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**PUBLIC CULTURE, PRIVATE BIRTH:
SOCIAL PATTERNS OF AMISH DOMESTIC SPACE**

A Thesis in

Rural Sociology and Women's Studies

by

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Abstract

In this dissertation research project I argue that birth plays a significant role in the lives of Amish women and men. And though birth has long been understood as merely a biological process, my research demonstrates that it is also a significant feature in the landscape of a society. This analysis of birth in several Pennsylvania Amish communities yields knowledge about both the particularities of Amish women's birth experiences as well as the sociocultural significance of birth within the larger Amish community. Aspects of the domestic realm, such as birth, continue to be overlooked in sociological analyses because of their location in the private sphere. Instead of lacking sociological relevance, these personal matters hold the key to unlock a more nuanced understanding of communities and of society more generally. It is unlikely that sociological findings of consequence will be generated without an appreciation of the relationship between the public and private spheres – this has certainly been the case for the scholarship on the Amish. It is only with a careful attention to the interwoven relationship between the public and the private that we will be able to produce research that approaches the level of complexity and intricacy inherent in society today.

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Chapter 1

An Introduction to the Dissertation

Introduction

Birth has long played a significant role in the lives of women and men. This event is not merely a private domestic experience shared within families, but is also an important cultural milestone that enables a deeper understanding of society. Insights into women's birth experiences serve as a point of departure for a more general analysis of cultural patterns and social norms. And though we may suspect that birth is itself a biological event, birth practices are culturally specific and socially mediated in a variety of ways. Analyzing birth offers clues into the particular gender dynamics of a society as well as into the fluidity of social structures and hierarchies. As yet, there has been a dearth of scholarship that uses birth as a point of entry into sociological analyses, and this dissertation serves as an antidote to that trend.

Because birth has been seen as a personal matter rather than an issue of public consequence, it has largely been omitted from academic inquiry. And while demographers have long focused on issues of fertility, birth rates and patterns of infant mortality, their work has not engaged with the sociocultural significance that birth has within certain communities. Like most matters perceived as domestic or private, birth is thought to lack sociological relevance and is rarely the focus of investigation. Feminists, however, have suggested that attention to these private realms offers evidence of how societies function and argue that analyses of the private sphere can enlighten both what we know about the ways that norms are constructed and enforced as well as the mechanisms through which norms become gendered. A close examination of the particularities of domestic spaces and the "private" events that occur there promises to augment our sociological imagination, as the public and private spheres are not diametrically opposed, but rather intertwined and mutually dependent – each are constituted from the other and exist in relation to one another.

With a particular focus on Amish birth, I argue that the domestic lives of Amish women have remained an elusive topic despite the potential for offering insights into the nature of Amish society. Much conventional research has focused on the public realm of Amish life, and particular attention has been paid to the role of agriculture in the structure of Amish society and construction of Amish identity. A spotlight on the private realm supplements previous knowledge about the Amish. Using birth as a point of departure, I contend that the domestic spaces of Amish life hold the potential for both illuminating the particularities of Amish women's daily lives as well as expanding our understanding of women's role in Amish society more generally. Amish birth practices hold a social significance that is culturally specific and simultaneously generalizable far beyond the Anabaptist communities from which they are born.

Undertaking a research project on birth

This research is juxtaposed against the context of birth in American (non-Amish) culture. Studying the Amish offers an interesting counterpoint to today's increasingly medicalized birth climate and provides insight into the ways in which birth often reflects particular cultural patterns. Birth is a social act, albeit one that has been largely overlooked by sociologists. Below I offer a brief analysis of American birth practices in order to offer some context on birth today. Though the Amish do exist within American society, their practices (particularly their birth practices) do not reflect the trend of today's medicalized pattern of American birth. A review of current mainstream birth practices will

help illuminate the degree to which the Amish depart from America's contemporary birth conventions.

Birth in the United States has become increasingly medicalized, as evidenced by the growing number of deliveries that are marked by high levels of obstetrical intervention and medical management (Kitzinger, 2005). Labors today are artificially induced, chemically intensified and increasingly end in surgical procedures (Wagner, 1997). And today, with the overall social consensus being that hospital birth is safest, this rising rate of obstetrical intervention is viewed as evidence of birth security. Particularly when attended by an obstetrician, a safe birth is seen as virtually guaranteed within the high-tech environment of the hospital delivery room. As a result, the vast majority of women continue to choose physician-attended (91.4%) or certified nurse midwife-attended (7.6%) hospital birth over other non-hospital alternatives (<1%). These statistics have remained relatively stable over recent decades. Today, over 99% of births take place in a hospital environment, and are subject to the procedures and treatments that accompany medicalized care (All statistics are taken from Martin et al., 2005).

Most commonly, medical technologies are used to monitor the birthing woman and manage the delivery of the baby. It is routine practice for women to be constantly monitored through the use of an Electronic Fetal Monitor (EFM) (an instrument that measures the heartbeat of the baby) during the course of her labor (Lent, 1999). Over 85% of birthing women, or more than 3.2 million live births, were monitored during labor using EFM in 2003, and this rate has climbed steadily since 1989 (Martin et al., 2005). EFM is the most frequently reported obstetric procedure, and may in fact be used to monitor an even higher percentage of births. In addition to the EFM, it has become increasingly popular to employ Internal Fetal Monitoring (IFM) (where an electrode is attached through the vagina directly to the baby's head) to ensure constant monitoring of the baby's heart rate during labor. Both of these surveillance technologies necessitate that the woman be connected to machinery through wires, electrodes and sensors. This technology is quite sensitive, and often requires the birthing woman to remain immobile to ensure a stable reading.¹ Labor monitoring is also carried out through detailed charting to ensure that cervical dilation is progressing along expected lines.² Slow or stalled labors are thereby quickly noticed, and more stringent courses of medical management are then adopted.

A woman in labor is routinely supervised and her medical caregivers regularly intervene into her labor and delivery. One-fifth of all birthing women will have their labor induced, a rate that has more than doubled from the 9.5% rate in 1990. This rising rate has been linked to a growing number of elective inductions (inductions with no medical or obstetric indication) and 25% of today's induced labors are the result of these 'patient-choice' inductions (Jones, 2000). Labor contractions are also increasingly amplified with a variety of chemical stimulants, and 16.7% of labors in 2003 were augmented in such a way. This represents a 59% increase from the 1989 stimulation rate of 10%. And even when there is evidence that certain medical interventions are in decline – processes such as vacuum extraction and forceps delivery have decreased in recent years, dropping by 41% to only 5.6% in 2003, down from 9.5% in 1994 – there is often a more complicated explanation for these trends. This decrease in assisted delivery (vacuum and forceps) has been linked to a drastic

¹ Because of the growing evidence of false positive reports of fetal distress as a result of EFM, greater attention has been focused on curbing women's movement during labor and encouraging their immobility (Lent, 1999).

²It is a common obstetrical assumption that women will dilate according to the Friedman Curve, which stipulates 1.2 cm dilation for each hour of labor. Though many women do dilate in such a manner, as many as 20% of otherwise low risk women do not progress at this rate (Wolf, 2003).

increase in cesarean births, making these vaginal delivery techniques unnecessary (All statistics taken from Martin et al., 2005).

As of 2003, the US cesarean rate was 27.5% – the highest rate ever reported. Driven by both the rise in primary cesareans (particularly for low-risk women) and the steep decline in the Vaginal Birth After Cesarean (VBAC), this represents a 5% rise from 2002 and a 25% rise from 1996. The rate of women having a vaginal birth after a previous cesarean (VBAC) fell 16% in the last year and has dropped 63% since 1996 (Martin et al., 2005). Because the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) as well as the American Medical Association (AMA) have recommended that physicians now discourage women from attempting VBAC deliveries, it is increasingly difficult for women to obtain a VBAC in a hospital environment.³ Thus, women who have an initial cesarean delivery are generally required to deliver all subsequent babies via cesarean section (Grady, 2004). Also leading to the growing rate of cesarean deliveries is the rising number of women with very low risk pregnancies delivering by cesarean, a trend that has risen 67% since 1990 (Martin et al., 2005). A number of these are elective cesareans—surgical deliveries that were requested and scheduled by the pregnant woman herself rather than recommended by her medical team (Klein, 2004).

The medicalization of birth has not gone unnoticed and there has been much attention paid to the growing number of elective cesarean sections, the rising rate of induction, epidural and episiotomy and concern over a variety of other medical interventions (Jones, 2000; Cohen, 2003; Heinze et al., 2003; Hannah, 2004; Klein, 2004; Leeman, 2005; Rubin, 2005). The Amish practice of homebirth offers a fascinating counterpoint to these trends towards medicalization. This research explores not only the particularities of homebirth in the Amish community, but looks into the birth discourses within Amish culture. By investigating whether the Amish conceive of birth as a non-medical event, I not only inquire into the specificities of Amish society, I also offer some insight into the ways in which distinct birth practices can reflect broader cultural patterns.

Research questions

Amish birth, as well as women's experiences within the domestic sphere, has long been seen as a topic unremarkable - and therefore unremarked upon in any sort of academic sense. Little is known about the particular practices of Amish birth and midwifery and virtually nothing is known about the cultural import that these practices have in the production of Amish identity. To expand both what we know about Amish homebirth and Amish women's daily lives more generally, I embarked on this dissertation research project under the auspices of the following question:

- ▣ *What are the particular meanings that Amish women and men attach to the socio-cultural experience of birth?*

In Chapters 4, 5 and 6, I employ three different lenses to investigate this research question.

- Chapter 4 examines feminist theories of embodiment and asks:
 - *How do Amish women experience birth within their particular social context?*
- Chapter 5 centers on issues of community and takes up the question:

³ Recommendation made by the AMA and ACOG influence the practice of medicine and shape not only hospital procedures but also the coverage that medical liability insurance providers offer.

- *What is the role of midwives who serve the Amish – do they possess power within the community?*
 - Chapter 6 is structured around the debate over public/private space and asks the question:
 - *Have the domestic spaces of the Amish home become a central stage upon which Amish identity is constructed and maintained?*

Such questions lend themselves to a qualitative investigation, and I answer these questions through material collected over a two year participant observation as an apprentice midwife in an Amish community.

Introduction into the study region

This project was undertaken within the Amish communities that sprinkle the Central Pennsylvania region. Five inter-related valleys make up the majority of the research site, and are separated by a series of mountain ranges that divide communities and limit contact. Because these are horse and buggy Amish, the amount of communication between valleys is limited. And though it is not uncommon for these Old Order Amish families to hire a driver to shuttle them to a doctor's visit or even to a Walmart, they are much less likely to maintain a close connection with residents in neighboring valleys. Community members place a high value on the local, and neighborhood ties play a significant role in daily life. It is common to find a group of men in the fields together, joining in the practice of making hay. Similarly, a group of women may congregate outside to work collectively in the family garden that spreads for hundreds of feet beyond the sprawling farmhouses that characterize the landscape.

Horses and buggies dot the region and are the primary mode of transportation. These carriages, coupled with rolling hills that distinguish these valleys, create a landscape best described as idyllic. The small vegetable stands that pepper the back roads sell garden produce in the summer months and, along with home-businesses peddling everything from apple cider to berry pies to organic dairy products, require clients to pay on an honor-system – a coffee can sits on a small table with a note requesting buyers to make change for themselves. During summer months, entire families will be found outside, working in the garden or plowing the fields with a team of 4 to 6 horses. The majority of Amish farmers in this area own and operate dairy farms, and the black and white (and increasingly brown jersey) cows can frequently be glimpsed traversing the hillsides in search of greener pastures. Farms vary in terms of size, but most have between 30 to 50 cattle and the large red barns that house the herd can be seen at various intervals throughout the landscape.

Given the importance of large families within the Amish society, it is not surprising to catch sight of the numerous turn of the century farmhouses nestled within groves of tall pines or branchy oaks. Amish houses are often painted white and have minimal adornments on the property. Porches tend to wrap from front to back and a few wood chairs may be the sole trimming. The vast majority are two storied structures, with living quarters downstairs and bedrooms on the second floor. Not all houses boast an antique status, and many are newly constructed on recently divided pieces of land. Homes often possess a number of large windows on every side. Without electricity, daylight becomes an important resource and the design and construction of Amish homes reflects this necessity. Very tidy in the presentation of their homes and gardens, Amish families strive to balance between efficiency and ornament. So while it is not uncommon to spot impatiens blooming on the front walk, showy flowerbeds and other domestic embellishments are largely absent.

Chapter overviews

My dissertation research project explores the private sphere of Amish life through an analysis of birth in multiple Pennsylvania Amish communities. This task was accomplished through two years of ethnographic field work and several months of data analysis and reflection. I begin this dissertation with a detailed presentation of my methodological process in Chapter 2. Given the limited scholarship that has been produced on the domestic realm of Amish life, my project refocuses academic inquiry on the (private) daily lives of Amish women. This second chapter of my dissertation details my ethnographic entry into the field and juxtaposes these experiences alongside a theoretical examination of the literature on qualitative research. In doing so, I situate my particular encounters with Amish women into a more general context. Chapter 2 delves into my connection to a key informant and gatekeeper within the Amish community, and I address the ways in which my role as an apprentice (and later, assistant) midwife lent me a high level of legitimacy within the study communities. This leads to a review of the literature on positionality, and I explore the feminist critiques of conventional objectivity in the research process. Feminists have claimed that researchers occupy multiple identities (woman, researcher, student, learner, midwife, etc.) and acknowledging and analyzing these competing subject positions becomes a central component of feminist research. I grapple with my position within the context of this research project and discuss how my own situated perspective allowed me specific insights into my study population that may not have been possible if I occupied a different subjective location. Chapter 2 concludes with a treatment of the feminist literature on conventional ethnographic practices.

Having established a methodological framework for this research project, I devote the following chapter to situating this particular study of birth and midwifery within the diverse body of scholarship that details the nature of Amish society. In this third chapter, I begin by reviewing the particularities of Amish culture, including their patterns of technology avoidance and strict code of dress. In particular, I consider how the Amish use practices such as farming to maintain their unique culture and strict separation from the state and government influences. I then move on to discuss Amish society within the frameworks generated by classic community and sociological theories. I do this in order to assert that many aspects of Amish culture embody a community-centric nature that differs remarkably from current non-Amish society. After exploring some of the current critiques of these classic theories, I weigh these theoretical constructions of 'community' against the structure of the several Amish communities that I studied. I then review the recent literature on Amish society, with a particular focus on Amish agriculture, Anabaptist faith and technological avoidance. I conclude this chapter by suggesting that this conventional research has brought about a number of valuable insights, but has also unduly focused on the public sphere of Amish life and has been primarily concerned with the daily life of Amish men. I introduce the feminist discussion of the public/private divide that marks both social divisions of labor and the consequent scholarly analyses. And while I further develop this notion of a public/private division in Chapter 6, this brief introduction allows me to argue that the limited scholarship that exists on Amish women and the domestic spaces that they occupy is correlated to an academic aversion to matters seen as residing in the private realm.

I return to matters in the private sphere in Chapter 4, where I discuss the particular ways that birth is socioculturally produced within the Amish community. Despite the fact that birth is often seen as a biological process, I draw on the work of anthropologists and sociologists to demonstrate that birth is as much a social event as it is a physiological one. This work lays a foun-

ation for my examination of Amish birth – both the particular practices and the social discourses that constitute Amish homebirth. I discuss how female bodily processes are often associated with shame and embarrassment and substantiate these claims by relying on the work of a number of feminist philosophers. For Amish women, this bodily shame is clear and evident, and I delve into the distinctly Amish etiquette that surrounds the pregnant body. And though many Amish women adhere to certain practices of pregnancy propriety, some women do actively resist them. I draw on feminist conceptions of agency to argue that this active resistance is just one of the ways that Amish women oppose the patriarchal discourses of Amish society. Using my data to support these assertions, I demonstrate the ways that Amish women resist social norms, and employ the feminist conception of interdiscourse to illuminate how Amish women exist as agentic subjects. I discuss the fluid nature of embodied resistance and explore the contradiction that Amish women are simultaneously trapped within a patriarchal discourse of bodily shame and yet empowered by positive discourses of body confidence and self-reliance. I finish with a discussion of the particular discursive forces that shape the lived, embodied experiences of Amish women.

To broaden the literature on the private realm of Amish society, I use my fifth chapter to explore the role of the midwife within the Amish community. Because of midwifery's location squarely within the private realm, it has been largely overlooked in favor of other more 'public' topics. As a result, both Amish midwives and the non-Amish midwives who serve the Amish community have remained invisible and their purpose within the social structure of Amish society is unformulated and ill-defined. A careful analysis of Amish midwifery suggests that these women occupy a position of power within the community structure and – despite conventional research on community power which indicates otherwise – their situation within the larger community configuration speaks to the subtle and profound ways in which they shape the lives of Amish women and men. To illustrate this, I begin Chapter 5 with a review of the literature on community power. After detailing both the community theorists who have written on community power as well as the feminist critiques of this scholarship, I move on to a discussion of community power within the research that has been done on Amish society. Not surprisingly, I find that this body of work has neglected the ways that women participate and create their own networks of community power. Drawing from vignettes culled from my ethnographic data, I demonstrate the ways in which the midwife exists within a nexus of power and I explore how her influence is both constructed and exercised. Arguing that non-Amish midwives are neither outsiders nor insiders, I delve into the ways that their in-between status provides them with power and influence within the Amish community.

In Chapter 6 I elaborate on the social division that separates society into public and private realms. This bifurcation between public and private worlds has significant consequences for the way that we understand social life. Of particular import is the means by which each sphere is gendered – the public realm is cast as a masculine space associated with rationality, logic and disembodiment, while the private realm is seen as a domestic space occupied by women and is tied to affectivity, passion and embodiment. This social division renders a number of social costs, and I explore these through the lens of the Amish communities with whom I worked. Coupling my observations with recent academic work on Amish agrarian life, I note the ways that Amish identity continues to be tied to the public sphere. And while farming has long played a significant role in the formation of an Amish identity, I argue that the advent of agricultural restructuring threatens to undermine this. As a result, the public sphere is less likely to be the primary site of Amish identity and the private sphere may now be where Amish identity is increasingly produced. I draw on the work of feminist scholars who assert that cultural identity is often invested in and invented on the bodies of women and the domestic realm that they occupy, particularly during times of social

change. I explore the social production of the Amish home and the daily practices of Amish women as emblematic of the renewed attention given to the private sphere in the construction of an authentic Amish identity. Amish domestic spaces play an important role in the Amish community, as all life events (birth, marriage, death) take place in the home. Amish identity is continually refashioned to reflect the changing social context, and increasingly this identity construction happens within the private spaces of the domestic realm. I conclude this chapter by suggesting that the dichotomy between the public and the private may in fact be a false one – these realms are much more related than has been previously allowed.

My final chapter reviews the wider sociological relevance of this project. Not only do I suggest that my research challenges conventional wisdom on Amish society, but I assert that it also enhances our understanding of the role of the private realm in public society. With a particular attention to birth, I argue that a variety of matters previously coded as domestic actually have a great deal of sociological relevance. These private choices that women make about their birthing experience demand a more rigorous examination of the public discourses within which they are situated. My research demonstrates that it is not enough to merely investigate these private realms. Instead sustained investigation of the public sphere is necessary to contextualize these more personal events. Private matters are always intersected by the public world within which they are located. This dissertation research project shows that this happens at a variety of scales, and that the impacts can be seen at the social, community and personal levels.

Chapter 2 An Ethnographic Inquiry

Taking the everyday world as problematic (D.E. Smith, 1987) to locate the starting point of inquiry anchors the ethnography in people's actual experience. It establishes for inquiry a subject position that remains open until it is filled by the subjectivity or subjectivities of those whose part is taken up as the starting point of inquiry: Inquiry sets out from there; it explores with people their experience of what is happening to them and their doings and how those are hooked up with what is beyond their experience. Research is then projected beyond the local to discover the social organization that governs the local setting.

Dorothy Smith, 2005
Institutional Ethnography: A Sociology for People
Pg. 41

Introduction

Ever since Sandra Harding wondered aloud if there was a feminist method, researchers have grappled with feminism's intervention into the research process (Harding, 1985). In particular, significant attention has been focused on the social sciences and much of it has actively critiqued the ways that women have been studied in conventional research. And while many have contended that studying women is not a new phenomenon, feminists have responded by asserting that studies which grow out of women's experiences and which offer insights into the gendered nature of the world around us are indeed quite novel. As scholars have begun to investigate methods of analysis that do not perpetuate sexist, racist, classist and homophobic research practices, increasing attention has been focused on the potential for academic work that is liberatory—free from the biases of traditional social scientific inquiry that have marginalized study populations. In pursuit of this, many feminists have called for a reconception of traditional methods that have often overlooked the important role that gender plays in society.

This chapter details my ethnographic experiences entering the field, and draws upon a broader theoretical literature to situate my particular encounters within a more general context. I begin by exploring the detailed structure of this study and review my active role as a participant observer in the data collection process. My position as an apprentice and assistant midwife allowed me to gain a tacit understanding of Amish culture and was facilitated by my connection to a gatekeeper and key informant, Vivian.⁴ Her involvement in the research mitigated much of the pressure associated with my 'outsider' status in the community and served as a connection between my research subjects and myself. My observations of her interactions with her clients served as my primary data for this research, and my attendance at prenatal and postpartum visits, as well as actively participating in the births, yielded insights into both the social significance of birth in Amish society and into the daily lives of Amish women more generally.

In the second portion of this chapter, I focus the discussion on two aspects of ethnography with which feminists have shown particular interest, namely the position of the researcher and the notion of reciprocity within the research process. Both of these foci grow out of feminist desires to include the researcher in the scope of the investigation and acknowledge the intricate ways in which the researcher is always intertwined with the research. My discussion of positionality delves into

⁴ All names have been changed and pseudonyms have been used to protect privacy.

the tensions that often exist between multiple subject identities and asserts that these moments of friction can be both uncomfortable and productive—they do not suggest that nothing can be known but instead point out that what can be known is always related to who we are as knowers. As I grappled with my own position as a white, heterosexual, married woman who was not Amish, I came to recognize the unique insights that grew out of this particular vantage point. I close with a discussion of how this position offered me specific knowledge into my study population and conclude that though this allows me to speak about the women I studied; it does not permit me to speak for them.

The third section of this chapter serves as a theoretical exploration of the possibility of feminist ethnography as it applies to this particular study of birth, midwifery and the domestic realm of women in the Amish community. I summarize the growing body of critical literature that attempts to imbue ethnography with a feminist imagination to counter the exploitative tendencies of ethnographic research. I assert that Amish women are not ‘natives,’ static in their identities or experiences, and detail the ways in which context is a necessary component of ethnographic research if we are to unpack the emancipatory potential of this research strategy. Invariably, these practices make for messy research, but it is the only way to work against the voyeuristic current that has long characterized ethnography. My research is not meant to offer transparency to the reader, but instead writes against culture and explores the ambiguity inherent in everyday life. In doing so, I work to resist our desires for empathy and paternalism and suggest that the power of ethnography exists in both what we can know and what remains outside of what can be known.

The study: An overview of the dissertation research project

This research project was undertaken to investigate the social significance of birth in an Amish community and looked at the experience of birth and the meanings that Amish women and men attached to it. As a sociologist, it was important for me to inquire into both the particularities of the birth process as well as investigate birth’s broader social relevance. Such a study lends itself to qualitative inquiry, as qualitative methods allow for the flexibility, variability and uncertainty that invariably arise when studying people’s everyday lives. This research project is rooted in “people’s experience, and examine[s] the world of people under theory’s auspices” (Smith, 2005: 2). Within any given community, birth is always both a practice and a symbol and thus requires a methodology that captures the nuances of the birth experience as well as addresses the significance of birth more emblematically. For these reasons, I employed an ethnographic investigation that drew heavily on participant-observation.

