cleveland was not always an option for Dan because of finances. These participants seemed to have a more difficult time transitioning based on the stricter affiliations in which they lived and the lack of support from their family and former Amish community.

Easier Transitions

For other participants, leaving didn't entail as many changes. They felt that they either had been living an English lifestyle before they left, or otherwise didn't undergo as many major lifestyle changes. Mark had been living as an English person for about a year before he officially defected from the Amish. He had his own apartment and a car, and was starting a franchising business. Since he had not joined the church, he technically was still in his rumspringa. He said, "When I decided to leave, I didn't change anything. I was already accustomed to a non-Amish lifestyle." Similarly, when asked what challenges he had faced, Wayne said, "I mean, you know, there are minor challenges, but nothing really. I wouldn't consider it difficult at all." When asked what values or practices they have retained from being Amish, Ruth Hostetler said, "It's not that much different except the vehicle." She still had the same religious beliefs, she still did "canning and gardening," and was a stay-at-home mom. While they had conflicts with their family after

leaving, and lost several friends, the Hostetlers still kept many of their old practices, but acknowledged, "It's a lot more convenient, definitely." Similarly, while Abram got a car and a cell phone, he admitted that he does not like technology: "I prefer hands-on work at the construction site….I still keep horses and cows. I would much rather be doing something like that until 9:30 in the evening than watch a football game." While participants may have changed their style of dress and abandoned a horse and buggy, some did not completely change their lifestyle. Popular media conceptions of ex-Amish life tend to portray all Amish defection and excommunication as a huge lifestyle change, throwing their participants from the country into the city. In reality, for some, the process of leaving does not entail a radical makeover of their lives.

Similarly, while there were challenges, many contributors had help with the adjustment into non-Amish life, either from ex-Amish or English friends. For example, Sarah and Levi had help from another participant, Isaac Yoder. Marvin and Ruth Hostetler had help from their friends, a couple who had left about a year before they did. Dan and his family also got help from another family that left shortly before they did.

Geographic Proximity

For several participants, leaving the Amish entailed major lifestyle changes, but the majority of my participants also stayed in the same area and same careers. Again, this deviates from ex-Amish stories told in memoirs and pop culture, which tend to show many ex-Amish who have left their hometown and pursued different careers or higher education. The willingness to stay in the same area was also dependent on the strictness of the church district and the parents. Those from more conservative church districts seemed more likely to move away. For several participants who lived on their parent's property, such as Wayne and Sam, they were given

several weeks or months to move out after leaving, giving them plenty of time to find other living arrangements. Sam noted that this was a huge help:

> But I think it was pretty quick, I mean within 30 days we were fortunate enough where my wife, ex-wife, her parents, we were living next to them and renting a house from them. So they allowed us to stay there for another 60 days. So we never got that booted out on the street feeling, you know. They allowed us to park my truck there for a while, and all that stuff. So even though it might have not been right in their eyes, they still allowed us time. That was a big help. A lot of people wouldn't get that.

Several others, such as Dan and Marvin and Ruth Hostetler also stayed in the same house for several years before moving. Even then, they stayed in the same area. As Dan said:

> I had a job at the time that I kept, so for me I wasn't really looking to get away from where I was at or anything. I continued working there for another year, and then I quit there and I went out. Yeah, I guess I knew that there were new adventures that I had never experienced before, but I didn't really know where to look. I would say that my roots are pretty deep in the community. I still live pretty much where I grew up in the same community.

Some of my participants moved to different communities, but rarely did anyone move more than an hour's drive away from their old Amish community.

Four other participants did move at least an hour away from their former communities, including Sarah, Levi, Waneta, and Barbara. Most left because their decision would not be accepted by their family or community, and they knew they would not receive support. Levi said, "I really had no one to turn to. I had no, really no place to go or someone to talk to about it because I knew my family and friends wouldn't help me out in any way." After a while, he called Isaac Yoder, who he found through Isaac's website "Mission to Amish People." Isaac put him in touch with an older couple, who let him stay in their house and helped him with the initial transition away from Amish life. Sarah also felt that she could not turn to anyone in her community, especially after her mother's angry reaction to her becoming a Born Again Christian.

She had wanted to leave the community for a while but waited until her kids got out of school to finally visit an ex-Amish friend:

> Monday morning, my mom told me that since that last day of school is a Wednesday, your sisters and the kids and mom were coming up to visit. And I'm like, Lord I can't do this. I really can't do this. I called my husband at work and I told him what she had said, and I said, "John, isn't there anybody that has a vacation home that I could go to for a while? Just give me – I need to rest."…. I came down to Isaac's, I wasn't even sure that this is when we were going to leave. I just had to get out of the area for a while. And just – leave me alone, leave me and my children alone. So that was Thursday morning, and we came down then, to Isaac's. By that weekend, my boys were begging to get haircuts [laughs].

After visiting her friend, Sarah and her family moved to that area shortly afterward. Her husband kept his job in excavating by their old community, meaning he had a two hour commute to work. Still, Sarah felt that moving was necessary. "It's just such a relief to be free," she said.

Occupation

Most of my contributors also stayed in the same job or career that they had when they were Amish. The men mostly worked in trades that they had learned growing up Amish, such as farrier work, roofing, cabinet making, and tile and flooring. Many had held these jobs since they were teenagers, such as Abram, who owns his own roofing business:

> I have been in the roofing trade since I was 14. My dad got me my first summer job two weeks after I finished 8th grade. He told me I can have two weeks to run the farm and do whatever I want to do, and then I'll be working for the next door neighbor who had a roofing company. I've been doing that ever since, and actually ended up branching out and starting my own company for a few years, came back and was given the first opportunity to buy my former bosses' business, which would have been a next door Mennonite family, cause I grew up working for them.