Ethnography reflects a genre of research that attempts to describe a social phenomenon (Dewalt and Dewalt, 1998). Operating under the assumption that a system’s properties cannot be understood independent of each other, ethnography approaches sociocultural systems as integrated rather than autonomous. As a result, in-depth immersion into the study community is often necessary to gain a more complete understanding of the study community. The process of ethnography is intended to offer insight into the common cultural understandings related to the phenomena under study (Creswell, 1998). To achieve this, ethnographers often involve themselves in the study culture and seek out community members which the researcher can observe and interview. This data is then reviewed and used to generate theory about the study subject or the community under investigation. Drawing on this fieldwork, ethnographic research focuses on the sociology of meaning of a given phenomenon in a particular community.

Participant-observation refers to an ethnographic research technique that relies on the researcher gathering data through regular exposure to particular practices of the research subjects.

Dewalt and Dewalt write, “Participant observation is a method in which an observer takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions and events of the people being studied as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their culture” (Dewalt and Dewalt, 1998: 260). Because I lacked familiarity with Amish customs and daily rhythms, this ethnographic method was useful—it allowed me to address my lack of knowledge through two years of in-depth cultural immersion. As an observer, I was able to study the cadence of Amish women’s daily life while gaining insight into the symbolic meanings they attached to significant life processes such as birth. Sustained observation yielded both small details (i.e. the vast majority of Amish women religiously do laundry on Mondays) and profound ruminations (i.e. the Amish never hold the midwife culpable in a death resulting from childbirth, and seek resolution through a reliance on faith) and these regular and sustained observations established a growing base of knowledge, albeit one that was always situated and partial.

My observations served as a primary source of data collection and were drawn from my attendance at prenatal visits, births and postpartum checkups, all of which occurred in the Amish women’s homes. In addition to observation, I conducted much of my data collection through the role of an active participant in pregnancy and birth care. In serving women as an apprentice and assistant midwife and doula, I provided labor support and pre- and post-natal care to the birthing women and their families. Acting as a participant legitimized my presence in their life beyond my role as researcher, and fostered a relationship that was built on mutual support and reliance. Relying on participant-observation facilitated my investigation of the particular practices of Amish birth – it allowed me to draw on my analysis of local phenomena to inform a theory of the interconnections between larger social processes (Eisenhardt, 2002). And while many have noted that the notion of participant-observation is inherently paradoxical, it is precisely this tension between becoming a fully invested active participant and a completely detached passive observer that allows the researcher to become a “vulnerable observer” (Behar, 1996).

Active participation in the research process served as a point of strength in both my data collection and my data analysis process. Dewalt and Dewalt find the benefits of this position of participant observer as being twofold, “First, it enhances the quality of the data obtained during fieldwork. Second, it enhances the quality of the interpretation of the data. Participant observation is thus both a data collection and an analytic tool” (Dewalt and Dewalt, 1998: 264). “To throw one’s self into the field, *body and soul*, is now not only a valid research stance, but marks investigatory excellence” (Irwin, 2006: 157). The particular ways in which participant-observation augments the research process are often difficult to articulate, and involve gaining a tacit understanding of the culture studied. Learning the cultural knowledge of a group of people involves the slow accumulation of wisdom gleaned from familiarity with the practices of everyday life – observing the small patterns, norms, jokes, silences as well as the body language and tone of personal interaction. Ethnographers have often used an apprenticeship to gain this knowledge and approach some semblance of intensive enculturation (Coy, 1989). I was fortunate to have the opportunity to use my midwifery apprenticeship experience as an entrance into the field, an opportunity that offered me “ways of knowing” that were distinctly Amish and encouraged me to “learn to see” from a new perspective (Coy, 1989: x).

Becoming a participant-observer

Because of the closed nature of the Amish community, it was necessary for me to enter the field via a gatekeeper, or “an individual who is a member of or has insider status with a cultural group” (Creswell, 1988: 117). I worked with a number of different community members and made several

attempts to secure a gatekeeper before I came into contact with the midwife who served as my primary liaison. I chose this particular midwife because of her two decades of experience working with a number of different Amish communities in Wisconsin, Indiana and Pennsylvania. I initially wondered if selecting a gatekeeper who was not Amish, but who served an Amish community, would be the best possible choice. I was concerned that Amish women would not identify as closely with a non-Amish midwife and her outsider status would serve as a wedge between herself and the women she served. Instead, I discovered that Amish women often seek out non-Amish women to serve as midwives, and prefer someone “outside” the community to attend them in birth. I give this phenomenon a more detailed treatment in Chapter 5, but it is worth noting that distinctions of “outsider” and “insider” do not always operate in their conventional senses, and interesting insights often precipitate from unlikely pairings of outsider/insider.

In return for her facilitation, I was required to accompany this midwife, who I will refer to as Vivian, to all prenatal and postpartum visits as well as assist her at the homebirths of her clients. During every stage of the research, I was concerned about consent and worked to ensure that all participants had a full knowledge of the study and their role in it. Each new client was asked to verbally agree to participate in the study after I had presented them and their families with a detailed summary of the research. All of the women we served agreed to take part in the study. They were informed that refusal to participate in the research in no way compromised the care that they would receive and were required to affirm their willingness to participate. Participants were informed that they would not be required to answer any question that caused them discomfort and were reminded of the voluntary nature of the research at several points throughout their care. Every effort was made to keep participants informed about the nature of the research and answer questions as they arose. Because there was no formal interview process and the data collection accrued slowly over time, the level of imposition that resulted from the project was extremely low – many participants concluded that they were pleased to have participated.

Once I had entered into the field, I was concerned that, even with a gatekeeper, I would not be able to gain access to Amish women at such a private moment in their lives. As an outsider, I wondered if my presence at pre- and post-care visits, as well as at the birth, would cause a disruption to the natural cadence of the event. Moreover, I suspected that the data I gathered would be influenced by my status as an outsider and wondered how my attendance would affect their birth and maternity care experience. In particular, I was concerned that my presence would distance Amish women from their caregiver and might create a tension between the women and their midwife. Both my gatekeeper midwife and I were concerned that my status as a non-Amish researcher may interrupt their interaction, and we spent much time discussing how to negotiate this situation. After much deliberation, we decided to give the clients many opportunities to discuss their concerns about my attendance and participation in their birth and maternity care. These moments of discussion were often promptly closed by the women; they assured us that they were comfortable and content to have me attend their birth and take part in their care. Short, focused responses typified the dialogue between the midwife and her Amish clients, and these matters were similarly succinct – my presence was not seen as unwanted or unwelcome in any way. This is not to assert that my attendance did not, in some way, shape the nature of the contact between these Amish women and their midwife, it merely suggests that I was aware that my presence would necessarily have an impact and worked to mitigate it in a number of ways.

Upon preparing myself for entry into the Amish community, I anticipated that the largest point of distance between my research subjects and myself was my being non-Amish. My lack of familiarity with Amish customs seemed to span a great chasm between us, and I was concerned that

it would be the single-most source of unease. In actuality, the point that regularly served to distance us was the fact that I do not have children, an issue that many women returned to regularly and focused on with great interest. Further, the fact that I was still attending school became a curiosity for many (Amish children only attend school until the 8th grade) as they sought to understand how and why a woman in her late twenties could be both childless and still in school. In many ways, this was the cultural rift that I had initially feared, but it materialized in a way that I had not expected – it was not me that was grappling with distinctive cultural patterns, it was my Amish subjects! I did not anticipate their interest in my reproductivity, even while I expressed sustained interest in theirs. Their concern over (what they perceived to be) my infertility and their willingness to sympathize with (their perception of what must mean) my failure as a woman provided me with a unique insight into the role of pregnancy and birth in Amish life.

In the same light, there were points of connection that I had likewise not anticipated. Seemingly trivial commonalities were often remarked upon – many of the clients were similar in age, a point noted by more than one woman. Several asked what year I had been born in and were pleased to learn that we were so close in age. In addition, many of my participants asked about my marital status, and upon hearing that I was married became visibly excited and opened up to me in new and interesting ways. I had not anticipated that my heterosexual privilege would manifest to such a degree in the research process. Racial privilege also colored my interactions with the Amish women I served, and I believe that – because of the lack of diversity of their population—my white skin allowed me access that would have not been possible for a woman of color. These forays into my personal life made me realize the ways that research is always situated—another researcher who was differently positioned would not have necessarily had similar interactions.

The research participants

The 36 women I studied were Old Order Amish living in the valleys east of Central Pennsylvania. Most women lived between 45 minutes and 2 hours away near the towns of Millheim, Rebersburg, Madisonburg, Loganton, Jacksonville, White Deer and Nippenose. All of the women had contacted this midwife for primary maternity care and very few of them had used her services in the past. Women ranged in age from 20-45 and approximately one-third were having their first baby. The remaining two-thirds were having their second through their fifth children, and two women were having either their sixth or seventh baby. All women were married and had completed 8 years of education. All women resided in a private domicile, though some did live in apartments attached to their parents or parents-in-law's home. Over half lived on active dairy farms, which served as their primary source of income. None possessed a full-time job outside of their daily household chores, though some did work informally doing sewing, quilting and baking. All women were part of a local church district and had a strong commitment to their faith. A minority of women had relocated to this area from afar – either because their husband lived here or because they had found an affordable farm or other gainful employment. The majority of women had grown up in nearby communities and, as a result, possessed strong familial ties and community structure. In fact, many of the women I studied were remotely related to each other, either through marriage or through indirect kinship. All but one of these women had a successful homebirth delivery, and one was transferred to the hospital for a cesarean delivery.

Seven of the births I attended were for non-Amish women wanting a homebirth. These women differ remarkably from the Amish sample, and serve as an interesting counterpoint for the research. These women were between the ages of 30-42, some were married and some were not, and all were living in or near the State College area. All of these women had some university educa-

tion and many were highly educated and involved with the local university in some capacity. Over half of these women held gainful employment outside of the home. None had grown up in this area and so none had a strong familial or community support structure. Five out of the seven women had successful homebirth deliveries; two women were transferred to hospital care and required a cesarean section delivery. And while there is much to be said regarding the differences and similarities between and among these disparate groups of women, I do not analyze the data gathered at these births until Chapter 6.

The ethnographic structure

Drawing primarily on feminist and critical work done on ethnography, I entered the field with a heightened awareness and some trepidation. Much has been done to illuminate the questionable history of ethnography and to make transparent its ethnocentric and oftentimes colonial momentum. Ethnographic researchers have long appointed themselves as spokespersons for those they research and in doing so have reinscribed hierarchies of race, class, and gender onto already marginalized groups of people (Murphy and Dingwall, 2001). Feminist critiques of conventional ethnography have focused on a variety of issues including power, voice and multiplicity and have demanded that ethnography be attentive to the complex histories that have come before (Lather, 1991; Behar, 1996; Hesse-Biber et al., 1999). Who speaks for whom, and why, are central questions asked by critical ethnographers, not the least because of the structures that they uncover and the mechanics that they expose. Feminists and other critics have questioned the very function of ethnography as an act of absolute truth-telling, and instead conceive of ethnographic work as yielding only partial insights and subjective truths (di Leonardo, 1991).

It is armed with these critiques that I entered the field – agreeing to become an apprentice midwife in order to gain access into one of the most closed societies in the US. Entry into the Amish community is virtually impossible, given the Amish's preternatural distrust of non-Amish society. Early attempts to meet and informally interview Amish women were regularly thwarted, ending almost before they began. Because I had no contact, bridge or gatekeeper to facilitate my entry into the community, I had little success communicating with Amish women. When the opportunity arose to apprentice with a midwife who served the local Amish community, I was eager to participate despite my lack of medical training or familiarity with labor and delivery. Thus began my two year-long apprenticeship and ethnography.

My role as apprentice demanded that I attend all pre-natal and postpartum visits with the midwife, Vivian, as well as assist with each labor and delivery. From the first day of my apprenticeship, Vivian (and the clients she served) viewed me as a participant rather than an observer and expected me to play an active role in the healthcare process. Household visits, both pre-natal and postpartum, followed similarly with me playing a central role in all of the birth care provided. So while participants were informed of my position as a researcher and consented to their situation as a research subject, these roles were often trumped by the dynamics that attended the caregiver/patient relationship that characterized the pregnancy and birth process.

And while 'active participation' typified my pattern of interaction with the Amish women and men that I studied, it was 'passive observation' that yielded my primary data. Because of the reserved nature of the Amish women, many of my direct questions went unanswered and I was forced to rely solely on sustained observation. Many of the topics that I engaged were seen by a number of participants as slightly distasteful or even taboo, and I quickly learned that forthright discussion was inappropriate. Working closely with a midwife who had 20 years of experience serving the Amish community helped me to clarify and interpret these observations – she frequently offered

insights into all matters Amish, ranging from social practices to local customs to familial relationships. This prolonged engagement with both the midwife and the Amish community enabled me to gain the trust of all who volunteered to be part of the project and helped to build and sustain relationships to the Amish women I served. In addition, it allowed me to become deeply familiar with the rhythm of Amish life and helped to situate this particular study within a broader understanding of Amish society.

Conducting research

Research consisted of participant-observation of prenatal and post-partum healthcare visits, as well as attendance at all births. I observed the interactions between the Amish women and their midwife, and was particularly attentive to the questions women asked and the knowledge that they sought from their midwife. Prenatal visits always happened on a Monday, as this is when Amish women do household laundry – a task that requires them to be at home for the entire day. Because they do not regularly use the telephone (many have access to a telephone and answering machine on their property but do not regularly visit it) scheduling an appointment would prove difficult and time consuming for the midwife. Instead, Vivian schedules all prenatal visits on Mondays, knowing that her clients will be home no matter what time she arrives. The pregnant women we visited were always working and looked forward to our visit as a break in their busy day of washing, wringing, carrying, lifting and hanging out their household's laundry. We would all gather at the kitchen table and occasionally some would offer us something to drink. Even though our visit was in many ways seen as a social call, it was rarely leisurely and the women often had a list of questions that they retrieved when we arrived. The atmosphere was always jovial and light and allowed me to see the ways in which these interactions walked the line between professional and intimate—a very different sort of healthcare model.

I was particularly attentive to how Amish women viewed their midwife, and I relied on verbal cues, voice inflection and other conversational patterns to understand her role in their lives. I gathered data on the sorts of questions that they asked and whether or not these questions had a specific midwifery component. I also analyzed the ways in which the midwife interacted with the women and charted the patterns that I saw developing out of these repeated conversations. This sustained observation allowed me to recognize which sorts of interactions were routinely expected and encouraged me to investigate the social significance of these patterns. Because the prenatal visits served two purposes—to check the health of the mother and to establish a relationship between the woman and her midwife—I paid particular attention to these early prenatal visits and gathered a variety of data from these initial meetings.

During a prenatal visit, Vivian would inquire into the woman's health and make general comments about innocuous topics such as the weather, a recent current event facing the community, or even a familial matter to which she had knowledge. At this time, the woman would send her older children outside or into another room, as they were not informed of her pregnancy or our role at the house. Once the children were out of earshot, Vivian would proceed with her regular healthcare maintenance, engaging in such activities as taking blood pressure and pulse measurements and administering a urinary test to check for pregnancy abnormalities. Vivian would discuss the woman's diet and answer any questions she might have about her pregnancy and the upcoming birth. The visit would then move to the sofa or the bedroom (depending on who was nearby and the woman's fear of being seen) and Vivian would engage in a variety of different observations of the pregnant woman including palpating the abdomen, measuring the fundus, and listening to the fetal heartbeat. Once this had concluded, everyone would return to the kitchen table to conclude

the visit and answer any final questions. During these prenatal visits, I assisted Vivian in charting the women's progress and kept duplicate copies of all medical records. I occasionally contributed to conversations, but primarily observed the proceedings, making notes and documenting particular events. Though these visits were regular and relatively uneventful, they added legitimacy to my position as an assistant midwife and helped to build a relationship between the birthing women and myself. They further allowed me to understand the significance of the patterned interaction of the prenatal visit, and enabled me to recognize deviations from it, often indicative of larger departures from the conventional midwife/client relationship, the consequences and implications of which I will explore in subsequent chapters.

As the birth neared, the women were given my home and cell telephone numbers as well as Vivian's number, and instructed to call us both until they got through to one of us. Because Vivian traveled to a variety of different areas, she occasionally had no telephone reception. In this event, women (or more frequently their husbands) would call me and alert me of the birthing woman's progress. Upon receiving the summons from either Vivian or the family, I would gather the limited supplies I brought to the birth – gloves, extra food, change of clothes, notebook – and drive to the house. This, too, was a benefit of attending numerous prenatal visits, as it was often necessary for me to navigate farm lanes in remote villages in complete darkness in order to reach these homes. Often, I was the first to arrive and would enter the house and survey the scene: checking on the birthing woman, putting water on to boil, organizing supplies and troubleshooting the site. While participating in the set-up, I was careful to observe the mood of the household and mitigate any concerns that the family had. I would assist Vivian in unloading her supplies and preparing the desired location for the birth. Women often chose to deliver in their living room or bedroom, and I would set up a birth stool and cover the furniture and floor with protective sheeting. Such active participation left little time for formal conversation, but allowed me the opportunity to witness the interactions between the birthing woman and her husband (who always attended the birth) as well as the birthing woman and her midwife.

Most women labored in the sole company of their husband, which left me alone with the midwife during labor. We often sat in another room entirely, and it is during that time that I was able to record many of my observations. I regularly used this time to speak with Vivian about her experiences with, thoughts on, and opinions of the different themes that I was investigating. She often answered questions that I had and interpreted various events of interest. Because labor was seen as a private business between a man and wife, we were often able to explore and discuss various themes while still maintaining contact with the laboring woman. Occasionally, the couples would join in our conversations and these discussions would grow into fascinating explorations of Amish culture and beliefs – moments which enriched my data immeasurably.

When birth was nearing, the midwife and I were summoned and began to play a more active role in the event. The midwife coached the woman and offered encouragement while I completed last-minute set up details and finalized arrangements. When the woman felt like moving to the birth stool, I would help to situate her comfortably, making sure that she had a regularly refreshed drink and a cool washcloth on her forehead. As the labor progressed to its final stages, I served as a second pair of hands to the midwife, passing her all necessary supplies. I was also responsible for checking the baby's heartbeat during the delivery and charting contractions and other important information. When the baby was delivered, I would cover the baby with blankets and hat and note the time of birth, as well as the time of placenta delivery. While the midwife checked the mother and the baby, I would begin the cleanup process and prepare food for the family. Within one week of the birth, I returned to the family for a post partum visit. During this visit, I would often discuss

the birth with the woman and reflect on the experience. Once I had performed various necessary checks on the mother and baby, I would engage in friendly conversation with the mother and father (if he was around) as well as with the mother's mother or mother-in-law who often arrived to help run the household. During these visits I was again an active participant, retelling and reflecting on the birth story and discussing the mother's experience of the event. So while these times offered rich opportunities for observation, my primary role was that of participant. I collected my observations after the birth by recording my thoughts as I drove home. These recordings were then analyzed and reflected upon throughout the research process.

Data analysis

"Because participant observation is perhaps the quintessential qualitative method, the question of reliability is critically important" (Dewalt and Dewalt, 1998: 287). I was particularly interested in issues of reliability and accountability in this project and sought to balance those concerns with the fluid nature of ethnographic data. As Wolcott states, "Precisely what ethnographic data consist of is so ambiguous that I sometimes wonder if the phrase presents us with another oxymoron, one that tempts us to refer to our research as though it really exists in tangible form" (Wolcott, 1999: 214). My data consist of the audio-logs that served as my field notes. These were recorded on an iPod device that stored the digital files until they could be downloaded onto my computer. The long drives to and from the research sites provided me with plenty of time to record my summary of the day's events as well as my over-arching observations. In addition, my conversations with Vivian were recorded as we drove to different prenatal and postpartum visits and we frequently discussed different clients – their particular stories and her knowledge of their families and communities. All of this material was reviewed throughout the research process and, in accordance with ethnographic protocol, all of my central themes were revised and retested throughout the data collection period (Eisenhardt, 2002).

Early on during the research process, I attempted to informally interview a number of the women I had helped deliver. Though these early interviews were carefully structured, with much attention paid to developing key questions around a few central themes, they were nearly a unanimous failure. Many of these interviews took place during my solo postpartum visits, providing me with unique access to Amish women who had recently birthed, and my questions were centered on their decision to use a midwife and the role of midwifery in the Amish community. Despite these carefully conceived questions, many women answered with the briefest of 'yeses' and 'nos' or resorted to the formulaic "That's just our way" to answer my every inquiry. I quickly became uncomfortable, as did the women I was interviewing, and realized that the particular interview format that I had begun with was not amenable to this research project. As Wolcott notes, "If you are asking questions that informants cannot answer, then you are not talking about their world. What they know, and how they have come to know it, are what matter, not what they do not know, and not what you know" (Wolcott, 1999: 213). Over time, I was able to develop a much more informal strategy for beginning conversations around my research themes without the more direct form of questioning with which I had begun.

My gatekeeper, Vivian, served as a further check on my data analysis. Our routine and regular conversations allowed me the time to posit my developing hypotheses to her and solicit feedback based on her extensive experience. The homes that we were visiting were often separated by an hour long drive and I was fortunate enough to be able to carpool with her during these visits. As we drove around the countryside, we spoke about the observations I had made, many of which were new to her – given her familiarity with the Amish, several of my points of interest had become

nearly invisible to her. Our involved discussions provided a point of check and balance to my data and her insight and wisdom often served to clarify the murkier aspects of the research – the “triangulation made possible [...] a stronger substantiation of constructs and hypotheses” (Eisenhardt, 2002: 14). Vivian’s expertise allowed me to pose a number of different hypotheses to her and she was able to assist as I synthesized my observations and reflected on the data I had gathered. She often offered insights that went beyond my particular data and shared experiences that either substantiated or disproved my claims. Her twenty years of experience working with a variety of different Amish communities provided a considerable amount of material from which to draw. Vivian played a key role in the data analysis process in that she was able to assist me in connecting the particular events that I experienced with her understanding of the more general trends in Amish society.

Because I myself was the primary instrument of data collection, I was constantly aware of the degree to which my personal perceptions shaped the nature of the research and as a result reflexively engaged with her on a number of different issues (Schensul et al., 1999). The particular themes that have precipitated out of this project result from two years of careful reflection as well as a rigorous commitment to transparency between myself, my research subjects and my gatekeeper. This is, after all, the cornerstone of ethnographic research – “keener observations, multiple instances, pervasive skepticism as to whether we have quite got it right” (Wolcott, 1999: 262). These multiple methods of data analysis fostered a process that encouraged considerable reflection on and revision of my central theoretical tenets and my two year engagement with this project allowed me much time to analyze my substantial data.

Feminist concerns with ethnographic research

Feminist critiques of conventional methodology have centered on the question of whether it is possible to alter traditional methods to serve the emancipatory principles of feminism, or whether a new feminist method is needed to meet those goals (Hesse-Biber et al., 1993; Visweswaran, 1997; Skeggs, 2001). Many agree that with careful attention and an active commitment, it is possible to achieve research that is less likely to reproduce inequality within society. “Positioning as a feminist practice is most committed to the situatedness and partiality of all claims to knowledge and hence contests the sort of essentialist rhetoric and rigid binarism as a cognitive mode (male/female, culture/nature) that has so biased questions of gender or “otherness” in language use” (Marcus, 1998: 198). With a primary focus on locating the researcher within the context of the research, feminists have critiqued traditional ethnographic work finding that it erases the social identity of the researcher. Such erasure perpetuates a myth of objectivity and supports the false assumption that the researcher is able to occupy a ‘view from nowhere’ (Haraway, 1985). Such strategies overlook the fact that all researchers leave their social finger prints on their work – academic inquiry always reflects the social position of the researcher (Harding, 1986). Moreover, feminists have demonstrated that the very nature of research chosen by scientists reflects the larger androcentrism within which our culture is steeped – the questions asked often produce answers that perpetuate popularly held assumptions about gender, race and class. Thus feminists suggest that researchers who reflect on their epistemological assumptions are more likely to explore their particular relationship to the research and less inclined to assert that their research is without vested interest.

Researchers concerned with producing work that attends to these feminist critiques necessarily inhabit the fringe of social science scholarship. Situated between the dominant system of sociological classification that typifies conventional research and the fluidity that distinguishes re-

search on people's lives, researchers are often torn between the two locations. "As outsiders angling for insider knowledge, professionals dependent on personal relationships for data, and members of research settings as well as the academy, field researchers ride the lines between and across multiple boundaries and the journey, as many have attested, can be emotionally and existentially uncomfortable" (Irwin, 2006: 160). And yet despite these tensions, such a position offers much epistemological insight – into both what we are capable of knowing and the ways in which that knowledge produced. Most interestingly, it is precisely research into the private and/or domestic aspects of social life that illuminates these points of friction and allows us to move towards an understanding of the social world that is more attentive to the experiences of those peoples who have not traditionally enjoyed the academic limelight. Simultaneously, it is imperative that we do not attempt (as has been the case in the past) to shape these new voices, particularly the voices of women, into conventional categories that have served to perpetuate inequality in society, and thereby limit their transformative potential (Smith, 1987).

This is perhaps the central dilemma for research that focuses on marginal groups that are conventionally seen as the 'other' either in terms of their non-Western location or their affiliation with non-dominant cultural identities (di Leonardo, 1991; Behar, 1996). A certain amount of interpretation accompanies all research and, within that process of elucidation, the voice of the research informant is necessarily hushed. And yet to imply that there exists the possibility of a true telling untainted by biased analysis is untrue. Instead, feminists suggest that the only hope for emancipatory research is through a more careful awareness of these pressures and how these forces shape the researcher's own position within the research process (Skeggs, 2001). "If ethnography is the writing of difference, and thereby takes place as a problematization of the representational, then the situatedness of the ethnographer becomes affirmed as, rather than a limitation to, the formation of understanding" (Van Loon, 2001: 281). Though this 'reflexivity' encourages scholars to locate themselves within the work, it does not demand that nothing can be known nor does it suggest that only those who share a particular experience can legitimately produce knowledge. Instead, this positionality implies that where a researcher is located (who she is and her particular situation) influences the knowledge that she produces – "the situatedness of knowledge is not seen as a limitation, but as a very productive point of departure" (Van Loon, 2001: 282). This process of honest disclosure about the research process fosters a higher level of transparency and acknowledges both the ambiguity and the subjectivity that attends research endeavors.

Rigorous qualitative research must attend to the position that the researcher plays in the development of the project and take up the unique situation that each person brings to the analysis. Much of this critical scrutiny takes place in the writing phase of the research and results in an embodied style of documentation with an actively present speaker. "In order to understand people's sense of their own everyday experience, we need to turn our attention to [...] the auto/biographical aspect of our own involvement as 'ethnographers'" (Van Loon, 2001: 281-282). My work follows in this tradition of exploring subjectivity and I worked throughout the project to consider how my position may affect the research process and outcome. Most significantly, I am concerned with my position as an outsider to the Amish community that I studied. I was not born Amish or Mennonite nor did I have any sort of distant familial connection to the Anabaptist faith. In every respect I was completely outside of any Amish cultural sect and I was aware of the ways in which this fact separated me from the women and men that I studied and distanced me from the overall timbre of the community. My position as a highly-educated American woman was often in direct contrast to the Amish women with whom I interacted.

And though I was confident that my educational status would be a source of tension in my relationships with my research subjects, there were a number of other issues that often took precedence over my schooling. Indeed, working with a group who leave school after the 8th grade made any discussion of college obsolete – those that did ask about the university were often more curious about the town of State College rather than interested in the college itself. The distinction between a bachelor's degree and a PhD was of little interest, and participants were much more interested in my personal life than in my academic credentials. I used a verbal consent procedure to gain informed consent about the research, and anticipated the participants expressing much interest in my affiliation with Penn State University. I would explain the nature of the research, my commitment to complete confidentiality and the voluntary nature of their involvement. After this exchange, participants would be much keener to learn about my non-academic life and continually returned to questions of home life in our exchanges.

The most popular topic of conversation, given the nature of my involvement with their community, was whether or not I had children myself. Upon learning that I did not, many were obviously taken aback. Because the women I studied were in the process of having and/or already had several children, this was a poignant mark of difference between us, and one to which they continually revisited. Because many women had begun childbearing in their early twenties, the fact that I was in my late twenties and had no children was of regular fascination. Questions often moved into an exploration of my marital status and a look of relief would spread over their faces when they learned that I was, in fact, married. Being married without children, as I will explore in later sections of the dissertation, is always seen as the result of a serious medical condition rather than a reflection of a personal choice, and many asked me quite frankly if I was unable to have children. Being able to share aspects of my personal relationship, particularly around issues of marriage, facilitated my entrance into the community and allowed me to briefly transcend my outsider status. Yet despite these brief interludes of insider status, my difference from these women was nearly palpable and I was constantly reminded of the myriad ways in which our lives diverged.

My position within a heterosexual relationship offered me particular benefits in terms of access and shared experience, but it also influenced the way that I saw particular events and interactions. Certainly, my familiarity with the heterosexual norms in my own society influenced my perceptions of Amish society and obscured a more attentive examination of sexuality within Amish life. In acknowledgment of this bias, I repeatedly returned to examine my own assumptions about heteronormativity within the communities I studied and reflected on the pitfalls of my own skewed perspective. More specifically, I focused particular attention on the relationship between the husband and wife (especially during the birth) and made a conscious effort to understand the unique dynamics of their interactions. The midwife's role in the community, as I will discuss in Chapter 5, was not limited to birth and often involved issues about sex and sexuality more generally. Because of this I became privy to a variety of insights that were outside the particular focus of this project, but nonetheless informed my larger understanding of women in Amish society. And though I do think that my own position within a marriage obscured a more critical understanding of this material, I also believe that my marital situation allowed a degree of comfort between women and myself that allowed such conversations to occur.

I further anticipated that my status as a non-Amish woman would confound the research process and stymie entrance into the community. However, working with a non-Amish midwife made my non-Amish status more legitimate. The dynamic personality of my gatekeeper allowed me to play a relatively minor role in the daily interactions that we had with Amish women and I was able to maintain some distance during many of our home visits. This space did offer me a valuable position

from which to view the interaction, though it did occasionally keep me from connecting to the women we served in an intimate and personal way. At many times throughout the research process, I struggled with the feminist critique of speaking for people, particularly when those people are members of a minority ethnic group or gender. In some ways, the Amish women of this study are both – being cast as the *other* by much of mainstream society (For examples of this see Weaver-Zercher, 2001). And though I felt profoundly involved in the lives of the women I studied, their relationship to me was always reserved and detached. I routinely wondered if I had the authority to report on my experiences and wrestled with the means by which I could speak about Amish women without speaking for them. This dissertation reflects my continued struggle with issues of voice – both my ability to honor the voices of the Amish women I studied and my desire to speak in a voice that captures the unique insights that resulted from my particular position within this community.

And what, exactly, was my position in the community? Did these women see me as a proper midwife's apprentice and assistant, or was I always (to them) primarily a researcher? Particularly during the early months of my research, I grappled with the ways in which I could appear legitimate as an apprentice and not be seen as just an interfering researcher bent on prying and snooping. To her great credit, Vivian worked steadfastly to legitimize my position with her clients. And after several months of rigorous midwifery training I did become a genuine resource to both her and the community. This position as actual assistant midwife and ethnographer often left me in a precarious position and I was occasionally unsure of which hat to don in particular moments. During this research process I was privy to a number of situations that I could not have been prepared for and during which I fought between my dueling roles. One such moment occurred when Vivian and I were called to a woman's home because this woman had stopped feeling her baby move and wondered if the baby had died. The moment was, for me, particularly poignant and I returned to it several times in my own writings and reflections. Here is an excerpt from my reflections:

On Silence

The Doppler is silent. There is no heartbeat. I sit on a hard chair in this empty bedroom, watching – staring out of the window. I see the river, swollen with the hurricane rains. I watch the land sigh under the weight of disaster and I watch her sigh under the weight of her own personal disaster. Her tears come silently. I want to run to her across these pine floors that have certainly felt the weight of death before and hold her and rock her and this dead baby inside her. This woman, whom I have never met, whom I have never even seen before and never will see again.

I stay in my hard chair and divert my eyes from her tears. I search the bare room and find nothing to draw my attention away. I am Professional. Legitimate. Authentic. Longing for a clipboard. This is just business, just routine, just life.

This IS life. This is the life that connects us to each other, to some sense of humanity and empathy.

I remain silent. Silenced by my own uncertainty, my own inability to know. Is this reverence, to look at death and be silent, silenced into a place where words hold no currency? Paralysis seems to be my respectability.

Be brave, be strong, look her in the eye and say the right thing. I want to be exceptional and exceptionally kind and capture her sadness in the blanket at the foot of her bed and show her that it is knitted with the tenderness and beauty and grief that envelopes us both.

But I do not. I cannot. I remain silent.

In the end, I did remain silent and did not offer any particular condolences, choosing merely to say “I’m so sorry” as I walked out the door. As Dewalt and Dewalt articulate, “To a large extent, the establishment of our own limits to participation depends greatly on our own background and the circumstances of the people we study. Our personal characteristics as individuals – our ethnic identity, class, sex, religion and family status – will determine how we interact with and report on the people we are studying” (Dewalt and Dewalt, 1998: 277). As I became more comfortable with my role as an apprentice and then assistant midwife as well as a researcher, I was able to see myself as a more active participant in the research process and this in many ways strengthened my position within the community. As the end of the data collection period neared, I was in many ways as central as the primary midwife and even had some responsibility for the primary midwifery care of the mother and infant. Many of my most profound moments came during these periods of active engagement and I am certain that my desire to be simultaneously both a midwife and an ethnographer resulted in a more robust project than had I adopted an ‘objective observer’ position.

On the possibility of writing an Amish ethnography

I began this project by wondering if my investigation would be a mere intrusion into the lives of these private people, an attempt to amass a collection of stories – a set of data – which would then be extracted from the community, processed and peddled as truth. This questioning speaks to a larger theoretical issue in ethnographic research, namely the place of ‘truth’ in ethnography. A search for ‘the ethnographic truth’ may in fact lead to the conclusion that ethnography is exploitative. Under such a pretension, I would be forced to exploit my informants and betraying their sense of privacy to tell their stories and achieve some sort of larger ethnographic truth. But instead of being trapped within this ethnographic dilemma, postmodern and post-structural feminists have challenged the assumptions that underlie the realism upon which this dichotomy is built. They have explored how we can do “feminist ethnography in ways that attend to the complexities of our desire for “realist tales” of women’s experiences” (Lather, 2001: 200) and how we can both “produce different knowledge” as well as “produce knowledge differently” (Lather, 2001: 200). Simply put, they have dismissed the notion of ‘the ethnographic truth’ and instead look for ways to reconceptualize what ethnography is, and what it could be. They have acknowledged that we, as feminists, want to tell women’s stories but at the same time want to refuse “the bias of romanticism” that has for so long spoken over the voices of women (Dewalt and Dewalt, 1998: 288).

These scholars have been the driving force behind the loss of innocence of feminist methodology. They have challenged the assumption that ethnographic problems can be solved with better ‘methods’ (Lather, 2001). Drawing on postmodern and post-structural critiques of knowledge and objectivity, they have instead asserted that the researcher cannot be separated from the research, and clear-cut distinctions between ‘self’ and ‘other’ must be refigured. Instead of seeking a less exploitative ethnography, these critics advocate using ethnography to “re-vision the ‘nature’ of the oppositions on which categories such as familiar/strange, self/other, man/woman, ethnographer/informant, depend” (Wheatley, 1994: 422). In doing so, they advocate an ethnography that is not content with research that results in the consumption of cultures. Instead they demand that we engender ethnography with a feminist imagination.

Ethnography can no longer be read as an impartial attempt to give voice to the voiceless, and such naiveté has been criticized as forwarding its own agenda, “attributing exotic, abstract es-

sences and characteristics to places and then naturalizing them so that the residents of those places come to be regarded as static, immobile 'natives' (Aggarwal, 2000: 20). Such has been the case for studies of Amish in general and Amish women in particular, and researchers continue to draw conclusions such as the following excerpt from a recent text:

"In the context of Amish society, for example, submission, humility, and self-effacement are virtues, to be actively striven for by men as well as women. According to one Amish minister: 'Being a woman means there is one more level of subjection than being a man, that is all. It doesn't mean that a woman is thereby being degraded, cheated, or despised. It is simply a fact of life, like being born a girl in the first place'" (Olshan and Schmidt, 1994: 229).

The authors naturalize the characteristics of submission and self-effacement to the Amish, and then use these characteristics as an explanation of why Amish women are frozen in their subjugated position. Their desire to 'tell the truth' about Amish women does not allow them to critically engage this quote or the larger questions about the agency of Amish women. Additionally, they are not able to theorize about their own positionality in the construction/consumption of Amish women. Adopting a realist position forces them to choose between a position of cultural relativism or advocacy for the equal rights of women. In the end they choose relativism, concluding "Their [Amish women's] view of the world is different than mine, so they reached different conclusions about how to live. Their conclusions are not THE WAY, but one way – a way that works for them" (Olshan, 1994: 229). Working from a position that severs subjectivity from other domains of social and material production undermines the power that ethnography can have as an emancipatory research strategy.

Postmodernists and post-structuralists have attempted to remedy this by encouraging researchers to consider their own position in the creation of knowledge. This is not the mindless realization that everyone has their own personal baggage to which many social scientists give a nod to as they continue to pursue objective truth and pure knowledge. Instead, it is the full mindfulness of multitude of ways in which a researcher is always complicit in the production of knowledge. As Donna Haraway suggests, we need to be aware of "the scholarly temptation to forget one's own complicity in apparatuses of exclusion that are constitutive to what may count as knowledge" (Haraway, 1997: 39). Such awareness destabilizes the idea that the researcher is somehow outside of the research and asserts "that there is never a single story and that no story stands still" (Lather, 2001: 209). It acknowledges the researcher's role in shaping what gets called data and what eventually gets refigured into knowledge.

Bringing such positionality into research moves the focus of research from capturing some cultural 'truth' to being concerned with the multiple interpretations of cultural meaning. In recognizing the partial and incomplete character of any ethnographic representation, I (as a researcher) was encouraged to acknowledge how my own research was and continues to be contextual and situated. "Ethnographic gazes have no essential implication in *prefigured* relations of power" (Wheatley, 1994: 422). Instead, our gazes are framed within and shaped by contextually specific ethnographic encounters. This, admittedly, makes for messy research. It is research without authoritative voice, it is work that is not clearly conclusive, and in short is "written out of a kind of 'rigorous confusion'" (Lather, 2001: 207). Such work focuses on "a process of layering complexity and foregrounding problems: thinking data differently, outside easy intelligibility and the seductions of the mimetic in order to work against consumption and voyeurism" (Lather, 2001: 207).

Attentive to this awareness, I am convinced that research on Amish women (for instance) cannot rely on assumptions of these women's "strength and clarity of purpose," their "quiet self confidence," or their "unassuming self-respect," nor can it quickly dismiss them as merely "sub-

missive” or “indifferent.”⁵ Instead such research must “write against culture” (Aggarwal, 2000: 20). No longer is the focus of the research on making the examined culture transparent. Instead, feminist ethnography asserts that we know “both too little and too much” (Lather, 2001: 205). Aware of our own subjectivity, we as researchers know too much about the ways in which we are shaping what constitutes knowledge, and at the same time know too little about the multiple ways that women (and men) actively adopt, rewrite and/or reject the power of cultural forces.

This awareness demands my refusal of the “mimetic models of representation and the nostalgic desire for immediacy and transparency of reference” that previous ethnographic work delivered (Lather, 2001: 205). Such knowledge challenges us to move away from the assumption that ethnographic work can (and should) uncover some hidden truth or expose underlying laws in a tidy, neat way. Ethnographic research need not clarify or simplify; it can never be easy or clean. But most of all, it needs to not propose to render all transparent. It needs to insist on “demystifying the ethnographic research process through documenting the indubitable messiness, complexity, and ambiguity of cultures as well as our relations with and experiences of them” (Wheatley, 1994: 413). Admitting that the ethnographic research process is a muddling through, a circular process of analysis, and internal as well as external endeavor brings to light the multifaceted way that knowledge gets produced through ethnography.

Doing this enables the researcher to avoid the “claims that ethnography implicitly fetishises subjects of ethnographic research by transforming them from the unknown (and potentially anxiety producing ‘other’) to the known (the reassuringly familiar). The worry is that ethnography engenders a false sense of competence in the reader, who feels that he or she has come to understand other cultures” (Pratt, 2000: 644). In short, we (as readers/consumers of conventional ethnography) are able to unproblematically gaze into other cultures/worlds/groups and take away various cultural ‘truths’ afforded to us by the researcher. We are able to empathize and in doing so are able to be sentimental, paternal and voyeuristic. The goal, then, is to begin to break down the boundaries that separate ‘us’ and ‘them’ and that confine our thinking to dichotomies; boundaries that do not allow for the complicated ways in which we are always both researcher/researched, and self/other. But I do not want to simultaneously let go of all the categories. Instead I want to use ethnography to destabilize the categories of us and them, where ‘us’ is a voyeuristic researcher and ‘them’ are the objects of my fascination/investigation (Lather, 2001: 214). Thus I am not perpetuating the practice of creating otherness through my research, continually reinscribing difference with the focus of my analysis. Rather, I hope that this research informs our understanding about why differences are theoretically useful while still allowing for their shifting nature.

The paradox that I continue struggle with is the tension between how I am to blur the line between self/other or researcher/researched while still preserving some sense of uniqueness within the culture I investigated. Should/can alterity be maintained in the face of such destabilization, and, because I want to assert that it can, how exactly do I do this? Is it, as Haraway suggests, that I need to hold these seemingly incompatible things up together because both or all are necessary and true (Haraway, 1985: 474)? Is it enough for me to be aware of my own discomfort with the contradiction? What will you, the reader of my ethnographic investigation, know about Amish women, and their lives and experiences – how will we together deal with these issues of knowledge? The knowledge that I produce is not the whole picture. Instead, I tell only the partial stories of my research participants. To protect their privacy and the particular access that I was given to their community, I cannot render all transparent and instead must shield certain aspects of the data I col-

⁵ These were all words that were used to describe Amish women taken from the first paragraph of Olshan and Schmidt text on women in the Amish society. see Olshan et al. *Op. cit.* p. 215.

lected. The stories I share are carefully culled from my data and were chosen for the larger themes that they reflected rather than for the anecdotal interest they offered. A number of stories were not included, not because they did not offer fascinating insight into Amish society, but because disclosing these instances may have compromised either my gatekeeper or my research subjects themselves. As a result of this necessarily limited disclosure, any pretense of the straightforward story is impossible, but it is my hope that we can hear the unspoken and/or the unspeakable that is present when people attempt to tell the story of their lives. I do not purport to play the expert and explain these Amish women's lives, instead I hope that this project goes part of the way to establishing a politics of not being so sure. In my analysis I reflect this by not giving in to your desire for an easy, tidy entry into the lives of my research subjects – I can't provide you with uncomplicated access. My narration will stutter, it will wonder, and it will wander. As a researcher I admit to traveling without a guide, and am not afraid of getting lost. From here we move forward without a map.

In conclusion

Critical feminist ethnographies have the potential to augment what we know about gender in society – particularly how gender constructions shape the daily lives and experiences of women and men. In this chapter, I discussed both the strengths and weaknesses of ethnographic inquiry and explored these implications within the context of my particular study. I presented the specificities of my participant-observation and the ways in which my research project was shaped by the emergent nature of the methodology. In my exploration of the notions of power and reciprocity (as concepts and as practices) in ethnographic research, I reflected on my own attempts to establish a truly reciprocal relationship with my research subjects. I concluded with a theoretical treatment of the possibilities inherent in ethnographic research and situated my particular project within a framework of critical feminist ethnography. I used this chapter to meditate on the possibility of doing feminist ethnographic research and provided the reader with insight into the complexities that attend such endeavors. These theoretical critiques shape the data analysis that follows in the next chapters and foreshadow the ways in which I evaluate the material I have collected. What ensues is a feminist assessment of my two-year long engagement with Amish birth and midwifery.

Chapter 3 The Landscape of Amish Society

They modify the milk machine to suit the church, they change
the church to fit the chassis, amending their lives with hook-and-eyes.

Their dress is a leisurely protest against chairmindedness.
We know their frugality in our corpulence. We know their sacrifice
for the group in our love for the individual. Our gods are
cross-dressers, nerds, beach-bums, and poets. They know it.
In their pure walk and practice do they eye us from their carts.

Excerpted from Why We Fear the Amish

A poem by Robin Becker

Introduction

In this chapter I review a variety of diverse literature in order to more clearly situate this particular study of Amish birth and midwifery. I begin by drawing on the extensive work that has been done on the Amish and explore the nature of Amish society, starting with their overarching philosophy to be 'in this world, but not of it.' By investigating their patterns of technology avoidance, strict code of dress and struggle to achieve ubiquitous similarity in all aspects of life, I demonstrate the degree to which Amish society is invested in preserving a decidedly non-material way of life within a mainstream society that is marked by rising levels of consumption and development. They have maintained a strict separation from non-Amish society through a variety of different mechanisms, all of which reinforce Amish difference and foster a detachment from popular American culture. In particular, I consider how the Amish use practices such as farming to preserve the unique identity of their culture. I further explore the ways in which reliance on a separate language usage and a private educational system maintain social separation and thus preserve the distinctiveness of Amish society.

In the second section of this chapter, I examine a variety of classic community and sociological theories to locate the structure of the Amish society within a scholarly framework. I employ a variety of continuums generated by such theorists as Tonnies, Weber and Durkheim, to assert that many aspects of Amish culture reflect a distinct community-centric spirit that marks it in opposition to current popular society. After presenting some recent critiques of these classic theories, I then proceed to a discussion of contemporary community theories and draw parallels between the theoretic constructions of 'community' as a concept and the practical structure of Amish society. My appraisal concludes with a discussion of social capital and reflects on the intricate patterns of Amish social interactions, considering the act of an Amish barn raising from this social capital perspective. Drawing on an analysis of current research on the Amish, I then review a number of topics that have recently served as the focus of academic inquiry. Specifically, I take up the subjects of Amish agriculture, Anabaptist faith and technological avoidance and summarize their lengthy treatment in the literature. I further discuss work that has been done on the elaborate patterns of Amish separation from mainstream culture and explore how certain aspects of mainstream culture do, at times, seep into Amish patterns of life and I touch on a few of the concessions that have been made.

To conclude this chapter, I suggest that much of the research on Amish society has been focused on the public sphere of Amish life and has been concerned with the work and life of Amish men. Drawing heavily on a feminist critique of conventional scholarship, I explore the notion of a

public/private dichotomy in traditional research and investigate the consequences of this division. I am particularly interested in the ways in which topics seen as consisting of 'private' matters (the home, women's work, reproduction, etc.) are regularly overlooked as legitimate sites of academic inquiry. Using the numerous interventions that feminist critics have made into the research process, I explore their critical appraisal of the scientific method and objectivity. I then apply this feminist assessment to work that has been done on Amish society and conclude that Amish women have been systematically overlooked in conventional research. And though I do review some recent work that attempts to address this academic oversight, I assert that there is still a substantial lack of research on Amish women. Ending with a consideration of what this means both for what we know about Amish women in particular and their society more generally, I suggest that our understanding of the Amish remains partial and requires sustained scholarly inquiry to correct this omission.