Similarly, Sam is a farrier, and started shoeing horses when he was a teenager. After leaving the Amish, he continued to work for a while at a factory while doing farrier work on the side. After leaving the Amish, working in the same job was awkward for Sam:

> For me…the biggest challenge was working in the factory, walking in everyday
> and wearing different clothes, driving yourself, meeting the same people. It was
> just that. It was kind of a hurdle, but not necessarily. It depends where you'd been
> working, that made it a lot tougher I think.

Eventually, he left the factory job for a construction job, and then became a full-time farrier

serving English clientele. A few contributors worked in jobs that weren't related to trades.

Wayne worked in network marketing, in a job he had when we was Amish. Dan became

involved in marketing with the same company after leaving the Amish, and Mark and Katie

worked for a franchising business after leaving the Amish. While Dan, Mark, and Katie all

underwent career changes, none of their careers required further schooling. In keeping with

Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, many participants had the experience, skills, and social

networks necessary to succeed in the jobs they held as Amish people. However, they did not

have, nor did they pursue, the institutionalized cultural capital that would have been necessary to

succeed in other careers.

Education

Only a few of my contributors got their GED or further schooling after leaving the Amish.

Three got their GED or were in the process of getting it, two had started GED classes but had

discontinued them, and seven did not have their GED and did not plan on furthering their

schooling. Sarah, Levi, and Wayne all got their GED. Sarah and Levi thought it would further

their career, and Wayne took it so that his kids could be legally homeschooled. Those who did

not get further schooling wanted to stay in the same job or career and therefore felt that a GED

wouldn't be of much use. For example, Abram did not get his GED because he wanted to stay in

roofing:

> If I would've gone into law enforcement or something like that, then I would have
> went and gotten schooling. But for what I was doing, there's just no need for that.
> I was able to start the business right off the top, and yes, there were some lessons

hard learned, and so forth, but I was taught well. It was pretty easy to do that
without any additional schooling."

Other participants echoed the sentiment that they did not need further schooling for their job so

they did not get their GED. However, many participants noted that had they wanted to go into a

career that required further schooling (for example, law enforcement), they would have

continued their education.

Gendered Differences

The women in my sample overwhelmingly tended to be stay-at-home moms. Waneta and

Barbara worked in restaurants and other jobs immediately after leaving the Amish, but became

stay-at-home moms after having children. Isaac, who helps many ex-Amish with the transition

into English life, explains that many women who leave the Amish want to stay in similar roles:

The girls are a little harder to get jobs for. Most of them don't even like the idea
of working at all. They want to get married, it seems like. They want their
families, and I hardly know any of them that have a career. I guess I know a few
of them, but very few. I mean, they just automatically think, "Have a family, stay
at home mom," and so most of them do that.

Similar to the men, many women tend to stay in the same job or role that they would have had as

an Amish person: homemaker and mother. Two of my contributors that were women worked,

and it was the same work that their husbands' were involved in. Miriam also noted that some of

the Amish women she has helped transition into English life, including her sister, wore their

head coverings for months or years after leaving. This may be comfortable and what they are

used to wearing, but it also relates to cultural capital. The head covering is not only a reminder of

their Amish background, it also represents "Gelassenheit," or submissiveness (Kraybill 2001:29).

I noticed this too with embodied cultural capital. Some of the women I interviewed were more

talkative than others, but overall I noticed that when I interviewed married couples, husbands did

most of the talking. While women were now able to live an English life, the value of

submissiveness seemed to be ingrained in their behavior.

Excommunication

The participants who left after baptism faced excommunication, although its severity

varied. Several encountered shunning in business situations. For example, Abram and Sam

described situations in which businesses would not sell to them because they were

excommunicated. Ruth Hostetler also had problems getting a job after her husband became ill

because she was excommunicated. Her husband Marvin explained:

> If you talk to Amish, they don't say much. She was, for example, when I was sick
> she was trying to find a job, so she wanted to drive Amish workers to work in the
> morning and evening because it's pretty good pay. And we thought we had one
> lined up until the one person found out who she is and that she [used to be] Amish.
> It was all cancelled, so that's the rationale.

Some participants noted that other Amish kept their distance from them after they had left.

Although Amish church members can still talk to those who are excommunicated, most

participants lost friends after leaving the Amish. Nearly all my participants had limited

communication with family and friends after leaving the Amish, although those who had

defected experienced the same thing. Dan said that the hardest part about excommunication was

how it affected his children:

> [The hardest part was] being shunned from your family. Knowing that all those
> ties are going to be cut with me, with me and my children. It was probably harder
> for me to see my children being cut off from their grandparents than what it was
> for me actually, at the young age that they were.

These experiences are all in keeping with the literature, as most ex-Amish memoirs describe

tensions in relationships and friendships after leaving. In the next section I will discuss how these

relationships changed over the long-term.

C. Long-Term Transition and Reflections on Amish Identity

After overcoming some of the practical issues of transitioning into English life,

participants still had to reconcile their ex-Amish identity. While they might drive a car and dress

English, their Amish upbringing still informed their everyday life. In this section, I present some

of the long-term issues in former Amish experiences, such as family relations, building new

friendships, and religious views. I also explore important aspects of ex-Amish identity such as

"role residual," Amish upbringing in relation to capital, and different views of cultural identity.

<u>Family</u>

While initially there was not much contact with family after leaving, 12 out of 14

participants said the quality of contact with their family improved gradually. For some,

conversation became very guarded, even after contact resumed, and the relationship never

returned to where it was previously. Some, however, reported that they felt close to their family

again. Only Levi, who left only 8 months previously, was not in regular contact with his family.