A discussion of Amish society

Scholars from a variety of disciplines have focused academic attention on the Amish. As a result, there is a substantial body of literature devoted to study of Amish society and their Anabaptist faith. This work has done much to illuminate the relatively unknown aspects of Amish society and to position Amish social structure within a more general sociological framework. As I will explore in greater detail below, scholars have long focused on the ways in which Amish society maintains a separate existence through their practices of technology avoidance and their aversion to American culture. Because of this sustained scholarship, we now know a great deal about the use of farming as a way for the Amish to maintain their separation and are beginning to understand the long term impacts associated with their move away from a primarily agricultural existence. Such research has also been useful in explaining the particulars of the Amish system of separate education and has broadened our understanding of the specificities of Amish culture, including their distinct language and way of dress. In general, the substantial body of work that has been done on the Amish has provided a wealth of information on this distinct culture and the structure of their society.

Since coming to America in the mid 18th century, the Amish have attempted to maintain an autonomous existence, and for the most part have been remarkably successful (Kraybill, 1993). Their rejection of many aspects of modern technology – particularly electricity and automobiles – has set them apart from mainstream US society. And though this rejection of technology has not been undisputed among the Amish – it has often been a process of negotiation and conditional acceptance – it has marked the Amish as culturally distinct. Relying on lanterns, horses and buggies, the Amish way of life has persisted for countless generations and continues to flourish despite the somewhat austere conditions under which members live. Doubling at a rate of about twenty years, Amish population now numbers near 200,000 and spreads from Pennsylvania throughout the northern portion of the Mid-West region of the United States and into southern Canada (Kraybill, 2001: 14). Nearly three-fourths of the Amish population currently resides in the tri-state area of Indiana, Ohio and Pennsylvania, including half of Pennsylvania's Amish who live in the original Amish settlement located in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

Striving to be 'in this world but not of it,' Amish have eschewed many of modernity's trappings and associate conspicuous consumption with worldliness, pride and greed. A strict dress code featuring dark colored clothing for women and men creates a visible division between Amish and non-Amish, as does their horse-drawn buggies and lack of electrical technologies such as televisions, cell phones and computers. All jewelry and ornamentation is foregone, including wedding rings and buggy reflectors. A concerted effort is made towards sameness, and everyone strives to

be similar in all ways. Possessions are minimal and practical and rarely carry embellishment of any sort. Art and decoration are largely rejected, though there is some appreciation for crafts and handmade goods that meet a particular need. Overall, however, the Amish make a collective effort to avoid all that might imply individuality, and see attempts to capitulate towards cultural trends – either by coveting luxuries or by outlandish displays of eccentricity – as succumbing to the worldliness of material society, believing that “A high look and a proud heart is sin” (Prov. 21:4, quote taken from Kraybill, 2001: 40).

Many have suggested that the Amish have maintained their separation from wider society through a reliance on farming as a primary occupation. Indeed, Hostetler argues that their austere lifestyle structured around hard labor and frugality in part facilitate a life of farming and allow the Amish to live with minimal interaction between themselves and those outside the Amish community. He suggests that a life of farming would not be possible without the thrift and economic prudence demonstrated by the Amish, and he explains that an Amish man “works and saves so that he can farm and support himself and his family with minimum interference from the world” (Hostetler, 1993: 114). And as the Amish population continues to grow, they are increasingly relocating to areas where non-Amish farmers cannot maintain a solvent farming operation, suggesting that the Amish’s fiscally prudent lifestyle coupled with their vast agricultural knowledge will continue to meet with success... allowing the Amish to remain disconnected from non-Amish society (Cross, 2004).

Increasingly, however, Amish men are leaving the farm to pursue non-agricultural work (Krep et al., 1994). The “lunchpail threat” as it has been termed (Kraybill, 2001a), has caused a growing sense of alarm within the Amish community as farmland becomes scarce and men move from agricultural work to small business and manual labor employment. Growing rates of urbanization coupled with the high growth rate of Amish societies has led a significant number of Amish families away from their farming lifestyle, much to the chagrin of the Amish bishops and fellow community members. Concerns over the possibility of importing ‘worldly values’ or the fear of compromised community commitment has left many wondering about the long term impacts of this migration away from an agricultural economy. Many Amish have successfully begun small-scale business enterprises, choosing to make furniture, shoe horses or engage in other such retail and service work. The flexibility associated with owner-occupied employment has allowed the Amish to remain in control of their schedules and has given them the flexibility necessary to accommodate their commitment to their community and their family (Kraybill, 2001a). These employment opportunities have helped to mitigate the pressures associated with the lack of farm employment and have allowed the Amish to retain their cultural distinction without requiring them to integrate into more mainstream economic sectors.

Relying on a distinct language has certainly helped to maintain separation from the outside world. Amish children learn Pennsylvania Dutch (the ‘Dutch’ comes from a slurring of the German word ‘Dietch’ and does not refer to the Netherlands, but rather to the German which serves as the root of their dialect) as their first language and speak it fluently before they begin to learn English. Indeed, many young children do not learn any English until they attend school. Communication between Amish adults is regularly done in Pennsylvania Dutch and each region has its own particular inflection and pronunciation. And while the primary Amish bi-monthly newspaper that serves the Amish population is published in English, many of their newsletters and other documents are written in Pennsylvania Dutch. Reliance on an exclusive language is one way that the Amish maintain a disconnection from mainstream American society.

An additional way in which the Amish have sustained a segregated society is through the development of a separate educational system. Since 1938, when Amish contested the large-scale

consolidation of schools and the disappearance of the small, rural, one-room school house, the Amish have provided a separate system of education to their children. Staffed primarily by young women who have recently graduated (but have not yet married), these schools generally serve students from first through eighth grade in small one or two room schoolhouses. Here, children learn both Pennsylvania Dutch as well as English, coupled with basic math skills, geography and history. Woven into their lessons are myriad teachings of a religious nature and all students participate in the prayer and hymns that accompany their lessons. This communal educational structure reinforces the importance of community and encourages a spirit of cooperation while maintaining a separation from the mainstream values that often attend non-Amish schools (Hostetler, 1993: 177-82).

The community school system fosters a strong commitment to the local collective, an allegiance that plays a central role in Amish life. Community and cohesion are valued over individualism; social responsibility is a common theme regularly reinforced in multiple ways, both in school and at home. The Amish define their community through the church district, which serves as the primary social unit in Amish society. The church district represents a congregation of families that share a neighborhood as well as a worship service. Because grown children regularly live near their parents and/or other relatives, church districts often consist of a network of extended families and neighbors who are connected through marriage. As a result, each member of the church district is intimately tied to others and is connected through a linkage of friends and family. These ties have been the subject of inquiry as they provide a unique insight into the success and staying power of Amish society.

The Amish disavowal of technology has further maintained their separation from mainstream society. Avoiding ownership of telephones and automobiles has been a central tenet of Amish life. This is not to imply that Amish do not make use of multiple technologies, including phones, cars, and electrical appliances. Ownership is a central component in the discussion of technology, as many Amish are allowed to hire drivers, use a neighbor's phone or even rent a tractor or pesticide applicator. The increased mechanization of agriculture, coupled with the growing number of Amish who are working off the farm, further complicate the discussion and suggest that questions over appropriate uses of technologies will be continually negotiated. "Lines are drawn, erased, and re-drawn in a continual process of negotiation – trying to strike compromises between the forces of tradition that fear any change and the reckless voices of progress that hanker after every novelty" (Kraybill, 1994: 36). Concessions happen within each church district, and it is not uncommon for certain districts to make allowances that other districts oppose. So while one area may allow rollerblade in-line skates, the neighboring district may be strictly opposed to their use. Technological adoption is considerably fluid, so that, for example, while "self-propelled riding equipment such as a riding lawn mower is forbidden, electric wheel chairs are widely used by the disabled" (Kraybill, 2001: 115). The careful adoption and rejection of technological advances has allowed the Amish to maintain cultural distinction and has fostered their desire to be 'in this world but not of it.'

The structure of Amish community: A theoretical investigation

The field of community sociology has spent a vast amount of time defining and refining a workable notion of 'community' (Hillery, 1955; Bender, 1978; Fowler, 1991; Wilkinson, 1991; Etzioni, 1996). Decades of study on both rural and urban areas has generated a substantial body of work that speaks to the complexity of the concept. And as scholars mark out what gets called *community*, it is interesting to note that much of this theoretical work aligns with the tenets of Amish

society, particularly the centrality of concepts such as ‘communality’ and ‘cohesion’. Many of the prominent community theories within the field delineate characteristics that are central to Amish life – a homogeneous society (Tonnie, 1988), a focus on networks of kinship and reciprocity (Hillery, 1955), and a privileging of the group over the individual (Bender, 1978; Wilkinson, 1991). Thus a review of historic and current community theory situates Amish society within a framework and provides some theoretical context for the specificities of Amish life.

As has been suggested above, Amish society is squarely focused on the communal relationship and the exclusion of the non-Amish. Easily characterized as a *Gemeinschaft* society according to Ferdinand Tönnies’ historical work on sociological theory, the Amish society places a high value on the linkages that exist between members of the group and is exclusive and exclusionary when interacting with those who are not Amish (Lyon, 1989: 82). Embodying all that Tönnies’ typified as rural living within his *Gemeinschaft/Gesellschaft* continuum, Amish life reflects the principles of communalism and independence that are associated with a *Gemeinschaft* community, rather than the urbanism and integration that reflect a more *Gesellschaft* orientation. And though Tönnies’ continuum theory was published at the turn of the century, it is still a useful way of characterizing Amish life, particularly because Amish society is built on the dismissal of transportation, electrification and urbanization – all features that exemplify the *Gemeinschaft* typology (Tonnie, 1988). The Amish community focuses on maintaining strong and healthy relationships between community members while eliminating all but a minimum level of interaction with the outside world.

Many comparisons can also be found in Emile Durkheim’s sociological theory of *mechanic solidarity*. Durkheim likens *mechanic solidarity* to the relationship that parts of a machine have to the whole, each serving a particular function for the greater good. In his schema, a society demonstrating *mechanic solidarity* reflects a significant homogeneity and is encouraged to privilege a communal identity over an individual one (Durkheim, 1893). Durkheim juxtaposes this concept – which is itself a derivative of Tönnies’ earlier conception – against *organic solidarity*. Durkheim asserts that societies exemplifying characteristics of *organic solidarity* often possess a more elaborate division of labor and members of the society “are no longer grouped according to their relations or lineage, but according to the particular nature of the social activity to which they devote themselves” (Durkheim, 1893: 143). And while Durkheim favored societies that tended towards organic solidarity, his continuum theory continues to be useful in understanding different levels of social development.

Tönnies theory of a *Gemeinschaft* society, Durkheim’s thoughts on *mechanic solidarity* and even Max Weber’s notion of *communalization*, all find relevance in today’s Amish society. Today’s Amish community prides itself on the maintenance of familial and social linkages (Weber, 1962). Amish society stands in stark relief to Weber’s opposing characterization of society as *aggregation* – a society where increased levels of competition and antagonism typify interactions. Much of this intense *communalization* or communitarianism comes from the routine practices and rituals that happen on a daily basis, serving to strengthen each individual’s allegiance to their community. These continuums, which attempt to classify various community structures, remain influential in the field of community sociology and have continued to shape the ways in which community theorists see communities.

These continuum theories, as they have been termed, have not escaped the critical gaze of the academy (Buttel, 1988). Most obviously, continuum theories have been used to demarcate a rural/urban division in society, and scholars have long criticized these early theories as overstating the differences that exist between rural and urban areas (Dewey, 1960). Most prominent in these critiques has been a dismissal of the diametrical opposition in which these positions have been cast.

Instead, it has been argued that the differences between rural and urban areas were “real but relatively unimportant” (Dewey, 1960). Moreover, the continuum theories have largely “ignored concepts such as class, power and ideology, fundamental to the analysis of both rural and urban social structures” (Buttell, 1988: 97). Furthermore, a romanticization of the rural attends many of these theoretical positions and suggests that the urban areas exist without ‘community’ or communal sentiments (Thorns, 2002). And finally, scholars have criticized these early continuum theories for being based upon a “model [that] was generated out of the experience of a largely European society at a particular moment in its development” (Thorns, 2002: 26). The rural to urban transition has not been a universal one and is marked by the spatial variations in each locality. Generalizing from these very particular moments in history has proved flawed and has called into question the validity of continuum theories. As a result, many current scholars have attempted to reformulate these early ideas into conceptual frameworks that can speak to today’s rural communities.

Many of the key theorists in community sociological theory address these critiques in their effort to refashion continuum theories to more clearly define the concept of ‘community.’ While doing so, their definitions echo modern-day Amish life and exemplify all that characterizes Amish society. Thomas Bender incorporates a few of themes from Tonnies, Durkheim and Weber in his definition of community. He writes:

“A community involves a limited number of people in a somewhat restricted social space or network held together by shared understandings and a sense of obligation. Relationships are close, often intimate and usually face to face. Individuals are bound together by affective or emotional ties rather than by a perception of individual self-interest. There is a “we-ness” in a community; one is a member. Sense of self and of community may be difficult to distinguish. In its deepest sense, a community is a communion” (Bender, 1978: 8).

And while this definition is meant as a general portrayal of ‘community’ it closely corresponds to the nature of Amish life.

More recently, noted community theorist Kenneth Wilkinson further outlined the boundaries of what constitutes a community by introducing his notion of a *community field*. Wilkinson suggests that communities exist because of “...a field of community action – collective efforts to solve local problems and collective expressions of local identity and solidarity” (Wilkinson, 1991: 3). Wilkinson’s focus on the community as an interactive field nicely aligns with the Amish concept of *Gelassenheit*, or submission – both to the community and to God (Kraybill, 2001a: 29). The Amish belief in *Gelassenheit* results in a society structured around a *community field* – one that “regulates the tie between the individual and the community by transforming the energies of the individual into cultural capital” (Kraybill, 2001a: 30). For the Amish, preserving the *community field* requires yielding and submission, but the community that grows out of such individual sacrifice is, to their thinking, well worth the surrender.

Most indicative of these academic conceptions of community – ranging from Tonnies’ *Gemeinschaft* to Durkheim’s *mechanic solidarity* to Wilkinson’s *community field* – may be the famous Amish frolic, where members of a church district rapidly rebuild a barn, house or shop that has been compromised by fire or flood. Supplies are purchased through a community fund and all labor and food is donated. A neighbor in need always trumps any personal obligation and a strong network of ties between members of a church district – often stemming from childhood – are regularly strengthened in acts of commitment ranging from small to large. Such *communalization* or *mechanic solidarity* is typical in a variety of daily activities within Amish society and maintain

relationships built on shared kinship and shared faith. These networks reflect the ability of the community to act (or re-act) and the Amish have always demonstrated an extraordinary commitment to the group welfare. A number of regular occurrences foster social capital among the Amish and are given great cultural significance in daily life.

In fact, social capital as a concept is squarely rooted in many of the classic continuum theories mentioned previously. In an effort to capture the complex relationships that characterized rural areas, scholars have developed the notion of social capital from an examination of the mutual relationships inherent in a *Gemeinschaft* community, or one that expresses high levels of *mechanic solidarity*. Portes writes:

“Social capital finds its classical roots in Durkheim’s theory of social integration and the sanctioning capacity of group rituals. As in the case of reciprocity exchanges, the motivation of donors of socially mediated gifts is instrumental, but in this case, the expectation of repayment is not based on knowledge of the recipient, but on the insertion of both actors in a common social structure. The embedding of a transaction into such structure has two consequences. First, the donor’s returns may come not directly from the recipient but from the collectivity as a whole in the form of status, honor or approval. Second, the collectivity itself acts as guarantor that whatever debts are incurred will be repaid” (Portes, 1998: 9).

Social capital suggests that people who invest in their community do receive some return on that investment (Putnam, 1993). For the Amish, this philosophy has become a central tenet of life, and their commitment to investing into their community blurs the line between family and acquaintance. And while the Amish do not invest in their community with the sole intention of recovering the interest from their initial investment, they nonetheless do gain access to community capital. Their high level of ‘bonding capital’ (Gitell and Vidal, 1998) serves as a resource upon which any may draw in a time of need.

Social capital is most often apparent in disasters when Amish families need help and a barn-raising ensues, but that is not the sole evidence of its existence. ‘Visiting’ is a national sport among the Amish and serves as a sort of social glue that bonds the community together (Kraybill, 2001: 150). Members regularly venture across the lane and across the country to maintain connections with family and close friends. Amish patterns of worship (every other Sunday) further facilitate this and families often meet on their ‘off’ Sundays. Practices such as the circle letter, a chain letter that is sent around a group of friends or family with each member adding an update before sending it along, further build a connection among members. Large pieces of farm equipment are often collectively owned and regularly shared among a small group, requiring men to move jointly from field to field when planting and harvesting. Labor intensive practices such as picking and canning require a similar response and women often travel from house to house during busy seasons. For the Amish, “Spiritual salvation comes via the grace of the community” (Kraybill, 2001b: 19). So while an attachment to a community spirit is evident in the barn-raising and the home rebuildings that happen after disaster strikes, it is the daily domestic practices of visiting and collective work that establish and maintain the social capital within the Amish society.

Some have suggested that social capital within the Amish society is further maintained by a flat distribution of power within the community (Kraybill, 2001: 98). Each church district is led by a bishop, who may often oversee two separate districts. The bishop is chosen from the two or three ministers who, along with a deacon, serve each district. All of these positions are filled from the congregation and represent the entire hierarchy within Amish life. These positions are not sought out – indeed the Amish consider it a burden to be placed in a position of power and the congrega-

tion prays for difficulties that lie ahead for their leaders. (Kraybill, 2001) Because deacons, ministers and bishops know every member of their congregation, the policies and regulations that they make are responsive to the particular needs of the district. All members of the congregation are very close to the central decision-making structure of the community because of this lack of bureaucracy and relatively flat distribution of power within Amish society, and this serves as a further point of cohesion within the community (Kraybill, 2001: 98).

This horizontal distribution of power does not extend to Amish women, who cannot serve as bishops themselves (Kraybill, 2001a; Johnson-Weiner, 2001). While they are permitted to vote in church business meeting and to nominate men for bishop duties, Amish women are excluded from all of the positions of formal power within Amish society. “The church teaches that, in the divine order of things, wives are expected to submit to their husband’s authority” (Kraybill, 2001a: 83). This does not suggest that women do not hold a significant amount of informal power, both within the family and within the society more generally. Indeed, the conventional division of labor gives women significant control over the domestic arena. And because of their close familial connection, Amish women often have significant and arguably powerful networks of relations that can be accessed when necessary (Johnson-Weiner, 2001). Moreover, a growing number of women are operating small businesses such as quilting, baking, crafting, etc. and about 15% of Amish businesses are now operated by Amish women (Kraybill, 2001a). So while a cursory analysis suggests that women in Amish society are relegated to positions of powerlessness, a number of trends suggest that Amish women not only have access to networks of kin but also have increasing access to economic power as well.

Research on the Amish: trends and reflections

The Amish have long been a subject of academic fascination. Fields as diverse as anthropology (Olshan, 1991), religious studies (Kraybill, 1991; Cosgel, 1993), political science (O’Neil, 1997), medicine (Hoffert, 1998; Elliott, 2004; Greksa, 2004), history (Hostetler, 1993; Cosgel, 1993), geography (Cross, 2004) and rural sociology (Krep et al., 1994; Smith et al., 1997) have all, at some point, placed the Amish at the center of investigation. As a result, there exists a great deal of information on the Amish, spanning a variety of different disciplines. Certain topics have remained popular over the years, and several themes run through much of the work. In particular, sustained interest has been focused on Amish patterns of agriculture (Cosgel, 1993; Blake et al., 1997; Cross, 2004), their avoidance of technology (Tenner, 2005), the Anabaptist faith (Kraybill, 1991; O’Neil, 1997), and the general exclusivity of the Amish community (Gruter, 1986; Reiling, 2002). Each of these topics has been taken up in a variety of ways over the past several decades.

Agricultural interest has focused on issues ranging from their stewardship of the soil to their crop diversity (Cosgel, 1993; Blake et al., 1997; Cross, 2004). Their low energy production has been the focus of much investigation, as has their tools and techniques. Though there are a few Amish farms that sustain viable organic operations (the vast majority of Amish farms rely on pesticides and fertilizers) there has been increasing interest in Amish farms that are beginning to orient their farms towards organic production (Blake et al., 1997). Many have investigated the economic viability of Amish agriculture and examined the significant role that Amish agriculture has begun to play in the wider economy (Cross, 2004). More recently, scholars have speculated about the relative retreat of farming from the Amish way of life – particularly the lower likelihood of Amish relying upon an agricultural livelihood as more Amish move to various micro-enterprises (Smith et al., 1997). Despite this more recent attention on non-agricultural economic pursuits, agriculture has

remained a primary site of inquiry and promises to continue playing a central role in scholarly investigations about the Amish.

Anabaptist faith continues to be of particular interest to scholars both within and outside of the religious studies field (Kraybill, 1991; Kraybill 2001b; Hostetler, 1993; Cosgel, 1993). Because the Amish faith is so completely intertwined with all aspects of Amish life, it poses much fascination to sociological scholars as well as those interested in the particular tenets of the Anabaptist religion (Hostetler, 1993). A focus on the connections between faith and community structure has surfaced as a common theme in research and scholars have focused on the ways in which Amish faith encourages a particular community structure (O'Neil, 1997). Much ink has been spilled detailing the inter-workings of the Amish community, and scholars have waxed poetic over the ways in which Amish religiosity restrains a strong personal identity in favor of a communal allegiance - personal humility and submission to the group is prized over flamboyance and ostentation (Kraybill 2000a; Kraybill, 2000b). Research investigating the ways in which concepts such as 'work' and 'family' are integrated into Anabaptist teachings has also received considerable attention, with a particular focus on how Amish socialization happens through education (O'Neil, 1997). Sociologists, community theorists, and anthropologists have joined religious scholars in their investigation of Anabaptism and its connection to the intricate structure of the Amish community (Hostetler, 1993; O'Neil, 1997; Kraybill, 1993, 2001a, 2001b; Luloff, 2002).

A substantial amount of research has focused on the Amish disavowal of modern day technology (Kraybill, 1994, 2000a, 2000b; Elliott, 2004; Tenner 2005). Most notably, their reliance on horse drawn carriages and their refusal to use public electricity have remained a continued source of academic interest, and researchers have investigated how this rejection has come to play a central role in the structure of Amish life. This denial of many forms of modern technology has been particularly remarkable partly because Amish do not avoid using automobiles and indeed often hire cars, vans and busses (along with drives) to shuttle them where they need to go. In addition, milking stables are increasingly fitted with the latest equipment run on diesel power or gas generator. Home appliances are also regularly retrofitted to run off of the household generator and everything from washing machines to blenders to refrigerators vie for space within the Amish home. Amish technological reticence has been troubled by their inflated numbers of genetic disorders, and they are increasingly finding themselves tied to sophisticated medical science (Elliott, 2004). At times, controversy over certain technologies has threatened to split the community and these moments have received careful review. "In all of these areas, the Amish have struggled with the forces of modernity, trying to remain faithful to their heritage while ever adapting to new forces, both internal and external, that have pressed for change" (Kraybill, 1994: 37). Researchers have suggested that the Amish's careful and methodical acceptance of certain technologies and a rejection of others has preserved the small scale, labor intensive and decentralized way of life that characterizes Amish society (Hostetler, 1993; Kraybill, 1993, 2001a, 2001b).

The elaborate ways in which Amish society remains separate from mainstream American life has been the subject of much inquiry. Academic work has investigated their distinct dress (Graybill, 2002; Schmidt, 2002) as well as their particular rites and rituals (Hostetler, 1993; Kraybill, 2001a; Reynolds, 2002). Their practice of excommunication, or shunning members of their community who transgress against Amish doctrine, has received considerable attention, both for its severity and for its effectiveness in ensuring community stability and cohesion. As Amish doctrine states, "An offensive member and open sinner [must] be excluded from the church, rebuked before all and purged out as a leaven and thus remain until his amendment, as an example and warning to others and also that the church may be kept pure from such 'spots' and blemishes (The Dordrecht Confes-

sion of Faith, quoted in Kraybill, 2001a: 137). Amish districts will occasionally shun a member for a serious transgression against the community or the faith. Amish bishops use shunning as a last resort, and it is generally imposed after substantial counseling and warning about the severity of the situation. Once a member has been shunned, everyone – including family, friends and neighbors – is obliged to sever all contact and renounce their existence. Until there is an apology, repentance or acknowledgement of wrong doing, the member remains excommunicated and community life moves on without them. Kraybill finds that “the ban is the ultimate forms of social control. When mavericks sidestep the Ordnung [Amish doctrine] or ‘jump the fence too far’, they are disowned to preserve the integrity of the moral order. Order, authority and identity take precedence over tolerance” (Kraybill, 2001a: 137).