Isaac said that part of the reason for the initial separation was that he was perceived as a "threat"

to the rest of his siblings:

> Part of it has to do with the fact that I was the oldest, and they felt I was a threat to
> the rest of the fourteen siblings in my family. And so now that all of them have
> left home and gotten married, it's just mom and dad at home, so they're a little bit
> more open. I can go down there, the last time I was there they actually invited me
> in for the night. And they made a meal, I couldn't eat at the same table, but they
> ate at their own table and then I had a separate table. But still, a little bit more
> open.

Isaac came from a very strict (Andy Weaver) community, so the fact that his family was able to

open up to him was important. Some participants were able to even vacation with their family,

such as Abram and Wayne. For some, their family simply opened up more over time, or

gradually accepted their decision. For others, such as Dan, an event brought them back together.

In his case, it was helping his sick niece's family:

> For about two years we had no contact, and then through different events…I actually had some meetings with my dad about something we were working with, which was that my ten year old niece had cancer. They decided to discontinue the chemo, and the hospital took them to court three times before they finally got their way. The family took off and went to Mexico to get away, because the hospital was going to kidnap the girl. They went to court the third time, and the legal system was going to take the girl away from them, I stepped in as somebody with no boundaries. Like for them, they were not going to fight. I, on the other hand, was not tied down by that system where I couldn't fight.

Through these meetings with his family about the case, they were able to patch up their relationship. The gradual resumption of limited contact with family seems to be in keeping with the literature.

One participant, Marvin Hostetler, had a very interesting relationship with his family after leaving. His parents said that something bad would happen to him if he left the Amish. Soon afterward, he became very sick:

> My dad said he was going to pray that something comes on to me to prove that I'm doing wrong, and I did get really sick. And they said if I come back, the Lord would heal me. But I had somebody pray for me, this was actually a couple of months ago, and I actually got healed right there….So now my parents can't understand why I got healed because they think I'm doing something wrong, so why did I get healed?

Similar to the fear of being "caught out," in this case his parents thought that he was sick because he had left the Amish, and that his only hope would be to return to the Amish. The experience of being healed outside the Amish served to strengthen Marvin's beliefs and proved to him that he had done nothing wrong by leaving the Amish. Although Marvin and Ruth still able to visit her family, they are still not able to visit his parents. In my study, even married couple's families reacted quite differently sometimes.

<u>Friends</u>

One of the hardest parts of leaving the Amish, according to contributors, was losing friends and making new friendships. This is very much in keeping with Ebaugh's role exit theory, which lists forming intimate friendships as one of the biggest adjustments to a new role. It also relates to Bourdieu's theory of social capital, as those who had friends outside the Amish had an easier time transitioning. When asked whether it had been difficult making friends outside the Amish, Levi said,

> Yeah, it has. I'm kind of a shy guy, I'm not really outgoing. And I guess one of the harder things was making new friends and thinking about the old friends I left behind, and how I wish I could still have that friendship. I've come a long way, but it's definitely been hard making new friends.

Forming new friendships with people outside of one's cultural upbringing can be especially difficult, and it was harder for Levi due to the fact that he lost many deep friendships after leaving the Amish. Marvin Hostetler felt the same way: "We basically had to find new friends. That was probably the hardest." However, he said that since leaving he had made many friendships through his work. He also was an "outgoing" person, which helped him find new friends. Now, he says, his friends are a mixture of English, ex-Amish, and a few Amish who he met after leaving.

Religious Life

Many participants still considered themselves "religious," and most joined new churches after leaving the Amish. Three became Born Again *after* leaving the Amish, five became Mennonite, and two joined non-denominational churches. Others said they attended church but did not specify a denomination. As stated before, one of the main differences in religious beliefs were that participants believed in a faith-based salvation as opposed to a workspace salvation. Some also took a more Evangelical approach to Christianity by having a personal relationship with their faith. Wayne said, "Basically my goal is to live with a close relationship with God and

follow His teaching." While Wayne did not identify as Born Again, his comments about having a "close relationship with God" connect to what Tanya Luhrmann describes as the "experiential" aspect of evangelical Christianity (NPR 2012). Several others stated that their religious views did not change much. "It would probably be small things that would have changed," said Abram. "I would call them personal preferences that have to do with religious beliefs." While participants were part of different denominations and churches, some also noted that other ex-Amish attended their church. Only two people said that they initially had trouble finding a church where they fit in. Sarah was attending church, but was having problems finding a church where she felt comfortable:

> Well I think one of the biggest things was, when you leave, you're leaving a church. And you kind of have this vision in your mind where you're going to find a church where everybody's more like-minded, and basically a trouble-free church. It doesn't exist [laughs]…. I don't know how to say this, but it's basically, if you're sitting in the church, and the pastor that's on the pulpit, you want to know that he's a true man. But when you know that they have marriage problems, or they have this or they have that, it just kind of bursts your bubble a little bit.

While Sarah had trouble finding her ideal church, her main belief in the assurance of salvation, the reason why she left the Amish, has not changed. It seems that most had differing religious views from the Amish before they left, however, and these views did not change much after leaving.

Role Residual

Relating to Ebaugh's theory of "role residual," all participants listed some positive values and practices that they still retained from their upbringing, including family and hard work. For example, Miriam and Sarah said that they try to raise their children with the same values that they had growing up. When asked what values or practices she retained from the Amish, Miriam said,

> I think we probably do a lot of things we don't even realize we do, but we were always very strong with teaching our children to work and be obedient, some of the things I didn't see so much in the culture out here. I mean, I look for chores. I make chores, because, even if it was kind of monotonous, I wanted them to learn. We didn't have a farm, so we had to teach them how to clean or do things around the house.

Similarly, Sarah tried to recreate the conditions she grew up in by not allowing her children to watch TV or use electronics on certain days. She said that growing up Amish, "There's no TV, there's no video games, there's nothing like that, so the children, they go outside and play more, they use their imagination more." Many participants listed family as a value of their upbringing that was still very important to them. Katie said that she appreciates that family was so important to the Amish, and particularly to her family: "I didn't realize there were a lot of families that had problems, like marital problems. They showed me, us, a good marriage." Similarly, Dan said that despite having left the Amish so long ago, he still finds divorce and remarriage to be "totally wrong." Many couples admitted that they spoke Pennsylvania Dutch with their spouse at home. Waneta also said that she wanted to teach her son, an infant, Pennsylvania Dutch. Others listed canning, gardening, cooking, and keeping horses and other farm animals as practices that they still kept from the Amish. These practices could be considered role residual, the values or practices that one keeps from a previous role. These practices are usually "nostalgic" and are associated with positive memories of their previous role (Ebaugh 1988:174).

Amish Identity as Cultural Capital

Some saw their Amish upbringing as an advantage in the job market, whereas others said it could be problematic if they applied to jobs that required further schooling. Mark Miller works in franchising, where he sees his upbringing as an advantage. He says it helps because they sell a business opportunity. If he can prove his business works, even though he only has an 8th grade education, they will be more likely to invest in their own business. Also, Mark says Amish

values help: "Our business is a people business, so values like character and integrity…are vital."

Wayne also said that his background helps in his job because people tend to "trust" Amish more:

> Growing up Amish, and being in that, one of the advantages of being Amish in that business, for the most part, the average American will trust the Amish and what they're saying. The trust factor was a little higher. Especially the Amish talking to Amish, they'll trust each other a lot more than if a non-Amish was talking to an Amish.

For those who worked in craftsmanship or trade jobs, like Marvin Hostetler, they also noted that an Amish upbringing was helpful because they learned those skills early and became very talented. Because of a recent illness, Marvin had to stop working, but in the first few years after leaving the Amish he continued to work in cabinet making. When asked if his Amish upbringing helped give him the skills to succeed in his job, Marvin said,

> Definitely. Amish take a lot of pride in their work and craftsmanship. I always, when I did something it had to be the best. I was very successful, I was known to do a nice job and I always got a lot of compliments. I think I picked that up from where I worked. I started working when I was 15, and that was a good thing that I was taught.

Many of my participants did not have the institutionalized cultural capital necessary to go into a professional career, but they were still able to succeed in their jobs because of the skills and values associated with the Amish. Many of them stayed in the same careers, and this made it easier for them to use the skills they learned when they were Amish to build their career.

<u>Cultural Identity</u>

As discussed previously with Turner and Ebaugh, one's identity after exiting an ethnoreligious group can be complicated. Some of my participants felt they were English, whereas others identified as neither Amish nor English. When asked if they would consider themselves Amish or English, five people answered English, and nine answered neither. For some who identified as English, like Wayne, they said that they defined certain practices, such as

driving a car, as the cut off point between Amish and English, and therefore they identified as English. But others, such as Sarah, felt that they could not confidently say that they were English:

> I don't know what I am [laughs]. It's kind of hard, because you don't fit in in the Amish world, and you don't really fit in in the English world either. You're not Mennonite, you're not…I think my children will fit in the English world a lot better than I ever will, and I'm okay with that, I mean, I'm not someone that needs a crutch. I love the English lifestyle….I don't know [laughs].

What Sarah describes, as not fitting in the English or Amish world, can be labeled liminality. While liminality does not always have a negative connotation, it does imply uncertainty about identity. Others, such as Dan, expressed the same feeling, and said that they would identify as ex-Amish instead of Amish or English. Marvin and Ruth identified themselves as Mennonite because they also did not feel English or Amish. Abram said that he identified as English, but followed it up with a more detailed answer:

> Like you asked me the question, "Do I consider myself English?" In a broad term, yes. But if you start really talking about culture, and you get down to where did you grow up at, and what you know and so forth, there's still Amish in me. I mean it's still written all over me and I'm not going to deny it. And I will argue anybody that tells me in six weeks time, they changed and they went from Amish to English, or Amish to Native American, because when you start thinking about that, you can change your way of life, but you can't necessarily change what you were, where you came from.

Although Abram considers himself English, he acknowledges that his Amish upbringing still plays a major role in his identity today. And when he says that Amish is "written all over him," he seems to believe that others might not identify him as English like he does. In fact, Mark and Katie commented that although they identify as English, many of their English friends will introduce them to others as "my Amish friends." Many others said that their accent is an instant identifier that they used to be Amish. Speaking English is a clear identifier that one has transitioned into English life, but despite their best attempts to speak English clearly, most

participants seemed frustrated by their accent. Despite the many changes that former Amish

undergo, it seems that their embodied cultural capital still causes others to mark them as Amish.

Many participants noticed changes within the Amish community that were in keeping

with their new beliefs, and that they felt were important to the future of the religious group. For

example, Isaac noticed that some communities are becoming more accepting of both Born Again

Christianity and technology:

> I was texting with an Old Order Amish man down in Holmes County yesterday. He's sending me pictures [laughter] of his kids, grandkids, you know. In my community, we couldn't even have our pictures taken. It was just very, very different from the Old Order in Holmes County. In fact, the one I talked to yesterday on the phone, we carried on a [religious] conversation, and we were exactly on the same page.

Allowing certain technologies is always something that the Amish have done, although they have

to be careful about what they allow. For example, in Wayne's case, his family left because there

was a crackdown on smartphones, a technology they had previously allowed. While Isaac

noticed that communities are accepting of some religious beliefs, sometimes they have to crack

down on these beliefs if they are perceived as a threat to tradition. Ruth and Marvin noted that

many people become Mennonite or New Order Amish because their beliefs are not in line with

the Amish:

> I see a generation, I mean there are some that definitely see things different. I very well respect them for the way they're doing things. It seems like a lot of those end up, they go Mennonite or something. Because the older generation starts, "Hey you're…what is the word…being too much like New Order or Mennonite." And then they get the pressure….