More recently, scholastic analysis has focused on rumspringa, or run around, the period between the end of school and before marriage when young Amish are allowed to explore the outside world, date members of the opposite sex and decide whether or not to join the church and undergo baptism (Reiling, 2002; Shachtman, 2006). Most recently, this topic has become all the more focal with the release of the new documentary detailing the undisciplined and at times riotous behaviors of a small number of Amish youths. *Devil’s Playground*, a recent documentary that sensationalizes the rumspringa period in one Amish community, represents the continued fascination that mainstream America has with “the Amish” (Weaver-Zercher, 2001). In a desire to “affirm their own values vis-à-vis the Amish” (Weaver-Zercher, 2001: 153) American popular culture has increasingly focused on the period of rumspringa. Current reality tv shows such as *Amish in the City* further reflect this enthrallment, while dramatizing the numerous ways in which Amish culture often mirrors our own variegated and occasionally unseemly society. Queries into the relationship between insiders and outsiders, and the blurring of that boundary that happens at rumspringa, continue to play a central role in work focusing on Amish society and offer insight into both what we know about the Amish and what we know about our own society more generally.

In many ways, the boundary between Amish and non-Amish society is becoming increasingly tenuous and this has become a point of academic interest for a growing number of scholars. Many concessions have happened on the farm as Amish agriculturalists submit to the growing pressures of industrial production. No longer do Amish tend a diverse patchwork farm of livestock and field crops, instead intensive dairy farming has become the primary operation on the Amish homestead (Stoltzfus, 1973) and many have abandoned the farm all together in favor of micro-enterprises and small business ventures (Smith et al., 1997). Around the barn it is not uncommon to see a diesel tractor (albeit with the required metal rimmed tires to prevent street driving) wheeling about, nor to hear the whine of a gas powered generator cooling the bulk milk refrigeration tanks. These high-cost production strategies, coupled with the rising cost of farmland, have necessitated a reliance on outside capital to finance such debt (Kraybill, 2001a). Increasingly, Amish farmers are relying on banks and creditors to enter farming or other owner-run business ventures. Dependence on commercial credit has certainly jeopardized the self-reliance that has long characterized Amish society, though whether this is merely a further adaptation that will facilitate the continuity of the culture or undermine it entirely remains to be seen.

These topics have formed the cornerstone of research into Amish life for several decades. From a variety of disciplines, scholarship investigating the “riddles of Amish culture” (Kraybill, 2001a) has inquired into the public sphere of Amish society and primarily focused on the work, religion and education within the Amish community. Such a focus is not uncommon, and the vast majority of historical, anthropological and sociological work uses the public sphere as a point of entry into any cultural analysis. And while much can be gleaned from research that is situated

around these topics, it can often obscure as much as it reveals. A research focus that concentrates on the public sphere of activities suggests that events happening in other arenas, particularly the private sphere, are insignificant. In addition, overlooking the importance of research in multiple arenas may result in a distorted image of the topic at hand. As a result, research on Amish society that systematically overlooks the role of women may in fact be drawing an incomplete and possibly inaccurate picture of Amish life.

Feminist critiques of conventional research: The missing Amish women

For several decades, feminist scholars in a number of different disciplines have suggested that conventional research has often been conducted from a male perspective that takes the male point of view as the objective norm (see for example the collected works amassed in Benhabib and Cornell, 1987). This tendency, while not always done intentionally⁶, has led to research that focuses on topics which reinforce male superiority and enable continued patterns of male domination in society (Narayan and Harding, 2000). Scholarship which privileges masculinist enterprises over those relegated to women has become ubiquitous and is largely seen as appropriate and worthy research. Indeed, many researchers have come to believe that work focusing on male-centric domains of society constitutes legitimate research, while scholarship that take up projects outside the realm of men serve merely as an addendum, supplementing the more worthy work. Corresponding to the Enlightenment notion of an impartial moral reason, this tendency “leaves difference, particularity and the body behind in the private realms of family and civil society” (Young, 1997: 194). Such androcentrism has resulted in research that obscures women’s experiences and devalues the contribution that women make in all aspects of social life (Hawkesworth, 1998).

The dichotomy between the public and private spheres of social life has been a central focus in feminist scholarship (Young, 1997). Essential to their analysis is the discovery that the civic public is often viewed in a variety of research as impartial and universal. Suspicious of this, feminists have investigated the ways in which the generality of the public has been constructed via a systematic exclusion of those who do not support this narrow conception of the civic public. In particular, this exclusion has been leveled against women, people of color and those not owning property or otherwise not having access to capital. More recently, the public sphere has been reimagined to exclude those who identify with an alternative sexuality, differently abled people and those who are affiliated with a minority religion or nationality. Feminist philosophers emphasize that this omission stems from the assumption of an impartial point of reason and, whether intentional or not, relying on the ‘public’ as an operational concept within academic research necessarily bifurcates society and obscures the perspectives of the minority.

Central to this feminist appraisal is concern over the certainty of what can be known. In particular, feminists have taken up the notion of *objectivity* and leveled several critiques against the ways it has masked patterns of male supremacy in society. Conceptually, *objectivity* suggests the absence of bias and error in intellectual inquiry, though feminists have demonstrated that such has not been the case. Instead, much effort has gone into presenting the ways in which everything from basic observations and beliefs to various research methods to general institutional practices reflect a deep and systematic pattern of androcentrism (Hawkesworth, 1998). As I detailed in Chapter 2,

⁶ Uma Narayan and Sandra Harding assert that “It is worth recollecting that the deepest forms of sexism and androcentrism – the ones most difficult even to identify, let alone to eradicate, have not been those visible in the intentional actions of individuals (which is not to excuse such or covert sexism and androcentrism.) (Narayan and Harding, 2000: vii-viii)

feminist critiques of *objectivity* have evidenced the profound degree to which all research reflects the particular position of the individual researcher. Contrary to traditional views on research which insist that the social identity of the observer is irrelevant to the objectivity of the results, feminists assert that we are all subjected to the culture-wide androcentric prejudices that permeate society.

Furthermore, feminists argue that the scientific method, the supposed guardian of objectivity, is itself ineffective in eradicating the androcentrism that shapes the research process. And while conventional wisdom suggests that the scientific method removes social biases through rigorous analysis, feminists contend that such is not the case. In fact, the hypotheses which would most thoroughly challenge androcentrism in research are often not present; they are missing from the analysis precisely because their inclusion would contest the hypothesis favored by the researcher (Harding, 1991). This is not to suggest that objectivity as a conceptual framework is thereby rendered futile. Indeed, Harding admonishes that we cannot “just say no” (Harding, 1991: 160) to objectivity and instead must refashion it in such a way as to address its several shortcomings. Harding’s desire to bolster objectivity results in her notion of a *strong objectivity* which straddles the chasm between the troubled legacy of empiricism and the relativistic tendencies of many post-modern theories. Like many feminists, Harding acknowledges that knowledge production is necessarily a political project and as a result has consequences for all of those who occupy a marginal position in society. Her conception of *strong objectivity* is a call for all researchers to acknowledge (as I did in Chapter 2) that a reflexive analysis of our positions in society can be a resource to the research process and not necessarily a hindrance (Harding, 1991).

Research that takes up the mantle of *strong objectivity* is not mired in the sludge of cultural relativism and instead moves beyond it to assert that women regularly occupy a subjugated position within societies. Harding does not want us to lose sight of the facts that surround us, despite the reality that these facts are the constructs of hegemonic discourses. Within this dialectic, Harding puts objectivity in conversation with subjectivity and aims to disrupt the bifurcation that has long characterized empirical science. *Strong objectivity* does not value subjectivity over objectivity but instead attempts to integrate the two concepts by encouraging reflexivity in the research process. Her desire to get researchers to see themselves the way that others see them is an attempt to address the rampant androcentrism that has typified conventional research (Harding, 1991). Because there has been an implicit erasure of the researcher from the research process, the resulting work has often been biased by a male perspective. What we know about research has been intricately structured to answer the types of questions *men* ask about nature and society and as a result have prevented close examination of the ways in which androcentrism flavors academic inquiry.

Thus, research on the Amish that overlooks the experiences of women, particularly those that shape women’s identity and pattern their daily lives, suggests an androcentrism that legitimizes male superiority. Within much of the scholarship on Amish society, Amish women have merited only a mere mention and the unique and important contribution they make to Amish life has largely gone unnoticed. Many of the most prominent texts on Amish society do not feature a single chapter on Amish women, and instead these leading authors pepper the text with platitudes about Amish women’s work ethic and commitment to their family and community. Consider this excerpt:

“The work is hard and the hours long, but there is quiet satisfaction in nourishing thriving families, tending productive gardens, baking pies, sewing colorful quilts, and watching dozens of grandchildren find their place in the Amish world” (Kraybill, 2001a: 83).

As is evidenced in the quote above, even for Donald Kraybill – arguably the most prominent scholar on Amish studies – the lives of Amish women warrant only the most cursory analysis. Instead, topics

such as work, community structure and faith feature prominently, though his justification for a focus so unanimously on the public sphere goes unmentioned. Texts such as 'The Amish Struggle with Modernity' and 'Amish and the State', both edited by Kraybill as well, follow in suit with their focus on the dynamics of the life of Amish men, while Amish women make only a cameo appearance. And while 'The Amish Struggle with Modernity' does dedicate a lone chapter to women, Marc Olshan and Kimberly Schmidt – the authors of the chapter 'Amish Women and the Feminist Conundrum' – are primarily intent upon dispelling the myth that Amish women are victims of their patriarchal culture. Most telling is the fact that Olshan and Schmidt are able to answer their primary research question "Do Amish women constitute an exploited resource or are they empowered by their work?" (pg. 221) without referencing even one Amish woman – they employ not a single quote, anecdote or other piece evidence to support their conclusions. When they do use a voice to answer their call, it is universally the words of Amish men, who comment on everything from their views of feminism to violence within the Amish household. Insights gained through this lens filter out the particular voices of Amish women and leave us with an impartial and skewed perspective on both the daily experiences of Amish women as well as the overall structure of Amish society.

Feminist scholars have commented on this tendency to overlook certain populations and have explored the consequences of this academic omission (Narayan and Harding, 2000). As Donna Haraway, noted feminist scholar and philosopher suggests; "For those people who are excluded from the visualizing apparatuses of the disciplinary regimes of modern power-knowledge networks, the *averted gaze* can be as deadly as the all-seeing panopticon that surveys the subjects of the biopolitical state" (Haraway, 1997: 202). Indeed, communities of people who are absent from academic inquiry remain invisible in the production of knowledge. As a result, what we know about society lacks the particular insights generated from populations on the margins. Feminists continue to assert that this new knowledge cannot merely be added to the body of conventional research, as it often poses fundamental critiques to traditional academic work. Instead, considering populations on the margins often can profoundly shift the content of what we know and simultaneously challenge the means by which we know it. "Indeed, these multicultural, global and postcolonial feminist concerns transform mainstream notions of experience, human rights, the origins of philosophic issues, philosophic uses of metaphors of the family, white antiracism, human progress, scientific progress, modernity, the unity of scientific methods, the desirability of universal knowledge claims, and other ideas central to philosophy" (Narayan and Harding, 2000: vii).

Academic privileging of public space is illustrated by both the work done by Krep et al. (1994) on the changing patterns of Amish men's employment and Sommers and Napier's (1993) research on environmental indicators on Amish and non-Amish farms. Investigations such as these are typical of work that is done on Amish society and have resulted in a body of research that not only overlooks private gendered and domestic spaces but also refuses to address the centrality of women in public spaces. That this focus captures the life and work of Amish men is consequential, as is the implicit erasure of the role of Amish women in Amish society.⁷ Consider, for example, a footnote from Kimberly Schmidt's recent text on Mennonite women where she notes that:

"Donald B. Kraybill and Steven M. Nolt undertook a significant study of changing work patterns among the Lancaster Amish in the early 1990s; however, the published results contain few references to women's work, even though their own research found that fully 20% of the new cottage industries were started and operated by women" (Schmidt, 2001: 98).

⁷ see for example Donald Kraybill's (1994) text "Amish Struggle with Modernity" in which of the 14 chapters, Amish women are mentioned in only 1.

Research that systematically dismisses the contribution that women make to Amish society has resulted in a biased understanding of the Amish community.

Because scholarship has failed to notice the position that Amish women play in society, our knowledge of their community structure and social life remains partial. Virtually nothing at all is known about the particular experiences of Amish women. Their voices have been left out of the vast majority of research on Amish society and their seclusion in the home has rendered them invisible to work concerned with the public sphere of Amish life. Furthermore, even less has been done to uncover the ways in which women's daily lives are shaped by the normative discourses of Amish society. In reviewing my data in subsequent chapters, I will argue that though Amish women are located within these strictly patriarchal communities, they articulate a clear sense of self-reliance that does not necessarily parallel their social position. Much work needs to be done to investigate how women's daily experiences are impacted by the broader normative discourses that permeate Amish life. Moreover, scholarly inquiry needs to take up the ways in which Amish women adopt these social scripts as well as rewrite, change and sometimes subvert them in small acts of insurgency. Research into the daily lives of Amish women is necessary if we are to rectify the fractioned perspective that has resulted from conventional research on the Amish.

Current scholarship on Amish women: A review of the literature

Recently, there has been an attempt to remedy this exclusion of Amish women, both in academic research as well as in popular writings more generally. Several texts have taken up the topic of Amish women and have shed light onto the lives of Amish women. And though much of the writing is not scholarly in the conventional sense, many of the books offer a glimmer of insight into this previously un-researched population. Telling the stories of Amish women has proved quite difficult, and much of the work is done by those who are outsiders – authors who are not themselves Amish but who share a close connection to Amish culture and are able to write about it. Very little of the work is done by researchers (the exception being Schmidt et al., 2002) and instead the majority of the writings are authored by non-academic women who are closely affiliated with Amish society (Davis, 1997; Bender and Bender, 1989) or who themselves were Amish and have since left the community (Stoltzfus, 1994; Garrett, 2003). Despite the lack of academic rigor, these recent books offer a cursory glance into the domestic lives and experiences of Amish women.

The sole work from the academy is Kimberly Schmidt, Diane Zimmerman Umble and Steven Reschly's edited volume *Strangers At Home: Amish and Mennonite Women in History*. (Schmidt et al., 2002) Growing out of a 1995 conference at Millersville University in Millersville, Pennsylvania, this volume collects a variety of information on topics ranging from Anabaptist women's dress to the symbolism of their bread making rituals. Of particular interest was the authors' goal to "illuminate the relationship of individuals to the community and to broader society" (Schmidt et al., 2002: 4) and to "raise critical questions about the assumptions implicit in mainstream scholarship" (Schmidt et al., 2002: 5). Conceived as a response to the dearth of work on women in Anabaptist communities within the field of religious history, the relevance of this book goes beyond the discipline of history. It extends well into the domain of the social sciences and offers much insight into the particulars of Anabaptist life, connecting the significance of these findings to a larger scholarly community.

The most profound contribution of the book is certainly the concluding essay written by Jane Marie Pederson, who examines "the complexities of religious ideology, gender constructions and modernity" within the American Anabaptist traditions (Pederson, 2002: 340). Pederson grap-

ples with concepts familiar to feminist criticism but largely absent from traditional Amish scholarship – her discussion of women’s agency and subordination provide a foundation for Amish theorizing that had not before existed. In her sophisticated analysis, Pederson does not fall victim to the tendencies that have characterized much of the earlier work on Amish societies and other Anabaptist groups. Instead, she suggests that though a discourse of conformity is frequently employed by members of Anabaptist communities, much resistance exists below the surface. “When confronted by crisis and unavoidable change, conservative Anabaptist traditions have creatively recast gender construction to sustain male authority; but women have been equally creative in cultivating their own opportunities for self-definition, autonomy, and resistance” (Pederson, 2002: 357). Her careful treatment of modernism in today’s society, as well as the anti-modernism that characterizes Anabaptist life, suggests that women’s roles within Anabaptist society are as much of a response to and negotiation with capitalistic market forces as they are any sort of static ‘tradition’.

And though this book marks a first in terms of scholarly inquiry, it joins the ranks of material which has taken a less systematic but nonetheless profound look into the daily life of Amish women. In the Introduction to *Strangers at Home*, the editors discuss the nature of the insider/outsider dichotomy and touch on a current that runs through much of the work done on Amish women, both scholastic and popular. Often written by women who have left the community, these texts grapple with the fact that, “Insiders know. Outsiders see” (Schmidt et al., 2002: 1). They see this as a “perceptual duality – knowing intuitively and seeing consciously” (Schmidt et al., 2002: 1) “Insiders feel their own cultures in their bones, willing or not, and intuit commonsense local knowledge without a second thought. Outsiders, holders of other traditions [...] must exert conscious effort to understand another culture, but they often appreciate what insiders miss because their own communities are too familiar” (Schmidt et al., 2002: 1). The mix of the etic and emic perspectives that distinguish this body of literature offer the standpoints of both insiders and outsiders and, taken together, offer a nuanced exploration of the lives of Amish women.

Louise Stoltzfus admits that though she is no longer a part of an Amish community, she continues to possess a distinct Amish identity (Stoltzfus, 1994: 1). Growing up in an Amish family has shaped her life in profound ways, and her book traces that impact on her life today. Stoltzfus explores the tension that results as she attempts to uncover how her Amish heritage shapes her life as a “twentieth century career woman” (Stoltzfus, 1994: 1). And though Stoltzfus’ short book attempts to valorize Amish culture, she also eludes to some of the indecorous undercurrents that shape Amish life – the pressures to conform, the restrictions on higher education, the denial of an individual identity. And though these bits often slip in despite her rigorous attempts at saccharine simplicity, they are an important response to conventional research that omitted such variation under the mantle of conformity and uniformity within the Amish community.

Similar sentiments have come out of the work done by those considered to be ‘outsiders’ to the Amish community. Authors such as Martha Moore Davis (Davis, 1997) and Sue Bender (Bender and Bender, 1989) offer an etic understanding of Amish society, drawing upon their connection to a few select members within a particular Amish community. Moore Davis uses the diary entries of Sarah Fisher, an Old Order Amish woman, to explore the daily rhythms of Plain life. Interspersed between Sarah’s daily diary entries are anecdotes written by Moore Davis, charting her growing relationship with Sarah and her own personal discovery. Sue Bender tells a similar tale of self-discovery and writes about her “Journey to the Amish” via a summer spent with the Yoder family. In detailing her careful entry into an Amish community, she reflects on her life as an outsider and offers insights into the similarities that mark the two distinct cultures. And while these texts often sensationalize

the community spirit and familial cohesion of Amish society, they do allow for moments of transparency in an otherwise opaque lifestyle.

Ruth Irene Garrett takes a more critical look at Amish society in her several books on growing up Amish. She details the experiences of her youth and focuses on both the supportive and nurturing aspects of the tight-knit society as well as the less compassionate side of her Amish upbringing. She presents a bleaker version of Amish life and explores her father's violence in a frank manner, candidly discussing her "jaded sense of family and marriage" (Garrett, 2003: 22) that resulted from her less than idyllic childhood. Her critiques of Amish society grow out of her sustained interaction with her own community and offer an insightful meditation on the price paid to maintain the *Ordnung*, or the particular requirements of conformity articulated by each congregation (Hostetler, 1993). Garrett cites "the inconsistencies of the rules not applying to everyone the same, scrutiny of one another, and the discord and bickering of what should and shouldn't be allowed" in her critique of Amish society (Garrett and Morse-Kahn, 2004: 176). Her words offer a rare glimpse into the daily life of Amish women and her forthright treatment of a variety of topics ranging from chore schedules to the lack of sex education offer an extraordinary opportunity to learn about the pressures and privileges that attend Amish women's existence.

A few midwives who serve the Amish community have shared their experiences about both homebirth and about Amish society more generally. Grace Kaiser (1986) appears to be the first to draw on her experiences as a midwife to offer a handful of stories that anecdotally explore homebirth in an Amish community. Peggy Armstrong (1986) offers readers a more sustained tour of Amish birth as she chronicles her experiences serving as a midwife in the Lancaster, Pennsylvania Amish community. Armstrong details both her thoughts and struggles as a homebirth midwife as well as presents the first ever detailed look at birth within the Amish community. In her attempt to educate about the structure of Amish society and their community-centric focus, Armstrong paints a fascinating though at times overly simplistic version of Amish life. And though she chooses not to address larger issues of women's unequal status in the community or particular topics such as domestic abuse, her stories about Amish birth are a first of their kind and serve as a point of departure for all research that focuses on the domestic life of Amish women.

These works certainly mark the beginning of a more sustained look at the lives of Amish women. The unique insights that result from these academic and popular inquiries begin to address the widespread and longstanding oversight that continues to mark this population. Despite these exploratory texts, however, very little has been done to systematically investigate the domestic experiences of Amish women, without which our understanding of Amish society remains partial and incomplete. Even so, recent scholarship has allowed us to recognize the particular moments that harbor social significance for Amish women. Authors ranging from Hostetler to Garrett have all remarked upon the centrality of both marriage and birth in the life of Amish women, focusing on ways in which these events are always both intensely private and communally celebrated. Equipped with this knowledge, social scientists are able to narrow their scope of study and investigate the ways in which Amish women (and Amish society more generally) construct meaning around these events. Such analyses promise to fill some of the gaps that exist in our comprehension of Amish society.

Chapter 4

Birth and Amish Embodiment

The idea of the lived body recognizes that a person's subjectivity is conditioned by sociocultural facts and the behavior and expectations of others in ways that she has not chosen. At the same time, the theory of the lived body says that each person takes up and acts in relation to these unchosen facts in her own way.

Iris Marion Young, 2005
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Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the cultural production of Amish birth. Though we are accustomed to view labor and delivery as a biological process, I suggest that birth is as much a social event as it is a physiological one. Despite this, birth has not been seen as a site of sociological significance, though feminist scholars have attempted to rectify this through a number of cultural and anthropological analyses. Their work lays a foundation for my examination of Amish birth and facilitates my inquiry into both the social discourses that surround Amish birth and the particular practices that characterize Amish homebirth. I discuss the ways in which the female bodily processes are often associated with shame and embarrassment and draw on the scholarship of a number of feminist philosophers to substantiate this claim. These works detail the processes by which women come to know their bodies as disgusting and shameful and explore the various practices women employ to hide their unruly bodies. For Amish women, such bodily shame is apparent and I delve into the distinctly Amish etiquette that surrounds the pregnant body. Amish women regularly sequester themselves during late pregnancy, and I explore the meanings that underlie this practice and discuss the ways in which discourses of seclusion become internalized and naturalized.

And though many women adhere to these etiquettes that surround the pregnant body, some women actively resist. I draw on a feminist conception of agency to suggest that this active resistance is not the only way that Amish women oppose the patriarchal discourses of Amish society. Feminist theorists have introduced the concept of *interdiscourse* as a conceptual framework for understanding the multiple and contradictory ways in which women exist as agentic subjects. Understanding Amish society as a layered *interdiscourse* allows me to explore the gaps at the discursive seams and discuss the fluid nature of embodied resistance. I use this concept of *interdiscourse* to assert that despite previous research to the contrary, Amish women are both trapped within a patriarchal discourse of bodily shame and simultaneously empowered by positive discourses of body confidence and self-reliance. My research suggests that Amish women are able to subvert the oppressive *interdiscourse* within which they are located through an embodied resistance. I end with an exploration of the mechanisms that foster this resistance and conclude with a discussion of the particular discursive forces that shape the lived, embodied experiences of Amish women.