However, Ruth also noticed that, "Probably 20 years ago they wouldn't have lifted the Ban. And

now they're starting too." This observation suggests that Olshan's prediction of English exposure

changing Amish values is correct. There seems to be a growing divide between communities that

are becoming more accepting and those that are cracking down on these new beliefs and technologies.

While my contributors clearly had to overcome challenges in their transition into non-Amish life, these findings suggest that their experiences and changes were not always as drastic or traumatizing as previous literature suggests. The diversity of experiences and pathways out of Amish society explored here is worth consideration, and suggests that what Kraybill, Johnson-Weiner, and Nolt refer to as the "proliferating brands of Amishness" may be giving way to an increased variety of ways to exit Amish culture (Kraybill 2014: 411). In the next section, I discuss this issue and other implications of my findings in light of previous scholarship.

Chapter VI: Discussion and Conclusion

At the broadest level, my study shows the literature on ex-Amish fails to capture the diversity of experiences. My study also suggests that the key points for diversity lie mainly in the transition into English life. While most of the literature on ex-Amish portrays the transition as extremely difficult and emotionally taxing, this is not the case for all former Amish experiences. While participants had to make changes to varying extents, some felt that their lives were not drastically different. In fact, many could find parallels between their Amish upbringing and their non-Amish life. Still, the changes are significant enough that we can view the move from Amish to English life as a role exit experience. The variation in ex-Amish experiences has implications for liminality, capital, and role exit, as all are affected by the different affiliation and situation of the participant. While most participants gave the same reasons for leaving, my findings suggest that the affiliation and location make a difference in the transition into English life. In particular, the variation among the Amish and the nature of the Holmes County Settlement make for very different former Amish experiences.

In the following section, I discuss the key findings of my study as they relate to literature and theory, and highlight how my study contributes to the existing scholarship on former Amish experiences. First, I discuss the respondents' decisions to leave and how they connect to literature. Next, I examine Ebaugh's stages of role exit as they pertain to the respondents' experiences. Then, I analyze the transition into English life through the lens of Bourdieu's theory of capital. Drawing on Turner, I connect liminality to the respondent's discussion of cultural identity. Finally, I discuss the adoption of new beliefs and technologies in Amish communities, and how this connects to literature and explains some of the variation in ex-Amish experiences.

The reasons my respondents gave for leaving the Amish did not differ drastically from the existing literature on the Amish. In particular, frustrations with Amish life and the belief that strict rules were unnecessary was a common reason in my study, as well as in Pollack (1981), Hurst and McConnell (2010), and several memoirs (Furlong 2011; Wagler 2011). Additionally, several participants wanted a more personal religious experience, and became Born Again before leaving the Amish. This trend was also common in Hurst and McConnell's (2010) survey. A few participants also cited the conveniences of English life, as did Hurst and McConnell's participants, but noted that discontent with Amish rules were what enticed them to leave, not the "perks" of English life.

The emphasis on Amish being a "man-made" religion seemed to be of particular emphasis in my study. Many participants used this phrase when describing how they felt about Amish rules. They would also point out that there was no evidence for certain rules in the Bible. Ordained leaders in most Amish church districts typically discourage Biblical interpretation, and this was a common cause for frustration in Hurst and McConnell's study. Similarly, my contributors felt that the Amish was a "man-made" religion after reading the Bible more carefully or after having certain passages pointed out to them. Several of these participants also said that someone pointed out these Bible passages to them, suggesting that perhaps someone was trying to convert them. There are many Evangelical churches around Holmes County, and could see the Amish as a target for conversion. This would make sense, as many of my respondents became Born Again Christians.

Additionally, many of my respondents joined a higher Anabaptist church such as a Mennonite church, relating to Pollack's (1981) study of the Mennonite church as a pathway out of the Amish. Many of my contributors believed in salvation through faith rather than salvation

through works alone, meaning that their religious views were more consistent with other

Christian denominations. It could be said that these other churches were an acculturation agent.

As Hartse's (1994) study of ex-Hutterites indicates, those who are more "emotionally

acculturated" to other churches were more likely to leave. The former Amish in my study had

exposure to many types of Anabaptist and Protestant churches simply through their location.

Holmes County is a melting pot of many Anabaptists sects and affiliations. One can find both the

most conservative Amish churches and the most liberal Amish churches, from Swartzentruber to

Andy Weaver, Old Order, New Order, New New Order and Beachy Amish, in addition to

Mennonite churches (Hurst and McConnell 2010:35). There are also many other Christian

denominations to suit any church-goer. In Pollack's (1981) study, higher churches were like

"stepping stones" that one could use to exit the Amish while retaining some of the same values

and social networks. Similarly, in my study, the churches they joined after leaving helped with

the transition into non-Amish life. Many ex-Amish were connected to other ex-Amish through

the church they joined after leaving. They kept the same values and the same community support

through their church. For example, the Hostetlers even had help from another ex-Amish family

that left the same community. Viewed through Bourdieu's theory of social capital, it was

precisely because of these social networks outside of the Amish that participants had a less

difficult transition. Indeed, although they left many of their friends and family behind, they were

not isolated. In this way, many former Amish in my study had their "social cocoon" of like-

minded individuals that eased their transition (Kidder and Hostetler 1990:914).

 While Reiling's study found that the fear of being "caught out" was widespread among

the Amish, a majority of my participants did not believe in being caught out and did not struggle

with the question of their salvation after leaving the Amish. The three people who did fear being

caught out were able to work through their fear after joining a denomination that espoused faith-based salvation. Many said that they were taught that belief when they were young, and believed it as a child, but by the time they were ready to leave the Amish they did not believe it. Perhaps this is because they were exposed to other religions with faith-based salvation, as stated earlier. Those who did believe it were Swartzentruber or Andy Weaver Amish, so it is possible that the fear of being caught out relates to strictness of one's former church. It is also possible that Reiling focused on one community, and therefore got similar perspectives on this issue. In any case, the issue needs to be explored further, but it seems that the fear of being caught out is not as common, at least in large settlements, as her study suggests.

However, the story about Marvin's illness brings up interesting questions about the belief in getting caught out. Many participants were told by their parents that they could go to hell if they left the Amish, but Marvin's parents actively wished that he would get sick to "prove" that he had made a mistake. They wanted to prove to Marvin that he would be punished because he left the Amish. After getting sick, it would make sense that Marvin would be worried about his salvation and might question his decision to leave the Amish. However, he said that he never believed he would go to hell if he left the Amish. Had he believed it, getting sick after leaving the Amish surely would have been a traumatic experience. While only a few people feared being caught out when they first left the Amish, this story shows how the idea of getting caught out can be very powerful.

Ebaugh's stages of role exit proved to be a useful lens for understanding many people's decision to leave the Amish. For example, her doubting stage was represented by the different frustrations with Amish rules that people described. Many of them talked about discussions with their parents in which they would ask why the Amish abided by certain rules, but they were met

with weak or inadequate responses. The doubting stage could also be seen in Dan's story about the split in his church, as this completely altered the way he saw the Amish. The seeking alternatives stage could be seen in some contributors through their decision to become Born Again while they were still Amish. For the Millers, they sought alternatives through their rumspringa. Mark in particular was living independently and driving a car before defecting from the Amish. Others sought alternatives by speaking with friends who were ex-Amish, such as Sarah. Levi also reached out for help from Isaac before leaving. While many contributors said their decision was gradual, several also identified a turning point at which they decided to leave. Wayne, for example, left after ministers confronted him about his smartphone use. For Wayne, who had been questioning Amish life for a while, it seemed like the right opportunity to leave. For Abram, the event was not so much the "straw that broke the camel's back," as Ebaugh said. His turning point was when he decided to marry his wife, who was Mennonite. He also had some frustrations with Amish life, but said that his wife is the reason why he left. While these are examples that fit with Ebaugh's turning point, about half of the contributors said that they came to the decision gradually. Interestingly, only three of my contributors left multiple times. Leaving multiple times was a common theme in the literature, but most of my sample only left the Amish once and never returned. While we can find examples of Ebaugh's stages across the different experiences, no one fit the narrative perfectly. Of course, this is to be expected, as Ebaugh states herself that there is nothing "'normal' about role exit" (1988:24).

In creating an ex-role, participants exhibited "role residual," values and practices from the Amish that they still retained. For example, all participants identified family as a value from the Amish that they appreciated and that they cherished after leaving. Others identified practices that they still abided by, and many of these practices tended to be gendered. For example, the

women still canned, gardened, sewed, cooked, and raised their children similarly to the Amish, whereas the men would sometimes keep farm animals and keep the same jobs that they had when they were Amish. They also tended to stay around the same area in which they grew up, and many said that they preferred rural life. While we might expect role residual to make it difficult for participants to assimilate, due to their deep roots in their rural communities many actually did not have a difficult time transitioning into English life. For many, it seemed, their lives changed, but not as drastically as the literature might have suggested, particularly compared to the ex-Amish in documentaries such as "The Amish: Shunned" and "Amish: Out of Order." While the ex-Amish in these documentaries tended to go to great lengths to get away from their Amish roots, participants in my study seemed to embrace it. While Amish life might have frustrated them, the majority of my participants had fond memories and an appreciation for their upbringing, and kept many of the same values and practices.

Although I anticipated that institutionalized cultural capital might prevent many ex-Amish from doing well educationally and financially in English society, I was surprised to find that many stayed in the same career and were relatively satisfied without advanced educational degrees. Many had the skills to succeed in their trade or craftsmanship jobs, and others had the social capital necessary to succeed in careers like network marketing, franchising, running a ministry, and starting their own business. Especially for those working in marketing, Wayne and Dan, they had Amish and English networks that they could use to market their natural health products and encourage others to join their business. Contributors also said that the Amish were known for their skills and good work ethic, which helped them with their job because they were able to grow their business and build a good reputation. Most noted that their lack of institutionalized capital might have been a disadvantage if they had wanted to drastically change

their career, but they did not see it as an issue in their own lives. For the very reason that they did not want to change careers and did not see their lack of schooling as an issue, many did not pursue their GED or any higher education. This pattern also represents an interesting disparity from the literature, particularly in memoirs and documentaries, where an emphasis is placed on further schooling for ex-Amish individuals (Furlong 2011, "The Amish: Shunned," "Amish: Out of Order"). Despite the fact that many kept the same careers, however, they might still have struggled with finances. Though I did not ask, only one participant volunteered that he struggled with finances in the transition into English life. Economic capital was an issue for Dan as he transitioned into English life, because he felt there were new aspects of English life he could not explore due to financial constraints.