A composite sketch of an Amish birth

Before exploring the more theoretical aspects of birth within the Amish community, it is helpful to review the particular rhythm of an Amish birth. After attending 36 different Amish births, I began to see several patterns emerge, both in the ways that the birth progressed and in the ways that the Amish couple navigated the terrain during labor and delivery. Not every birth followed a similar tra-

jectory, but the vast majority did have a number of the features I describe below. In what follows, I detail the events that frequently occurred during the Amish births that I witnessed.

Upon arriving at a birth, I would often find the couple alone together. If there were other children in the household, they were sent to the home of a neighbor or nearby relative. Parents or grandparents did not attend the labor or delivery, even if they resided in the same home or lived adjacent to the property. Instead, the birth was seen as a personal event between wife and husband and all others were not permitted to attend. Depending on the time of day or the degree to which labor had progressed, the couple may be reclining on the living room furniture or in the bedroom. It was not uncommon to find a husband attending to his laboring wife in the bathtub or shower, pouring water over her belly or massaging her lower back. During this time, husbands often spoke quietly with their wives and may even read to them from the Bible or other religious works. Some husbands chose to sing to their wives and would softly hum or chant various hymns or songs a cappella, or without music. Early labor was often a time for husbands and wives to spend alone together and was rarely interrupted by either myself or the midwife except for minimal assessment of labor progression.

At times, the husband would need to attend to chores in the barn or various work-related duties. It was during these moments that the midwife or I would take his place, soothing the laboring woman and talking her through each contraction. During long night labors, the midwife would encourage the husband to sleep while we took over the job of attendant, though many men chose to forego sleep and stay actively involved in the labor process. Husbands assisted in the set up of the birth – gathering the necessary supplies and arranging them even before we arrived. Because the Amish do not have electricity, the men would light various household propane lanterns to illuminate the room and the events unfolding. When a woman approached delivery, her husband would sit behind her on the birth stool (a low stool that positioned the woman in a supported-squat) and would serve to prop her up and sustain her through each hard contraction. When the baby was delivered, the husband was often involved in cutting the cord and holding the new infant right away. The postpartum period was a bit different, as many of the men departed quickly after the birth to see to their work in the barn. In fact, after packing our supplies and getting ready to leave, the midwife often had to fetch the men from the barn and send him back into the house to watch over his wife and newborn until another family member could be summoned. Despite this quick retreat after delivery, Amish men played a very active role in the labor and delivery process.

Amish women also played an active role in their birth process. From the moment we would arrive at a birth, the laboring woman would be up and involved in a variety of small tasks. We would likely find her in the kitchen, pacing the floor or tidying up the room. Vivian would often encourage women to squat down with each contraction (to help bring the baby down), so women would alternate between pacing and squatting, working their way around the room and leaning on furniture as they moved along. During these laboring moments, Amish women would carry on conversations with their husbands, their midwives or both and would regularly chuckle at their awkward positions and heavy bodies. On multiple occasions, Amish women in labor would prepare food for either themselves or for others and would insist on undertaking the preparations herself. Large meals were rarely eaten during labor, by either the birthing woman or those in attendance, and instead we would all snack on sandwiches and other refreshments throughout the process. Amish women prided themselves on staying active throughout their labor and would engage in a variety of small chores to occupy both their mind and their body.

Because the Amish do not have an extended formal education, their knowledge of anatomy is limited. During the birth, Vivian would often spend time explaining the various processes that

allow for a baby to be delivered. She would educate the couple about the female reproductive anatomy and explain the process of cervical dilation and effacement. Conversations about uterine contractions and the infamous “urge to push” were also common as couples inquired into the particulars of the experience that was occurring. They regularly asked a variety of questions and often sought out more technical explanations when Vivian attempted to simplify complex concepts. Because many men had experience delivering cows, horses and other animals, these conversations occasionally turned to comparisons between the various processes of labor and delivery in mammals. Couples were interested in learning more about the process and about anatomy more generally and took advantage of Vivian’s vast knowledge of these subjects while passed the hours.

When these sorts of conversations became less frequent, we all knew that delivery was likely approaching. Women would either choose to deliver in the living room or in the bedroom, depending on the size of the room, its visibility from outside and the likelihood of visitors. The midwife and I would set up a small area with a drop-cloth and some absorbent pads. The low birth stool was placed on top of this material and the laboring woman was positioned on the stool supported by her husband behind her. Because the stool was so low, Vivian often had to lie on the floor to assess dilation and labor progression, and this was regularly a topic of jest and humor, even during the throes of labor. Stacks of towels and blankets were nearby to help catch the slippery baby when it arrived, and once the baby was delivered it was wrapped and placed directly on the mother’s chest. Once the baby had been born, mother often leaned back on dad and both gazed at their new baby while Vivian and I delivered the placenta and checked for blood loss. The woman was then moved to either the sofa or her bed to recuperate and to bond with her new baby.

After the baby was delivered and the mother reclined with her newborn, I began the cleanup process while Vivian checked the infant and reviewed some basic information with the parents. If they were interested (and most were interested) Vivian showed them the placenta and explained its basic function and structure during the process of fetal development. The majority chose to bury the placenta in the garden under a special plant or bush and the placenta was treated as a special component rather than as medical waste. After Vivian had reviewed the warning signs to look out for and assessed the baby’s vital signs, we left the couple alone to acquaint with their new child and to begin the breastfeeding process. All Amish women breastfeed and do not use formula unless there is a medical necessity to do so. During this time, the husband may travel to the shared phone (sometimes ½ mile away) to alert family members of the birth. If there was a nearby mother, grandmother or other female relative, Vivian might retrieve her and bring her back to the home to assist with the new baby and watch the mother while the father attended to the animals or other necessary barnyard chores or left for work.

In general, the Amish couple was actively involved in the birth process and was curious about the various stages of labor and delivery. And while this event was seen as a personal occurrence between a husband and wife, the couple often chatted and engaged with their midwives throughout the affair. Amish men regularly played a central role in the birth process and were responsible for overseeing much of their wife’s care. The midwives supervised the actual delivery and offered suggestions for how to best cope with the strength of the contractions, but for much of the labor their involvement took a back seat to that of the husband. The process of Amish homebirth was unique in that it was a quiet and reserved event that centered on the needs of the laboring woman rather than on the needs of those in attendance.

A sociology of birth

Research has suggested that birth is not merely a biological process but is indeed invested with great social and cultural significance (Jordan, 1993; Davis-Floyd and Sargent, 1997; Martin, 2001; Kitzinger, 2005). As birth activists and sociological scholars have long asserted, “Every society has its own birth culture” (Kitzinger, 2005: 1) and “birth is everywhere socially marked and shaped” (Jordan, 1993: 1). Yet despite the potential for birth analyses to inform studies of culture and society, they have rarely served as a point of sociological inquiry, and before the 1970s were nonexistent (Davis-Floyd and Sargent, 1997). More recently, however, feminist scholars from a variety of disciplines have used birth as a point of departure for a more general analysis of cultural patterns and social norms (Davis-Floyd and Sargent, 1997; Martin, 2001; Kitzinger, 2005). Birth comparisons between developed and developing countries have become a vehicle for leveling critiques against an industrialized society that foists a “technocratic model of birth” upon Western women at the expense of “woman-to-woman contact” (Davis-Floyd, 1992: 8-9). These studies are often grounded in the lived experiences of birthing women and birth is seen as indicative of the social climate within which a woman is located. This work has regularly engaged with the particular birth practices that signify a society. “The cultural arena of birth serves as a microcosm in which the relationships between rapid technological progress and cultural values, normative behaviors, social organization, gender relations and the political economy can be clearly viewed” (Davis-Floyd and Sargent, 1997: 6).

As has been argued in previous chapters, Amish birth has remained an elusive topic despite its potential for offering academic clarity to the more abstract aspects of Amish society. More specifically, the particular practices that distinguish Amish birth are of significance both for what they elucidate about Amish society and more generally for what they imply about mainstream US birth. Amish women’s embodied experience of birth provides insight into the myriad ways that social dictates become incorporated into the body and become naturalized – are seen, in fact, as second nature (Franklin et al., 2000). Despite this perceived/ constructed naturalization, birth practices are culturally specific and socially mediated in a variety of ways, not all of them always clear or consistent. Within Amish society, birth is marked by the shame that surrounds the female body as much as by Amish women’s bodily confidence and lack of fear. The reality that cultural practices are often far from coherent does not negate their power to tell illuminating tales of society, and an analysis of birth practices offers one such glimpse (necessarily partial and situated) into the story of Amish women.

Shame and the female body

There is certainly an assortment of sentiments associated with female bodily processes beginning with menstruation and continuing through menopause. Many have remarked upon the ways in which reproduction (and its attendant cycles) continues to be looked upon with embarrassment and even disgrace by both men and women in a variety of societies (Jeffrey et al., 1985; Martin, 2001; Young, 2005). While much of this attention has been focused on menstruation, the arguments raised have much purchase within this current examination of Amish birth. This critical literature began with the groundbreaking work of feminist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir:

“Her first menstruation reveals this meaning, and her feelings of shame appear. If they were already present, they are strengthened and exaggerated from this time on. All the evidence agrees in showing that whether the child has been forewarned or not, the event always seems to her repugnant and humiliating” (de Beauvoir, 1952: cited in Young, 2005: 109).

Feminists have continued to explore the means by which female bodily experience become socially devalued and constructed as shameful:

“The experience [is] of knowing oneself as shameful, as an abject existence that is messy and disgusting. Women as menstruators [and, I argue, as birthers] live through a split subjectivity insofar as we claim the public face of normalcy and a fear of exposure of the private fluidity of our flesh. Given the dominant disembodied norms of clean and proper, it is difficult for me not to experience my being as defiled and out of control” (Young, 2005: 109).

In a process that starts with menarche, girls and women begin to associate shame and disgust with the biological processes of their female body. Because of the cultural assumption that the normal body is necessarily a male body, women are forced to see their own body as a deviation from the social standard. As Young suggests above, the “fluidity of our flesh” becomes something to privatize rather than publicize. Shame then grows out of this attempt to keep private, or hide, any evidence of our bodily deviance.

“Shame, as what we might call a primary structure of a woman’s lived experience, extends far beyond her relationship to menstruation, and it becomes integral to a generalized sense of inferiority of the feminine body-subject” (Kruks, 2001: 64-65).

This practice of concealing the distinctiveness of the female body leads women to engage in practices that are largely minor but nonetheless reinforce (and simultaneously devalue) female bodily difference. Young refers to these practices as “manners” or “etiquette” and suggests that they “demand the micromanagement of behavior” in small but insidious ways (Young, 2005: 112). Thus women are motivated to conform to the body etiquette that is dictated by society both by their learned shame and by the threat of being censured by others (men and women).

“Shame of an embodied self that is always marked as inferior, as defective, is instrumental to women’s participation in the multitude of minute daily practices that induce docility and reproduce forms of normalized feminine behavior” (Kruks, 2001: 65).

For Amish women, this bodily shame manifests in the particular etiquette practices that surround the visibly pregnant body. Despite the high value placed on large families and rapid reproduction, the pregnant body that is evident and perceptible is a source of shame and is actively concealed. Amish etiquette dictates that under no circumstance is it appropriate to comment on a woman’s pregnancy, even if delivery is plainly imminent. Questions inquiring into a woman’s time of expected delivery or even whom she will be using as her midwife are extremely improper and Amish women and men avoid all discussion of pregnancy and birth.

At a prenatal with Barbie, we sat around the kitchen discussing headaches, nausea, sore joints and other pregnancy related topics. Barbie’s three other children played at our feet and we laughed and joked about the bodily changes that happen during pregnancy. Just then, Barbie’s father entered the kitchen and went to the sink for a drink. Upon registering his entrance, Barbie immediately changed the conversation to a discussion of the children, stopping mid-sentence to redirect the flow of the conversation. When he retreated, she chuckled over the possibility that he might have heard her talking about the pregnancy, even though she was visibly pregnant and was at that very moment being visited by the community midwife.

So while an Amish woman will discuss her pregnancy with her husband and possibly with a close sister or even her mother, she will not introduce the topic for conversation with anyone in the broader community, nor will she mention it to her children. This intense privacy and secrecy that surrounds birth is discussed by Grace Kaiser, long-time Amish midwife, upon revealing the identity of one client to another, “Now she was privy to a guarded secret, the identity of a laboring woman” (Kaiser, 1986: 159). Pregnancy, and its implicit connection to the feminine, is a marked condition and thus must remain un(re)marked upon within Amish society.

More than just this conversational restriction attends the pregnant body. The visual cue presented by the pregnant body is itself seen as shameful within Amish culture. As a result, women regularly closet themselves away from Amish society when their pregnancy becomes obvious. Women will stop attending church and even cease to leave their house for groceries and other necessities when they approach the latter stages of pregnancy.

We arrive at Eva’s house for a prenatal exam. Eva’s two other children play in the yard while we sit at the kitchen table and discuss her pregnancy. “You’re getting so big” remarks the midwife. “I know, I can’t believe it!” replies Eva. “I’ve stopped going to church! People must be wondering. I hope it comes soon.”

As Eva alludes to above, this seclusion does not render pregnancy invisible, as she is fully aware that her fellow church peers knew of her pregnancy and further know what her absence implies. Implication is permissible, while any concrete evidence is more strictly forbidden.

We wondered as we arrived at Rachel’s house whether she would be in the full throws of labor or just be in the early stages. Excitedly, we pulled into her farm, which sat at the end of a long lane, twisting and bending from the street and leaving the house nestled far back from the road. As we parked and got out of the car, Rachel ran out of the house gesturing for us to get back in the car – she wanted the car moved out of the driveway and quickly hidden in the barn. Even though her house, and the car for that matter, was not visible from the street, she was still concerned that someone might walk up her lane, see the midwife’s car (the car, while not particularly distinct, was a frequent visitor to the community and would therefore be recognized) and suspect that she was in labor.

The car was often a visible marker of pregnancy and possible delivery. Several women asked us to move the car into the barn or inquired whether we had been spotted by any of the neighbors upon our arrival. As Kaiser similarly reports, “Numerous times I was asked to park behind a shadowy barn or corn crib so passing neighbors did not recognize my station wagon.” (Kaiser, 1986: 159) This careful attention to surveillance is not reserved solely for women, and men too participate in carefully rendering the female pregnant body invisible.

Since Rachel’s delivery seemed a far ways off, Amos decided to go help his brothers make hay in the field until he was needed. Both he and Rachel explained where he’d be if I needed to fetch him, and both reminded me that I should not say anything that would give away the fact that Rachel was in labor. So, even though I was obviously the midwife’s assistant and was driving into a hayfield to tell a man, in front of all of his brothers, that his wife needs him, I was not to give any indication that she needs him to help her deliver their child. And while the content of the need was plainly obvious to all in attendance, the direct explication was carefully avoided by all.

Whether a woman is actually being so closely surveilled is of little import, though my two years of observations suggest that Amish women do pay a great deal of attention to such matters. What is

of more serious consequence are the ways in which this possibility of surveillance is internalized, naturalized and made to become second nature. Amish women feel the threat of social scrutiny at all times, particularly around those events that are deemed inappropriate and unacceptable, such as birth.

The trip to Sarah's birth involved more than a bit of panic, as she lived over an hour away and had a tendency to deliver her children with great speed. We raced to her house to attend her fourth birth and wondered if we would arrive in time. In all of our swiftness, we ended up there with plenty of time to spare. After our setup, the midwife and I moved to Sarah's porch to sit on the swing and knit, taking advantage of the cool breezes and late summer sun. Because the house was secluded and set well back from the road, our presence on the back porch swing was completely invisible to anyone who might pass by on the road. The only way we could be seen is if someone ambled up the long dirt lane that late afternoon – a highly unlikely prospect seeing as supper-time was quickly approaching and men everywhere were in the thick of "choring" in the barn. After 10 minutes outside, Sarah asked us to come inside in a circular but nonetheless persistent way –

Sarah: How are you doing?

Midwife: It's a beautiful afternoon, we're doing well. How are you feeling?

Sarah: I'm okay, very well actually. Do you want to come inside?

Midwife: Oh no, we're fine here – just trying to stay out of your way!

Sarah: You're not in my way! If you'd just as soon sit inside, I guess that'd be fine.

Midwife: Oh no, we're okay out here. Don't worry about us.

Sarah: Yes, well, I just wonder if someone might see you.

Midwife: Would you rather us be inside?

Sarah: Whatever you like, either way is fine. But if you're worried about being seen then you might just come inside.

Most problematic for Amish women is the possibility that someone would see their pregnant body and the shame that is attached to such sight. Shame does not attach to the person who spies the pregnant woman – the person who ambles up the lane only to find the birth attendants on the porch or the midwife's car in the drive is not the one who suffers the shame of discovery. Instead, the burden of that embarrassment is placed on the pregnant woman and she is responsible for removing herself from situations which would bring this shame upon her. It is not merely the fear that neighbors might spy her in labor or that they may glimpse the midwives entering the house and surreptitiously announce the impending delivery to the community. Instead, the fear of being seen transcends the locality and is present even when an Amish woman leaves her particular neighborhood. "The subject of disciplinary power actively participates in it; power is not unidirectional nor simply top-down... through self-objectification and shame, disciplinary power is internalized so that its subject comes also to be its agent" (Kruks, 2001: 68).

Annie already had six children and was eager to birth her seventh. For this birth, she had decided to travel with her husband to Vivian's clinic to have her homebirth away from the prying eyes of her many children. After leaving her children with a neighbor, she and her husband arrived at the clinic. A preliminary exam revealed that Annie still had several centimeters to dilate. Vivian suggested that Annie and

her husband walk down the lane and cut across the neighboring farm to get some exercise and help labor progress more quickly. Annie flatly refused... what if someone would see her? Vivian reminded her that she was in an entirely different valley, she did not know a single person in this village. Vivian further insisted that if she wanted to have this baby she needed to walk, rather than spend her labor sitting in the clinic. Annie conceded that it would feel good to walk and headed for the door. A few minutes later, she and her husband returned. She had changed her mind and decided that she would wait for the cover of darkness before venturing out of the house. She was, she stated, too worried about being seen.

The above data are not meant to imply that all Amish women live in a perpetual fear of being seen while pregnant; shame is not always universally and unequivocally accepted by all women. Some women do dismiss the social pressures that encourage them to see their pregnant bodies as shameful. These socializations are only as effective as their ability to be taken up and implemented, and their uneven acceptance goes part of the way to demonstrating their fragility. It is in moments of dismissal and rejection that we see one example of Amish women's own agency and power in shaping the culture. As Iris Marion Young suggests, "The multitude of ways that persons are made ashamed or positioned as odd ought not to be understood as a consequence of their being or actions, but that the trouble is with the idea of normal" (Young, 2005: 108) and some Amish women do not see the bodily shame that attends pregnancy as normal.

Fannie was a spunky Amish woman who had verve. She sometimes wore pink underwear under her dress, just for fun. She read Amish romance novels bought from the Christian bookstore. She had panache. As we sat talking with her one afternoon, Vivian mentioned that her pregnancy was just beginning to show. Fannie remarked that she knew this and that her husband had repeatedly pointed it out. "He doesn't want me going out anymore," reported Fannie. "Why not?" I asked. Fannie responded, "I guess he's embarrassed. He doesn't think that I should be going to church looking pregnant. I told him I'm only 5 months pregnant! I'm not just going to sit home here and wait for the next 4 months. I told him I'm going to church right up until I have this baby. I wouldn't miss it!"

For some Amish women, the socializing forces that confine women to their home and create a legacy of shame around the pregnant body fall on deaf ears. They do not bend to the pressure exerted on them by both the larger society nor by their particular family members. Non-conformity carries its own penalty, though women like Fannie seem willing to pay the cost of rejecting these discourses. This conclusion does beg the question of whether this is the only sign of Amish women's agency, this jejune dismissal of convention? Are there other, more subtle ways, in which Amish women outline the shape of their lives? Previous work on Amish women has, as I have presented in earlier chapters, suggested that Amish women exist solely under the dictates of their husbands. My research instead illuminates moments of agency in the lives of Amish women – glimpses of sustained body confidences despite the strictures of their patriarchal culture. The sightings of such moments depend upon both the lens through which they are viewed and the particular location of the observer. My reliance on a feminist conception of agency offered a framework for finding both the colonization and the emancipation that was inherent in Amish women's bodily experiences. An exploration into a feminist reconception of female agency allows for a more sustained treatment of the Amish woman as agentic subject.

Feminist theories of agency

Instead of merely looking for change and/or action as evidence of agency, feminists have asserted that agency should be characterized by “understanding the *contradictions*” (Mohanty, 1991: 66) that exist between various social structures/ cultural patterns and people’s particular experience of them. This theory grows out of the observation that cultural ideologies and social discourses contain inconsistencies, and “these discursive faultlines can be exposed and interpreted” (Meyers, 1998: 377). Feminists contend that we are constantly immersed in these cultural ideologies and social discourse, which have been termed *interdiscourse* (Hennessey, 1993) and they further assert that understanding both the interconnections and the contradictions in these discourses goes part of the way to explaining how each of us both responds to and resists against these cultural norms in lived and embodied ways.

This *interdiscourse* that permeates life is always both complementary and competing. In some places, the individual narratives overlap and align nicely, in others they are incongruent, leave spaces and create contradiction. Gaps in discourses become obvious to individuals as they try to cope with the inconsistencies and adjust to the paradoxes that arise at these discursive seams. Searching for “gaps, contradictions, *aporias*” (Hennessey, 1993: 92) yields work that moves beyond structural causation and gets at the fluid nature of embodied resistance to normative cultural dictates. It is here that feminists hope to link material conditions with individual embodied subjectivity. Locating the ways in which women negotiate inconsistencies is an opportunity to shed light onto a woman’s engagement with discursive borderlands. Using the concept of *interdiscourse* as an analytic tool allows us to consider the ways by which “...‘women’s lives’ are constructed across a range of articulated discourses, the effect of a series of subject positions sutured into or against the *interdiscourse* in any historical formation” (Hennessey, 1993: 79).

Situating these discussions within a material context, feminists are able to capture some of life’s inherent complexity. Focusing on *interdiscursive* fissures directs attention to the borders of competing discourses and illuminates their margins. Hennessey feels that “Inhabiting the gaps in the coherence of the social imaginary, these critical positions disclose the arbitrariness and historicity of its boundaries” (Hennessey, 1993: 87). It is here that a woman’s agency becomes obvious; in her negotiation between these misaligned discourses her critical reflection and engagement are uncovered. Such an investigation also sheds light on the uneven borders of the culture, illuminating a woman’s particular social, economic and political condition. It is this conception of agency that the feminists have offered researchers, one that situates women’s critical discursive engagements within a set of historically specific conditions that are materially grounded.

The *interdiscourse* of Amish birth

With the legacy of shame that attends the Amish pregnant body, I expected to uncover an Amish birth discourse that belied a deep lack of self-confidence and reflected the myriad social pressures that reinforce bodily embarrassment. Within the Amish *interdiscourse*, there exist very few sites of positive reinforcement for Amish women and, as I have demonstrated above, most women are surrounded by discourses that undermine body assurance and trust. Despite these expectations, I instead discovered striking contradictions between Amish cultural patterns and Amish women’s experience of them. More precisely, though Amish women are situated within a society that weaves a highly patriarchal *interdiscourse* around them, they are, at times, able to subvert this *interdiscourse* and resist its power over them. This embodied resistance became clear as I attended deliver after delivery and observed (and assisted) Amish women during birth.