Embodied cultural capital was a frustration for some participants. Participants noted that there were probably little behaviors that they kept from the Amish. As Miriam said, "we probably do a lot of things we don't even realize we do." Here, she is probably referring to embodied cultural capital: the "dispositions" they have retained from the Amish. While role residual refers to the values and practices one has retained, embodied cultural capital focuses on the small behaviors or personality traits of which the respondents were not conscious. For example, when Sam's girlfriend said that she knew he was ex-Amish because he seemed "innocent," she was referring to his embodied cultural capital. Similarly, many of the women I interviewed were quiet and reserved, relating to the concept of Gelassenheit. Embodied capital was a frustration for participants, who noted that their accent often revealed that they were ex-Amish. Many noted that others identified them as Amish even after they left. While embodied cultural capital might not have made a difference in their career, it did impact how others viewed them, particularly English people. For ex-Amish, particularly those who identified as English,

the struggle to fit in the English world was compounded by the fact that others, even friends, still identified them as Amish.

Tensions with family and loss of intimate relationships, common themes in the literature, were also present in my study. Ebaugh identifies it as one of the main issues in creating an ex-role, and Boeri (2014) and Coates (2010) identify it as one of the biggest difficulties in the lives of former cult members. Similar to the exes interviewed in those studies, participants mourned the loss of intimate friendships and relationships after leaving the Amish. Although they found new friends through ex-Amish networks, through church, and through work, many still said that leaving those friendships behind was very hard. Many participants also noted that their relationships with their family were tense after leaving, and although they improved over the years, there was still some distance. There may be many reasons why contact would be limited with family; for some, like Isaac, being seen as a "threat" to younger siblings meant that he was not allowed home for many years. Others, like Sarah, did not want to face criticism from their family, and chose to keep some distance.

Nevertheless, the fact that nearly all of my participants (12 out of 14) said that their relationship with their family improved over time shows that leaving the Amish is not always as scary or traumatic as the literature suggests. Maize claims that the "exit costs" of leaving the Amish are very high, which is why the retention rate among the Amish is so high. Indeed, many of my participants said that disappointing their family was one of the biggest costs of leaving. But if they knew that contact with family might eventually improve, or that they would be allowed to stay on their parents' property until they could find a new home, or that they would even be able to vacation with family again, perhaps the exit costs did not appear so significant.

Indeed, many of the Amish who said that their transition was not difficult also said that their relationship with their family improved.

Despite overcoming issues with the transition, nine participants did not identify as English, even years after leaving the Amish. They did not identify as either Amish or English, but something in between. These participants remain in a state of liminality; as Turner would say, they are "betwixt and between" different stages of being (Turner 1990: 147). These participants can be said to be in a state of cognitive liminality, of struggling between two separate identities: Amish and English. As Beech and Ellis stated, in liminality there is a push-pull between different "circles of loyalty" (2011:24). Some participants gave answers like this, saying that they did not fit into either the Amish or English world. This means that there is a possibility of cognitive liminality even after role exit. Others, such as Dan, identified as ex-Amish as opposed to Amish or English. We would assume that liminality would imply a sense of "danger" or anti-structure, as Turner suggested, but instead many participants seemed content with having an ambiguous identity. Like Sarah, who noted that she did not "need a crutch," some participants seemed satisfied with not being Amish or English. While they might have a liminal identity, they seemed to be content with having Amish "written all over [them]," as Abram said. However, for participants who had believed in being caught out, there was a danger in liminality. Despite the fact that Martin now believed in his salvation, when he initially left the Amish, there was a sense of danger in not having an Amish identity and not being assured of his salvation.

In some cases this sense of liminality carried over into interactions with English people. It was interesting to note that Katie and Mark's friends still called them "Amish," despite the fact that they felt English. This disparity between how they identify themselves and how others identify them caused some annoyance or frustration as they tried to transition into an English

identity. As stated earlier, Amish accents were also a frustration for many who identified as English. Embodied cultural capital can sharpen this sense of liminality, as it might prevent one from being identified as Amish or English.

My contributor's observations about changes that they saw within the Amish community affirm Olshan's (1991) predictions for the Amish rather than Hostetler's (1964). To reiterate their arguments, Hostetler believed that the Amish would fragment and die out if they moved away from their agrarian roots, whereas Olshan believed they would continue to thrive, but would change from within. Marvin, for example, noticed that many Amish whose views were seen as too progressive were converting to Mennonite or other higher churches. His view was that a "new generation" of Amish were being pressured out of the religion. However, Ruth did note that their excommunication was lifted, which would not have happened decades ago. She saw progressive changes in the Amish. Similarly, Isaac noticed that many of the Ashland County Amish community he talked to not only used new technology, they also were on "exactly the same page" in terms of religious beliefs. This indicates that some church districts are more accepting of beliefs like salvation through faith. It could be that these Amish churches are more accepting of salvation through faith and other beliefs because of exposure to other religions. Isaac's story also supports Olshan's prediction for the Amish changing from the inside as opposed to "fragmenting," as Hostetler suggests (1964:196). While Marvin's observations show that some Amish communities are not yet willing to give up on their belief of salvation through works, it is important to note that the "cultural fences" that the Amish have constructed to keep separate from the world have shifted over time for all groups (Kraybill 2013:9). As more and more Amish are exposed to English beliefs and ways of life in the course of growing up, ex-Amish would perhaps have an easier time adjusting to non-Amish life.

From the interviews with my participants, we can see the variation in ex-Amish experiences, particularly in the way ex-Amish cope with the transition into non-Amish life. We can see factors that would make the transition easy or difficult. For example, tensions with family, the affiliation/strictness of the church district, and previous exposure to English ways of life are all issues that would affect the transition. Still, we cannot definitively say how different factors affect the transition; that question must be answered by further studies. However, there are unique qualities about the area in which I conducted research that can give us clues as to why some ex-Amish had a smoother transition into English life. As stated before, the Holmes County Settlement, with its large Amish population condensed into one area and its vast array of Anabaptist affiliations and other more liberal denominations, makes for a very interesting case of religious diversity– at least within Christianity. With so much exposure to other ways of life and with so many religious and social networks, finding a path out of the Amish is not as difficult as it may seem. Compared to Ira Wagler, who came from a small Amish community in Iowa with very little exposure to other religions or ways of life, and who had virtually no friends outside of the Amish, many of my participants could be considered worldly.