The gaps at the discursive seams were evident in the ways that Amish women approached and enacted their birth experiences. Amish women do not approach birth with a sense of fear or trepidation, even though they know very little about the process. Instead, they set aside all bodily shame and claim a strong sense of body confidence. With a lack of concern, they approach birth with good humor and poise and do not demonstrate any of the bodily embarrassment that marks their pregnancy. Their confidence and body security is more pronounced than even their non-Amish counterparts, a fact that was remarked upon by many of the midwives with whom I spoke. Consider the following non-Amish birth:

Shelly, a non-Amish woman in her 30s, was having her second baby at home with Vivian. She had invited her parents to the birth and was also attended by her husband. Even with her extended support staff, she expressed a great deal of fear about the process and would become visibly upset when Vivian was out of her line of sight. When we arrived, Shelly was in labor and cried through every contraction. Shelly eventually delivered a baby boy after several hours of hard labor while Vivian sat in front of her guiding her through each contraction. Shelly would only respond to Vivian's hand, which she would raise and lower through each contraction. Any deviation from this pattern gave Shelly great anxiety and she would become distraught if Vivian left for even the shortest of breaks. At a post-partum visit Shelly repeatedly articulated that she could not have survived the birth without Vivian – she “wouldn't have been able to do it by [her]self.”

Shelly's birth was typical for a non-Amish birth, which often requires a great deal of labor support and attention from the midwife. It is common for non-Amish women to repeat that they can't continue or that they are too tired. Amish women do not regularly express similar sentiments and see labor and delivery as an intense experience that can be borne and endured.

Nancy was an Amish woman in her late 20s delivering her second child with Vivian. When we arrived at her birth, she was cheerful and was playing with her young daughter, despite the hard labor pains that continued to come. Soon, her husband came in from the barn and she fixed him lunch – even as he pleaded with her to let him do it himself – and she served us all a noontime meal. Nancy continued to walk back and forth in the living room during her contractions, and occasionally joined in the conversation between Vivian and her husband. When the contractions intensified, she walked her daughter down to her mother's house (about ½ a mile away) and then returned to deliver her son with only the most basic of support and guidance from Vivian.

Nancy's birth experience reflects the majority that I attended and, according to Vivian, is characteristic of Amish birth. After attending nearly 1500 births, Vivian had become accustomed to the marked differences between the two. Most interesting was her assertion that these differing birth outlooks had actual material consequences – Amish women often have faster labors and deliveries and fewer complications during the birth process. This is not due to the fact that many Amish women are delivering subsequent babies – the first birth often takes longer than following deliveries – trends remain consistent whether the comparison is made between first, second or third births. An Amish woman delivering her first baby will likely have a shorter birth than a non-Amish woman during her first delivery. Of course, there is great variability in any woman's particular birth experience and a great number of outliers – this generalization is certainly not true all of the time, but is based on the observations of countless midwives across the country.

At Midwifery Today, a national meeting of midwives held in Philadelphia, PA, I attended a session on Amish Birth. Led by both Amish midwives and non-Amish midwives who served the Amish population, the crowd of thirty midwives discussed the particulars of Amish homebirth. I introduced the notion that Amish women often birth more quickly than their non-Amish counterparts. The midwives all shook their heads in concurrence. When I questioned them as to the reasons that underlie such a shocking (shocking at least for me) realization, they all agreed on the reasons that Amish women are better birthers. The common consensus for their quicker birth outcomes with fewer medical interventions is simple “They don’t have the same fear [as non-Amish women].”

This is such a reality in Vivian’s life that she charges two different fees, a reduced fee for her Amish clients and a regular fee for her non-Amish clients. Because Amish births are less demanding and are often shorter, she (and the many other midwives who do the same) feels confident that her price structure reflects the work that she performs. This economic disparity does not reflect a romanticization of the Amish – this price difference is not a charity. It is, rather, Vivian’s best estimate of the number of hours she will likely spend providing prenatal and post-partum care as well as time spent attending the labor and delivery. Vivian assumes that in all fairness she will likely spend more total hours with a non-Amish woman than with an Amish woman. She attributes this difference to the high level of body confidence that Amish women possess combined with their lack of fear surrounding labor and delivery. She does not find this trend to be evidence of some stoicism on the part of Amish women – birth pain is not seen as a woman’s punishment for Eve’s original sin (Genesis 3:16). Instead, Amish women approach birth with an eager anticipation rather than see it as a burden that they must endure.

As Martha sat on the birth stool and labored, she laughed when her husband alluded to labor pains being a retribution for Eve’s transgression. She joked that labor was hard work, and that she was always up for hard work. Martha prided herself on being a strong woman who could handle anything that came her way. “This isn’t punishment, this is a challenge.” She replied to her husband. “And you know that I always love a challenge!”

Martha’s outlook was quite typical for the Amish – birth was not an event that had to be endured to pay out women’s debt to society. Instead, Amish women saw labor and delivery as a test of their endurance and fortitude... and one that they eagerly anticipated. Afterwards, they enjoyed recounting their successes and saw the birth as a personal accomplishment rather than a trial overcome.

After Linda had delivered her baby, she and her husband lay on their bed and gazed at their new infant. Vivian had gone to fetch Linda’s mother from down the lane, and when they returned we all began to reflect on the 20 hour long birth that had just taken place. Vivian remarked that Linda was one of the strongest women she had seen – it had been a very powerful experience and Linda (who was only 20 years old) had certainly risen to the occasion. “Did you hear that Momma?” asked a smiling Linda, who was visibly proud of the work she had done and the recognition bestowed on her by Vivian.

Linda did not see this experience as a burden she was required to bear or as her lot in life as a woman. Instead, she saw it as an opportunity to meet a challenge and test her limits. Amish women do not see birth as a misery that they are required to endure because of biblical prophesy or cul-

tural dictate. Instead, the pain associated with labor is viewed as a shaping force in the lives of Amish women, allowing them to see it in a much more positive light.

In a society that surrounds the pregnant body with shame and embarrassment, this absence of trepidation in approaching labor and delivery is more than a bit shocking. Is this, as Hennessey (1993) discusses above, a gap at the discursive seam, a veritable rip in the fabric of Amish culture? My research suggests that this is precisely exemplary of the discursive fault line that Meyers (1998) introduces. She suggests we focus academic inquiry at these fault lines to more fully comprehend how women, and Amish women in particular, negotiate inconsistencies and engage with discursive borderlands. In a seeming contradiction, Amish women exist in a patriarchal society that deems their pregnant bodies shameful while simultaneously possessing a high level of body confidence and trust. There is much evidence to suggest that there are competing discourses here and Amish women are able to traverse the distance between the two. Is this embodied resistance, and if so, how does it come about?

Despite the fact that Amish women endure a great deal of embarrassment about their pregnant bodies, they live in a society that affords them a great deal of positive body image (Platte et al., 1999). They are not subjected to a popular culture that sells them poor self-image in a billion dollar marketing scheme to convince them to purchase perfection (Kilbourne, 1999). More specifically, they are not bombarded with endless messages that imply the female body is problematic and requires medical intervention (Martin, 2001). There is neither pressure to suppress menstruation nor to medicate menopause (Kissling, 2006). They are not aware that many Americans are now “too posh to push” or that nearly 1/3 of Americans are electing for a ‘patient-choice’ cesarean over a vaginal birth (Beckett, 2005). Seen as a natural process rather than a medical emergency, birth is a normal part of Amish life and they live amongst countless women who have birthed without intervention. All of this creates a social situation that is highly supportive of a woman’s ability to birth and offers a woman much confidence in her own ability to manage labor and delivery. Such discourses of support seem maligned with those that espouse bodily shame and this fissure between the two offer insight into the *interdiscourse* – it is, in fact, not a seamless narrative but is rather a layering of conflicting discourses that both empower and oppress Amish women.

So while Amish women may take on the cultural tenets that require them to sequester themselves during pregnancy, they actively reject this doctrine during labor and delivery. Instead, their self-assurance is clear and apparent to the midwives who serve them. This composure is not merely a discursive concept that floats ethereally within Amish society. It is embodied in the particular ways that Amish women birth and is materially constituted in their birth practices. Countless midwives have reported that Amish women birth differently, suggesting that birth is as much a social process as a biological one. Discourses have the power to shape the ways in which we, as women, know ourselves and our bodies. Just as powerful, however, is a woman’s ability to navigate the discursive terrain and inhabit the borders of competing discourses. Amish women are not passive objects shaped by the totalizing force of discourse, but neither are they sovereign and autonomous subjects that operate outside of its bounds. They are instead, travelers of the *interdiscourse* – moving between the two with aplomb.

Chapter 5 The Role of the Midwife in Amish Society

Introduction

Much conventional research on the Amish has overlooked the central role that the midwife plays in the structure of the community. Earlier chapters demonstrated that scholarly and popular work on Amish society has neglected to notice the position of the midwife in Amish life and her central function has gone largely unmentioned. As a result, both Amish midwives and non-Amish midwives who serve the Amish community have continued to be invisible and their purpose within the social structure of Amish society has remained unformulated and ill-defined. A careful analysis of Amish midwifery suggests that these women occupy a position of power within the community structure and – despite research on community power which indicates otherwise – their situation within the larger community configuration speaks to the subtle and profound ways in which they shape the lives of Amish women and men.

I begin this chapter with a review of the literature on community power. I focus my review on various community theorists who have attended to issues of power and community structure within a rural context. Most prominently, I explore Molotch's foundational theorizing on the issue and present his growth machine hypothesis as well as detail his practice of using local elites to understand networks of community power. I then move to a discussion of other community theorists who have built upon the basic tenets of the growth machine hypothesis and survey some key pieces of literature on community power. With a focus on the ways in which community power has been defined and operationalized, my analysis points to the trend in community research that equate power with positions of leadership and those of high visibility. And while I present a gendered critique of this tendency that has been articulated by those within the field of rural community studies, I conclude that even these critiques fall short of their aim to redefine community power from a feminist standpoint.

The next section of this chapter reviews the Amish literature on this topic, finding that – similar to the conventional research on rural community power – academic inquiry has regularly focused on highly visible positions of power. As a result, the work has been quite gendered and has neglected the ways in which women within the Amish community participate and create their own networks of community power. My research suggests that the midwife serves as one point in this nexus of power and I explore the ways in which her influence is both constructed and exercised. This knowledge challenges traditional understandings of rural community power and suggests a revision of these conceptual frameworks. Midwives have a great deal of influence in matters reproductive and otherwise, and I present the variety of strategies that midwives in Amish society use to gain positions of influence within the community. Much of their strength, I argue, comes from their boundary position as neither insiders nor outsiders in Amish society and I present data to substantiate the numerous ways in which midwives navigate these borders between emic and etic status.

A detailed exploration of Amish midwifery follows, and I discuss both Amish women who serve as midwives as well as the larger contingent of non-Amish midwives who serve the community. I draw on a variety of vignettes culled from my observations to provide insight into why Amish women are more likely to select a non-Amish midwife to attend them in their home birth. I dismiss the notion that non-Amish midwives are outsiders and instead argue that they occupy a space between insider and outsider and assert that it is precisely their liminal location that provides them a

great deal of power and influence within the community. This power is not easily come by, and midwives must actively situate themselves within Amish society in a variety of different ways. Most interestingly, midwives often have a detailed understanding of kinship patterns and local lineages that they deploy to gain status and stature within the eyes of the community. Moreover, their position as a non-Amish woman allows them certain privileges that further substantiate their power within the community. Midwives negotiate the tensions between insider and outsider and use their unique position to leverage a great deal of power within Amish society. Their influence extends beyond matters reproductive and encompasses a variety of issues that encompass the lives of Amish women and men.

Community power

In chapter 3, I introduced several scholars who have shaped the field of community studies. Sociologists such as Tonnies, Durkheim and Weber have long championed the benefits of small communities and brought critical attention to the patterns of urbanization. These scholars, and many since, have elucidated the benefits that attend small communities. In their attempt to highlight the attributes of societies that are primarily small, rural and agrarian, their work has occasionally overlooked the “dark side” of small-community living. (Putnam, 2000) In particular, this vein of scholarship has been accused of idealizing a communitarian ethic at the expense of investigating the ways in which small communities exercise power over individuals – the group cohesion that serves as the backbone of Tonnies’ *Gemeinschaft*, Durkheim’s *mechanic solidarity*, and Weber’s *communalization* often comes at the cost of individual freedom. In some ways, their work has romanticized a certain notion of “community” and has driven a future generation of scholars to investigate the particular ways in which power operates in communities.

And though a generation of scholars have tackled the issue of power within communities, the topic continues to have purchase within the realm of rural studies (Molotch, 1976; Beaulieu, 1984; Lyon, 1987; Bridger, 1992; Bourke and Luloff, 1998). Many working in this area have used as their point of departure Floyd Hunter’s exploration of *power elites* (1953) as a way to understand how communities function through an analysis of the local elite class. Hunter’s theory grows out of the assumption that communities are dominated by a relatively small group of social, economic and political elites who are responsible for making the majority of decisions. This perspective was adopted and adapted by Molotch, who proposed a theory of communities as *growth machines*, where he, too, suggested that researchers consider social power from the hierarchical vantage point of community elites. He posits that “Conditions of community life are largely a consequence of the social, economic, and political forces embodied in this growth machine” (Molotch, 1976: 309). And while his *growth machine* refers to the particular topic of urban growth, his more general argument – that scholarly inquiry should focus on the social, economic, and political situation of the elite to understand communities – has become a shaping force in the discussion of power in rural society. The notion that communities can be studied – and it is presumed, understood – through an examination of community power continues to inform much of the work done on rural communities and on Amish communities more specifically.

In their prominent study on the structure of rural communities, Lionel Beaulieu and Vernon Ryan (1984) employ a variety of network analyses to demonstrate that community power must be understood in terms of hierarchy and suggest that those who have highly visible positions within the community are more likely to have influence or power over others. Their work concludes that “Given the strong association between the two networks [power networks and action networks], it seems

reasonable to conclude that power, as measured by organizational leadership roles, serves as a critical factor in determining the hierarchical structure of the action network” (Beaulieu and Ryan, 1984: 114). In short, the authors assert that power resides in individuals involved in leadership positions within the community and urge other scholars to consider the power vested in those at the top when attempting to unpack the vagaries of community structure. Others have followed in similar fashion (Lyon, 1987) and have even attempted to systematize power analyses within rural communities. Lyon’s detailed formula for discovering “individuals who are likely to possess knowledge about power in the community and how it is used in local issues” (Lyon, 1987: 208) involves a methodical analysis of people who held “official positions in the community” (Lyon, 1987: 208). His focus on presidents of businesses, directors of organizations, and pastors of churches echo Beaulieu and Vernon’s earlier call to center community analyses on community leaders and those with obvious social influence.

I do not mean to suggest that this focus on community power has emerged without critique. Community theorists have slowly begun to turn a critical eye to the implications of research that is solely attuned to a hierarchal conception of power, though their refashionings have, as yet, not fully addressed the androcentrism inherent in the conventional understandings of community power. In perhaps the most well known gender critique of rural community power, Bourke and Luloff (1998) contend that such a narrow understanding of community power misses the important contributions of women, arguing that “Rural women have wielded influence through less formal strategies than leadership” (Bourke and Luloff, 1998: 239) and further that “Studies of women [...] have claimed that women use different strategies than men to gain influence” (Bourke and Luloff, 1998: 240). Yet despite their commitment to broadening the discussion of community power, they resort to an analysis that focuses almost solely on “attitudes towards women as leaders, community involvement, perceptions of influence in the local community, and the perceived influence of women” to inform their new (and hypothetically more broadened) understanding of community power. And instead of providing them with a sustained critique of community power scholarship, their study can only comment on the gender disparities that exist with regard to community power – namely that “The general perception of the participants in this study was that men ran the community and held most formal leadership positions” (Bourke and Luloff, 1998: 251).

Bourke and Luloff’s study, and their resulting conclusions, leaves the authors with little new insight into the gendered dimensions of community power. Their only option is to encourage others that, despite their evidence to the contrary, women do matter. In closing, they admonish that “It is time to celebrate the achievements, hard work, commitment, spirit and leadership of rural women because they are an important part of and influential in the context of the rural community” (Bourke and Luloff, 1998: 252). The study’s findings suggest that the only option for challenging the androcentrism inherent in traditional conceptions of community power is a charitable revaluing of women’s work. Assuming that community power is necessarily tied to leadership positions, Bourke and Luloff do not question why power has been so narrowly defined to reflect these conventional bastions of male authority – indeed their work further substantiates traditional leadership roles as the hallmark of community power and influence. Despite recognizing that women’s perceived lack of influence and power often precipitates out of research that focuses on the “defined, prestigious and preferable roles for men” (Bourke and Luloff, 1998: 238), it is precisely these male-dominated positions to which the researchers turn. Their focus eliminates the possibility for a more nuanced and attentive understanding of community power and erases the very real sources of power and influence that women often wield.

Midwife as a source of community power

A focus on the private sphere opens new possibilities for understanding community power – both how it is gained and how it is exercised. Community power research has maintained a focus on leadership positions and has overlooked the myriad ways that power is woven through the fabric of social life. In particular, this work has missed the careful ways that women occupy networks of power in manners that are often less straightforward, but no less consequential. Work on the Amish society has similarly failed to notice the gendered nature of power hierarchies that permeate the Amish community. As has been documented in earlier chapters, research has consistently been concerned with the visible structure of the Amish community and much attention has been paid to exploring “The Social Architecture of Amish Society” (Kraybill, 2001) and the nature of “The Community” (Hostetler, 1993) through analyses of standard networks of visible power. As a result, there exists an elaborate descriptive body of work which details the relationship between community elders, bishops, deacons, etc. and discusses leadership, influence, and power within Amish society. And though this research offers much insight into the character of the Amish community, it obscures the multi-faceted nature of power and neglects that community power often has a considerable gender dimension. My research suggests that the midwife occupies one such position of power within the Amish community. Though the midwife has not been visible in studies on the Amish, she is nonetheless central to understanding the network of community power within Amish society. Below I explore the nature of Amish midwifery before moving into a more detailed analysis of community power from the perspective of the midwife.

The role of the midwife in Amish society

The profession of homebirth midwifery is varied, with both non-Amish and Amish women serving as midwives. Because of this, it is difficult to make sweeping generalizations about the field of midwifery within the Amish community. The majority of Amish women are attended by non-Amish midwives, though there are a fair number of Amish women who do practice midwifery and serve a predominantly Amish clientele. The number of Amish women who serve as midwives is low for a variety of reasons having to do with both the strict social pressures exerted on Amish women and the difficulties associated with Amish disavowal of technologies. Because Amish women (and Amish midwives more specifically) do not use vehicular transportation, they must employ a driver – a non-Amish woman – to take them to and from births. Furthermore, without easy access to a telephone, Amish women have to find a driver who is willing to serve as the nexus of communication... taking calls, fetching the midwife and transporting her to the birth and then returning her home when the event is finished. Alternatively, some Amish midwives do homebirths in their own home and require laboring women to come to the midwife’s house to deliver, though without telephone communication even these logistics can become difficult to negotiate.

A few birth centers run by Amish women do exist, and some women will travel to one of these centers to deliver. The difficulty is, once again, the nuisance associated with hiring a driver coupled with the prospect of laboring and possibly delivering while in transit – a scene that becomes all too real for a number of Amish women.

Anna was about to become the mother of three when she had the unfortunate experience of laboring and nearly delivering on her way to an Amish birth center. She was woken up in the middle of the night with what she thought might be a stomach ache. Her due date was approaching but still was a ways off and she did not expect

to be feeling the rhythmic contractions that felt so akin to labor. After watching the clock – doing some timing and quick arithmetic – she woke her husband and told him to summon a driver and send for a neighbor to sit with the children once they awoke. As he made his way to the phone shed (located a quarter mile down the road) she quickly gathered her things and prepared for her departure. When the driver arrived nearly an hour later, she was in the full throws of labor, with contractions coming hard and fast. As they drove to the birth center, she could feel the baby moving down and the labor intensifying. The moment the van pulled in front of the birth center, she flung open the door and nearly ran to the door. Once inside, she did not even make it to the bed before delivering her son. “I didn’t even have time to get my pins out!” remarks Anna when she tells me the story, referring to the numerous pins that fasten her apron to her dress. “That,” says Anna, “is why I have hired Vivian as my midwife. This time she can come to me!”

Such sentiments were often repeated by other Amish women who reported selecting a non-Amish midwife for the convenience that it afforded them. Amish birth centers, such as the one in which Anna so nearly missed delivering in, are not only rare because of the difficulty associated with getting to them. Amish women shoulder a great deal of familial pressures and have little time to pursue a career in midwifery while raising their often-times large and growing families. As I present in the previous chapter, the domestic duties that attend Amish life are substantial and leave little opportunity for a focus outside of the household. The particular birth center that Anna visited was operated by Martha, an early widowed great-grandmother (in her seventies), and two of her young teenage granddaughters. And though the birth center – which consisted of a 4 room house that sat in front of her larger farmhouse – had existed for decades, there was constant concern that once Martha retired the birth center would close. So while there are certainly options to birth with midwives who are themselves Amish – either at your home or at theirs – this option imposed a great deal of logistical restriction on the birthing woman and for that reason and others which I will explore below, Amish women often opted for midwives that were not Amish.

The non-Amish midwife in the Amish community

Amish women often selected a non-Amish midwife over an Amish midwife or birth center because of the anonymity that she provided. As I will explore in the following chapter, there is a substantial amount of embarrassment and shame associated with the pregnant body, and many Amish women are self-conscious about the state of pregnancy itself. Contrary to our culture’s hyper-vigilant scrutiny of and discussion around a woman’s pregnancy, the Amish work diligently to hide their pregnancy from both family and acquaintances.

Lydia, a bubbly first time mother, was always eager to chat when we arrived at her prenatal visits. Her husband worked at a nearby shop, leaving her great expanses of time to clean her house and wait for the delivery of her baby. One afternoon Vivian, Lydia and I began talking about her motivations for choosing Vivian as her midwife. Lydia succinctly responded that she “couldn’t imagine seeing my midwife in Church or somewhere after I delivered!” and went on to detail the degree to which this encounter would discomfort her. “I love seeing you now,” she reported, “But I would be so embarrassed to see you then.”

For Lydia, and for many other Amish women, the luxury of employing a non-Amish woman was precisely her outsider status. Like many Amish women, Lydia became enamored with Vivian’s vibrant

personality and warm-hearted demeanor, but was always aware that the intimacies of the relationship would not transfer into her daily life once the birth had taken place. It is precisely the midwife's outsider status that allows them this entrée into Amish society; though once she has entered the community as a midwife, her position within it becomes one of substantial 'insider' influence.

The midwife's emic perspective is not necessarily universally bestowed, but is the result of an active cultivation on her part. Non-Amish women have to work quite hard to be accepted into the community and to maintain their 'insider' status. Vivian saw herself as Amish in many ways and engaged in behaviors that reflected her investment in the Amish community. From frequenting Amish businesses and roadside stands to hiring Amish construction crews to help build her house, Vivian was deeply invested in supporting the local Amish economy. She regularly read the local and regional Amish newspapers – *the Budget* and *Die Botschaft* – to keep current on the social landscape of the community. Vivian spoke the local dialect of Pennsylvania Dutch (a German dialect) and frequently used the language to make comments to her clients. Midwives are occasionally invited to attend Amish ceremonies such as weddings and funerals, and Vivian attended several such events. Most interesting was her regular practice of connecting with her Amish clients through a detailed exploration of their extended families. Many midwives mentioned the importance of keeping a detailed knowledge of familial kinship patterns and I regularly saw the significance that this played in both building the legitimacy of the midwife and in creating a network of power and influence within the community.