However, as Maize says, leaving a minority culture will always be difficult because there are exit costs and negative consequences to leaving ethnoreligious groups (Maize 2005: 756). These costs may vary, especially in their severity, but they are almost always present; trying to reconcile one's internalized cultural beliefs while transitioning into a new lifestyle is a hard task. However, as my participants' stories demonstrate, there are many different ways of dealing with these exit costs that are not always emotionally fraught and traumatic. My study reveals that the popular and academic portrayals of leaving the Amish are very limited in their scope and fail to encapsulate a variation of former Amish experiences.

In this section, I have attempted to offer reasons as to why the variation in ex-Amish experiences is so extensive, but there is one more explanation for this variation that relates to adaptions and changes within the Amish. Previously, I discussed how "cultural fences" have to be negotiated in every Amish community to either adapt to the world or to maintain distance from it. The various solutions that Amish communities have created to solve these disputes has resulted in over 40 different affiliations and countless more church districts with unique rules and practices. Kraybill, Johnson-Weiner, and Nolt call such variation the "proliferating brands of Amishness," the increasing diversity of ways to be Amish (2013:411). While some Amish have maintained strict separation from the world, others are creating small businesses and getting an education past the eighth grade. Still, the question remains: Why do some Amish literally run away from home, while some can simply say that they're leaving and make the transition over a few months? A passage from the final chapter of Kraybill, Johnson-Weiner, and Nolt's *The Amish* can provide some answers:

> The Amish saga, however, is not a monocultural story with a single grand narrative. Amish affiliations and church districts have bargained in different ways over different issues, producing an assortment of story lines that defy generalization. Some groups have focused on resistance, while others have been more open to adaption and change....Clearly, the account of Amish bargaining is a collection of short stories with different characters and sundry resolutions, some satisfying Amish expectations and others disappointing them (2013:405).

Just as the Amish are not monocultural, with the same practices and traditions, neither are ex-Amish. Ex-Amish experiences are diverse because the Amish themselves have become more diverse. My findings reflect this larger trend of the growing Amish diversity. Ex-Amish experiences, like Amish experiences, can only be told through "a collection of short stories with different characters and sundry resolutions." Popular media and even some academic literature have tried to generalize about former Amish:

ex-Amish are runaways, they all fear being "caught out," they need to get a GED or further schooling to succeed, they move far away from their Amish communities (Reiling 2002). But it is clear from my study that such generalizations are inaccurate. Leaving a minority religious group is surely a difficult task, but there is no master narrative for leaving the Amish, only trends and themes.

Appendix A: Interview Questions

Motivations/Reasons for Leaving:

1. Why are you no longer a member of the Amish church?

2. Which do you think was a greater factor, the attractions of English life or frustrations with Amish life?

3. What affiliation of the Amish church were you associated with? How do you think your affiliation influenced the process of leaving?

4. If you chose to leave the Amish, how did you come to that decision? What were your reasons for leaving?

5. Was there a single event or a turning point where you finally decided to leave?

6. What did you consider to be the main costs of leaving?

7. Did you have any idea before you left of what you might want to do if you did not stay Amish?

8. How many siblings were in your family? Were you the first to leave of these siblings?

9. Do you feel that you made the right decision?

Reactions:

10. How did other react to your decision? (Parents, church, friends) Probes: Did your mom and dad react differently? How did they try to persuade you to return? Did the ordained leaders react differently, and what kinds of contact did you have with them?

11. Did they place you in the Bann, and if so, are you still excommunicated?

12. Did you still keep contact with family after leaving? How has the quality of that contact changed over time?

Initial Transition:

13. At what age did you leave? Did you have older siblings or friends who had already left, and if so do you think they contributed to your wanting to leave? If so, how?

14. Did you ever return after leaving? If so, how many times and why?

15. Where did you go immediately after leaving the Amish? What did you do?

16. Was the initial transition into English life difficult? If so, what were the biggest challenges? What was your emotional state during this time?

17. Was there anything that surprised you about transitioning away from Amish life?

18. What was the hardest part about leaving the Amish church?

19. Did you have any English friends or acquaintances who helped you with the transition into non-Amish life?

20. Do you have other friends who are also ex-Amish?

Long-Term Transition and Axes of Liminality:

21. What aspects of your Amish upbringing do you still retain today?

22. Do you still visit your former Amish community? Why or why not?

23. Would you consider yourself to be "English"? Would you consider yourself to be Amish?

24. Has it been difficult making friends or meeting new people since leaving the Amish?

Potential Economic, Legal, and Social Obstacles:

25. Would you say your Amish background was a hindrance or a help in finding a job? Would you say having an Amish background has hurt or helped your income level?

26. What is your job history since leaving the Amish? Did you ever consider going back to school?

27. Were there any legal obstacles you faced, including documentation, getting a license, etc., after leaving the Amish?

28. Did you encounter English stereotypes or misperceptions about the Amish after leaving? Did you ever experience discrimination because of your Amish background before or after leaving the church?

29. What is someone's typical reaction when you tell them you grew up Amish?

Religion:

30. What were your religious views before leaving the Amish, and have they changed since you left?

31. Did you ever have a fear of being "caught out" and going to hell? How do you feel about that now?

General Questions:

32. Do you have any friends or family who have also left the Amish, and how did their experience differ from yours?

33. What is your opinion of the Amish today?

34. Do you ever regret your decision to leave? Would you do anything differently if you were doing it all over again?

35. Do you know anyone else who would be willing to be interviewed?

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