On any given outing with Vivian, our conversation would eventually drift to the women we would see that day. "We're starting with Nancy Beiler," Vivian might say, "she's the sister-in-law of Sylvia Esh who lives in Sugar Valley and the daughter of Arie Stoltzfus. Then we'll stop in at Mary's – did you know that Mary is best friends with little Melinda over in White Deer? She married Sam from Brush Valley and now they live out there, but she used to live next door to Mary." A nondescript farm flies by in the distance. "Right there!" Vivian gesticulates wildly to the rapidly shrinking farmhouse. "That's the house where all those Swarey boys grew up – Samuel, John, and Raymond. Their dad is the bishop and his wife, Rachel, had all her babies over at Martha's place. Raymond married Rebecca – did you know that she and Nancy are actually cousins – and, anyway, they just moved to Wisconsin and now the others are thinking of going, too. Well, after Mary, we'll check on Katie who doesn't want her sister-in-law Linda to know that she's pregnant." In an unsure voice I'd ask "Linda Stoltzfus?" "Yes," Vivian would reply, "But not that Linda Stoltzfus. Her sister-in-law is the Linda Stoltzfus that's married to Ben Stoltzfus. You know his brother David Stoltzfus whose wife is Anna. They have that big farm over in Penns Valley and she has a twin brother named Amos and they look identical... remember them?"

This tracing of familial linkages serves an important function and distinguishes the midwife's allegiance to the particular communities she serves as well as indicates her acknowledgement of the centrality that these ties play in Amish society. Upon meeting a new client, Vivian would always ask the woman about "her people", meaning the particular family to which she belonged. Because there are several very common surnames (Stoltzfus, Lapp, Beiler, Zook, Fisher) coupled with a number of common first names (John, Jacob, Ben, and Sam for men; Mary, Anna, Lydia, Arie and surprisingly Barbie for women) it is rarely possible to know to which particular family anyone is referring. Instead, a more detailed description is necessary, often spanning several different families

– a woman may begin by saying that she is one of John and Mary Beiler’s girls and then go one to say from which area she hailed (up on the hill in Loganton or down in the valley in Nippenose, for example) and may also reference a well known uncle or grandparent. From there, the conversation would turn to questions about her siblings and the midwife might ask if Sam Beiler in the Sugar Valley is her brother or to whom her sisters are married. A similar line of questioning would be repeated for her husband’s “people”, all of which gave the midwife a detailed understanding of the ways in which this particular family was situated within the larger Amish community. As Vivian would get to know a couple, she would often discover connections between families and would remark “I didn’t know that your husband was Sadie May’s brother” or the like. Her Amish clients would frequently seek out Vivian’s knowledge of these relationships, asking her to remind them of where Anna Fisher’s “people” came from, and her mastery of Amish relations was regularly remarked upon. In addition to being a pleasant way to get her clients talking and feeling comfortable with her, this attention to familial lineages demonstrated her acknowledgement of the centrality of family ties in Amish life. It also provided her with a detailed understanding of the relationships that exist between community members and, as a result, lent to her a decidedly ‘insider’ status.

In a number of other ways, a midwife hovers between insider and outsider status. Her role as rural healer and country doctor is yet another example of this balance between insider/outsider. Vivian, as well as many of the other midwives in the area, frequently served as impromptu doctors for the communities they served. Midwives often have a strong commitment to homeopathic healing and are critical of what they see as the over-medicalization of the healthcare industry. These sentiments align nicely with those of the Amish population, and advice from midwives is often sought out on health matters beyond the realm of reproduction. Vivian had a particular interest in homeopathy and was always willing to help her clients address their ailments. And because a trip to the hospital is both logistically difficult and prohibitively expensive, Vivian was consulted to address a variety of the maladies that struck her clients.

When little Leroy fell down and hit his head, his mom Ester scooped him up in her arms and carried him across the street to Vivian’s house/clinic. After setting the small boy on her kitchen table, she took a good look at his head and carefully examined the long gash that ran down his scalp. After a moment she fished through her midwifery supplies and extracted her stitches. After numbing the injury, Vivian proceeded to meticulously sew closed the wound with a few well placed stitches. The family, who have been Vivian’s clients and friends, were grateful both for her skills as a country doctor as well as for the economic savings she had provided them.

Many midwives serve at the first line of medical defense for the Amish and are viewed as an internal resource to be tapped before an external search is undertaken.

As much as her healthcare services lend her great legitimacy, it would be amiss to imply that the midwife is seen as a full-fledged member of the Amish community because of these skills. In fact, her expertise sets her apart and reinscribes her position as an outsider, as her training and knowledge are in stark contrast to the 8th grade level of education that the Amish possess. Many of the Amish do see the midwife as a doctor of sorts and exhibit a great amount of respect for and deference towards women who serve the community in this capacity. The medical realm is one with which most Amish have little familiarity and hold those who work within this field in high esteem. Indeed members of the medical community greatly appreciate Amish patients for their reverence and obsequiousness, and more than one hospital doctor commented on their respectful submission to medical authority.

In an interview with an obstetrician who practices at the Mount Nittany Medical Center in State College, a doctor spoke about her appreciation for her Amish clients. "I don't see very many of them, but the ones that I have worked with are just great patients." She reported to me, "They don't ask questions or second guess you in any way. They know that you have their best interest in mind and they are very respectful. The worst patients are the University women who are so educated that they interrupt everything you say. Compared to them, the Amish are so easy to work with."

The distance that separates hospital doctors from the Amish is vast, and they are seen as very far removed from the rhythms of Amish life. Midwives, despite their non-Amish affiliation, are seen as much more integrated into the Amish community. The midwife's role is one that navigates between emic and etic – she is neither a fully legitimate insider to the community, nor is she relegated to the outside fringes of society – and this negotiation between these positions is where a great deal of her power within the community is vested.

Midwives on the boundaries of Amish society

My research clearly demonstrates that the power vested in midwives is a result of their occupation of this boundary position. Advice from Vivian was often sought out on a variety of matters, and not solely on those issues specifically linked to reproduction. Her extensive medical knowledge (as I mentioned above) along with her detailed familiarity with family kinship patterns and awareness of Amish customs resulted in her becoming a significant community resource. Vivian frequently admitted to being woken early by calls from her Amish clients and their families, and though for her this was often more frustrating than empowering, it goes part of the way to demonstrating the centrality of her role within the community. The Amish greatly value the border position of the midwife – she is a link to the world outside Amish society while still being deeply entrenched within the community that she works. Much of her influence grows out of this bridging function that she serves and in small and subtle ways she actively shapes Amish culture in powerful ways.

The midwife is primarily solicited for matters reproductive and she has a great deal of authority in this regard. She serves as the sole caregiver for Amish women during their pregnancy and provides prenatal and postpartum care along with labor support and midwifery during the birth. Vivian would see her clients an average of 10 times before their delivery, though many other midwives visit their clients with less frequency. The frequency of these visits, along with the several hours spent doing labor support during the delivery, allowed women to form a close bond with Vivian. Many of the deliveries I attended were marked by the long and intimate conversations we had with Amish couples while waiting for the birth, an opportunity afforded to few others who serve the Amish population.

Mary had been in labor for several days and her contractions had started and stopped so many times that we had all lost count. She had summoned Vivian a number of times believing that labor was progressing, and each time Vivian had returned home after the contractions fizzled out. So when Mary called Vivian and anxiously announced that things were finally changing, Vivian and I drove to Mary's with a fair bit of skepticism. Arriving at 11:00pm, we entered the quiet house just as a thunderous rainstorm began to downpour. Mary did look like she was in active labor and was progressing, albeit very slowly. Because of the torrential rain, we decided to stay and wait for Mary to deliver, rather than heading home once again.

That night we napped intermittently and sat with Mary and her husband Emanuel. We joked about having a slumber party and talked about the practice of non-Amish kids inviting their friends over to spend the night. Mary and Emanuel shared stories about Rumspringa, the run-around period for Amish teenagers. We spoke of our respective gardens, and Mary imparted Amish horticultural insights, explaining that a big lightening storm (such as the one that was going on at that very moment) was necessary in early spring to “activate the garden” and properly ripen the produce. We collectively passed the time talking about cultural differences great and small and enjoying each other’s company.

Over shared meals, late nights and early mornings, Amish women and men would get to know Vivian in a more sustained fashion and she would become more deeply familiar with their lives, families and work. So while they saw her first as a caregiver, she also became a friend to many of her clients and was sought out on matters beyond the expected.

Midwives who work with Amish populations practice a strict confidentiality. Because of the secrecy associated with Amish pregnancy, midwives are not at liberty to divulge the identity of their clients, and even two sisters may not know that they are being served by the same midwife. As a result of this strict confidentiality, their advice is often solicited on matters requiring great sensitivity. Beyond the realm of expected questions on breastfeeding and the vagaries of baby sleep patterns, midwives are often consulted on matters associated with natural family planning and child spacing. And though the Amish do not openly condone these practices, there is increasing evidence to suggest that fertility rates are declining within various Amish communities. (Greksa, 2002) Midwives regularly teach women about their fertility cycle, explain concepts such as ovulation, and educate about the female reproductive system more generally. Several women ask about the efficiency of extended breastfeeding to delay ovulation and many were interested in ways to space the next conception of their child using “natural” methods. (i.e. Non-hormonal methods rather than relying on birth control pills/ injections)

When Vivian arrived for a postpartum visit, she often sat at the kitchen table and had a glass of water or coffee while meeting with her client. On one such occasion, she asked Barbie, the new mother of a rapidly growing family of five, for a glass of water and then helped herself to the cupboard to grab a glass. As she filled it with water at the sink, she noticed five condoms neatly drying in the dish rack. “Are you reusing these?” Asked Vivian, knowing that the Amish are often prudent when it comes to recycling. “Oh yes,” said Barbie with a bit of surprise. “I wash them out after each time.”

And after having to tell more than one couple that condoms were not reusable, Vivian was convinced that more than a few Amish couples were using them to space their children.

The midwife’s position in the non-Amish world provides Amish women with access to a variety of resources and knowledge to which they would be otherwise restricted. Information on child spacing can be requested without judgment, and women are able to honestly explore their reproductive concerns without fear of disapproval or social censure. Midwives bring a variety of material into the community, and Vivian occasionally loaned books to women who had a particular interest in the subject. Midwives will teach women about the variety of birth control methods available and will even refer women to doctors for prescriptions of birth control pills when desired. The midwife was further consulted on matters sexual in nature and helped several Amish women and their husbands discover more fulfilling sex.

After one particularly giddy prenatal visit with first time mother Arie, Vivian and I stood up to leave. As we headed for the door, Arie lowered her voice and reported that her and her husband had recently stopped having sex. After Vivian asked her a few questions to make sure there was no illness or infection making intercourse painful, she gently eased into a conversation with Arie about sex and sexuality. "I don't ever get a thrill" Arie suddenly reported, referring to an orgasm. "I've heard women can have a thrill, but I don't know how." Vivian launched into a primer course on the female anatomy and suggested experimenting with new positions. Her and Arie talked about foreplay, lubrication and more generally about intimacy in marriage. Vivian served as part therapist, part sexologist, part biology teacher and, after the tutorial, Arie was visibly relieved to have had the conversation.

Such conversations would likely not be possible with an Amish midwife and are yet another way in which the midwife's situation on the boundary between Amish and non-Amish society is distinct in that it fosters a relationship that is both deeply personal and subtly powerful.

Midwives are well aware of the power that they hold in the community and deploy their influence with intention. Because of her status as a medical practitioner as well as an advisor and sometimes confidant, a midwife is able to interject her own philosophies into the Amish community in a variety of ways.

Vivian felt very strongly about the issue of circumcision and encouraged Amish families not to circumcise their boys. When a baby boy was born, the parents often asked if she performed circumcision. She would respond that she did not and would then give a very thoughtful, but critical, synopsis of the procedure. Once she had summed her thoughts on the matter, she further elaborated that other Amish families were omitting this practice and would draw upon her knowledge of friends and relatives that had elected to forego the operation. Vivian always concluded that she was glad that she did not circumcise her own boys and now that they were grown, they were grateful as well. And while she would always offer the name of a doctor who did perform the surgery, she would strongly encourage them to reconsider the necessity of circumcision.

The authority that midwives possess is wielded quite carefully and only has purchase because midwives have such an intricate and profound understanding of the nuances of Amish culture. Their power exists because they are able to inhabit a position between insider and outsider and leverage the interstitial nature of their situation. It was only with the utmost comprehension of the rhythms of Amish life that Vivian was able to delicately move her Amish clients away from the practice of circumcision. Without her deep investment in the community and her comprehensive knowledge of Amish kinship and the importance of familial connections, her influence in the matter of circumcision or in others more generally would be greatly compromised.

Shifting locations of community power

This research suggests that midwives occupy positions of power within Amish society. Despite the fact that they are not members of Amish society, they possess and exercise a great deal of influence within the Amish community. Conventional scholarship on power asserts that community clout rests in those who occupy highly visible positions within the community structure and who are often members of the elite. My data suggest otherwise, and find that community power can accrue in those individuals quite unlikely to be vested with such authority. Within the Amish society, power is

gendered, and analyses focused on formal networks of influence and relation miss the vibrant and vital flows of power that reside below the surface. Vivian, and other midwives that serve Amish women, have substantial influence in the lives of Amish women and men despite their relegation to the margins of Amish society. Their position on the fringe allows them both access to the daily lives of Amish women, and provides them with a measure of distance not afforded to those who are officially 'insiders'.

Because midwives do possess a significant amount of power in the community, their existence troubles the notion of the Amish community existing as a distinct and separate society. As separate as they may try to be, the Amish are very much situated within the context of contemporary American life. The fact that people such as Vivian have the power to shape certain social processes suggests that decision making does not always follow the conventional channels that have been so extensively explored by Amish scholars. Formal structures, and the theories that attempt to render them transparent, do not speak to the very intricate workings of power that happen in the micro exchanges between families and their midwife. Molotch's growth machine, and the subsequent theoretical musings that his work has inspired, are one vehicle for explaining power in rural communities, but a sole reliance on the explanations that these theories generate leave us with only a partial understanding of community power – and one that specifically neglects the gendered dimensions of relationships within a community structure.

When Vivian was interested in starting a community birth class for her new clients that were first time mothers, many members of the Amish community thought it was a great idea. Yet when she articulated her desire to show a variety of birth films to those in attendance, many were less than thrilled. Utilizing her connection to numerous bishops and elders – she had, of course, delivered a number of their children and grandchildren – she was able to garner permission to screen her films despite the Amish's strict ban on media technologies.

From the vantage point of the midwife, the Amish community looks quite different from the one depicted in more conventional analyses. The tidy lines that have been drawn by scholars such as Kraybill and Hostetler do not rightly capture the myriad ways in which Amish society blends into mainstream America. The politics of Amish religion and their decision-making structures imply that life is ordered and precise, and research that uses these facets of Amish life as a guidepost will most certainly generate conclusions that reflect this romanticization. My research, however, does not use as its point of departure the conventions of Amish religion and social arrangement and instead acknowledges the social significance of birth in the lives of women and men. As a result, my work demonstrates that community power is neither solely vested in the positions of the social elites (bishops, elders, deacons, etc.) nor is it even exclusively located within the Amish society. Amish midwives, who are themselves not Amish, enjoy considerable power within Amish society despite the fact that their influence is not accounted for in the metrics of conventional analyses.

Chapter 6 Amish Identity and the Domestic Spaces of Daily Life

One of the functions of dubbing something “personal” is to define that activity, decision or complaint outside of the social, political or public arena, and to connect it with the particular circumstances and responsibilities of the individual or individuals concerned. [...] The particular problem is of no public interest or concern.

Ruth Gavison, 1992
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Introduction

As I have suggested in Chapters 2 and 3, our social world has been largely split between a public and a private realm. The public sphere and general issues of social welfare is structured to be primarily the realm of men. Opposed to this is the private sphere, referring to the domestic aspects of life, which have been primarily occupied by women. This bifurcation between the two spheres has had numerous consequences, and I explore some of these in this chapter as well as investigate the particular gender relevance that this public/private division has on the way we understand social life. I begin with a brief review of the feminist literature on the topic and demonstrate that not only have there been two distinct spheres that regulate the ways in which we live our lives, but that these two spheres have been gendered in significant ways. More specifically, the public and private realms have been tied to specific gender characteristics associated with men and women – the public sphere has been perceived as a space of logic, rationality and disembodiment, while the private sphere has been associated with affectivity, passion and embodiment. I argue that these divisions have been and continue to be socially constructed, which conceals the various power inequalities that they enable.

From this point of departure, I move on to explore the consequences of a society divided between public and private realms. The negative connotations associated with the private sphere have rendered it both scholarly and socially invisible. This trend is typical of work on the Amish (as is demonstrated in Chapter 3) and I discuss the consequences of a sole academic focus on the public sphere. Detailing the importance of Amish agrarian life, I note the ways in which Amish identity has long been tied to the public sphere. Academic work continues to concentrate on agriculture as a primary site of Amish identity. Because farming is presently being subjected to a variety of global fluctuations and adjustments, conventional agriculture is quickly becoming a thing of the past. In a market increasingly dominated by agribusiness, some Amish farmers are unable to compete and are choosing to migrate into wage-labor positions. I conclude with a discussion of the potential threats that these shifts pose to the foundation of a separate and distinct Amish society and suggest that the public sphere may no longer be the primary site of Amish identity.

I move on to an analysis of the public/private dichotomy and draw on the work of feminist scholars who suggest that this division is actually associated with a great deal of ambiguity. These spheres do not remain constant over time, nor is their meaning universal across different spaces. In fact, recent work has investigated the connection between the two spheres and I situate my own examination of Amish society within this line of inquiry. Domestic spaces, and the women who occupy them, have often served as markers of cultural identity in times of social change. Because the agricultural component of Amish identity has begun to diminish, I offer an assessment of the private sphere of Amish life and examine both the distinct features of Amish domestic life as well as the

particular instances where the public and private realms blur together. Drawing on ethnographic data culled from my study, I show that the Amish home is increasingly serving as both a private space of significance and a public sphere of influence.

The public/private dichotomy

Feminist social scientists have long established that daily life has been divided into distinguishable public and private spheres (Arendt, 1958; Elshtain, 1981). The public sphere has referred to the realm where men (originally only those possessing both economic and social status) participated in collective governance and saw to all matters economic and social. By contrast, the private sphere has referenced all that is not encapsulated within the confines of the public and primarily involves the domestic lives of women and men. The gendering of the two spheres – the public as male and the private as female – has been well documented (Arendt, 1958; Elshtain, 1981; Pateman, 1989; Gavison, 1992). Not only have these spheres relegated men and women into appropriate or legitimate spaces (with men enjoying the civic/public while women occupied the domestic/private) but the attributes associated with each of these spheres have been gendered as well. Reason, objectivity and impartiality have become emblematic of a public realm, whereas desire, subjectivity and affectivity have been tied to the private sphere (Pateman, 1989). Within this dichotomy, those features associated with the mind stand opposed to those of the body, and this bifurcation has further associated these traits with particular kinds of people – namely reason and logic with men, the body and emotion with women (Gavison, 1992).

In this social division, women have traditionally been excluded from the public realm because of their domestic affiliation and their inextricable ties with the body (Pateman, 1989). Growing out of this public/private split, masculinity has been equated with logic and femininity with sentimentality and irrationality. The strength of the dichotomy depends on the opposition of the two spheres and their correlating attributes, and any crossover between the two has threatened to undermine the social ordering that has for so long relied on the bifurcation. This particular social arrangement has led to the assumption that men are inherently logical, rational and above all disembodied, while women are irrational, emotional and embodied. Young argues:

“By assuming that reason stands opposed to desire, affectivity, and the body, this conception of the civic public excludes bodily and affective aspects of human existence. In practice this assumption forces homogeneity upon the civic public, excluding from the public those individuals and groups that do not fit the model of the rational citizen capable of transcending body and sentiment. This exclusion has a twofold basis: the tendency to oppose reason and desire, and the association of these traits with kinds of persons” (Young, 1997: 194).

As a result, Young contends that women, because of their association with affectivity, desire and the body have been largely excluded from the public realm and thus systematically overlooked in academic research.

The public/private social division is not a natural edifice that grows out of human predispositions or particular gender traits. For the last half century, feminist researchers have attempted to demonstrate the ways in which this division is a social construction – one that has been built and maintained by both men and women in small and large ways. Conventionally, women have been marked as overly affective, passionate, irrational and have been furthermore seen as having an otherwise (overly)embodied identity. Their affective nature has long been used as a justification for keeping them shut out from the public realm (Elshtain, 1981). The public realm is the one in which

social, economic and legislative power is located, and women's historical relegation to the private sphere has often left them without access to any substantial control or influence over their lives. Moreover, the underlying assumption – namely that these realms were autonomous and separate but entirely equal and necessary – ignored the very reality that one sphere exercised nearly complete power while the other sphere fostered nearly total dependence (Gavison, 1992). The perpetuation of two distinct and separate domains – and the gender divisions that this has inspired – fostered a climate where the gender inequality that existed within our social system was cloaked within a language of personal choice and biological imperative.

Partly because of this, much that has been deemed *private, domestic, or personal* has become largely invisible – both academically and socially (Pateman, 1989; Gavison, 1992). The importance of the public has overshadowed the private, and matters that are seen as distinctly feminine – including childbirth and rearing and general domestic work – are characterized as trivial and negligible to the functioning of general society. This marginalization of the private realm has led to the assumption that society's particular power dynamic and hierarchy is somehow natural, rather than socially constructed. Because of its assumed *natural* status, the private sphere has remained largely invisible to public scrutiny and academic inquiry and the women who occupy it often go unnoticed. This conventional way of understanding society has been premised on the belief that a division between the public and the private is not only a biological necessity, but is also essential for the development of a functioning social system.

The Amish public sphere

For the Amish, the division between public and private is clearly demarcated and aggressively protected. Even though Amish society does not employ this language of public/private, evidence of these theoretical divisions are evident within Amish society. The public sphere of Amish life has been reserved for men, and their role as farmers and laborers (as well as small-business owners and craftsmen) legitimizes their position within the realm of the public. As was detailed in Chapter 3, much research has been focused on the nature of the public sphere and particular attention has been focused on exploring Amish agriculture (see Kraybill, 1993; Hostetler, 1993; Kraybill, 1994). And though systematic investigation of the Amish public sphere is an important sociological and anthropological endeavor, it offers only partial insight into the nature of Amish identity at both the individual and community level. An analysis of the public realm of Amish life rests on the abovementioned assumptions about the private realm – namely that it is inconsequential and trivial. Instead, drawing on the feminist explorations of the public/private dichotomy presented above, I suggest that an analysis of the private sphere challenges the notion that this is a realm of only marginal importance. I demonstrate how an investigation of the domestic realms of Amish life illuminates the ways that both the public and private spheres are socially constructed by individuals in response to not only external economic pressures, but also to internal desires to maintain a distinct cultural identity.

It may seem that the public/private division falls between public mainstream American culture and the seemingly private Amish culture; this is not the focus of this particular investigation. Each culture manifests both elements of public and private within themselves and the Amish culture is no different. A comparison between the public and private elements of Amish and American culture – while interesting – is not what follows. Instead, I address the public and private elements of Amish society and do not directly focus my attention on mainstream American society. I argue instead that the public elements of Amish society are in many ways similar to the public elements of

other cultures and thus draw on literature that has documented these patterns outside of the particular Amish context. So while the Amish do have a complex and elaborate relationship with mainstream American society, I am not arguing that the Amish represent the private realm of American public culture – instead I am suggesting that both cultures share elements of both the public and the private and can be analyzed separately despite their connection to each other.

Amish identity has rested on an ability to maintain autonomy from mainstream society. Relying on agricultural pursuits for fiscal solvency has allowed them to remain ‘in this world, but not of it’ - a cornerstone of Amish living. An autonomous Amish public sphere has maintained separation from American social, cultural and economic forces that threaten to undermine the distinct principles of Amish identity. In particular, the Amish reliance on farming has facilitated their disconnection from mainstream society and has enabled them to develop an identity intimately tied to the land. Though the Amish do participate in the American marketplace both in terms of agricultural production, small business ownership and wage-labor work, their interaction with the American state as well as the American public has historically been minimal, and they have existed largely outside of “conventional” American life. Recognizing a certain degree of separation, the American government has granted the Amish several public liberties that allow them to exist beyond the realm of typical American citizens. As a result, compulsory military conscription is waived and farm furloughs are granted, formal high school education is not required owing to the tacit knowledge gained through farm work, and Amish workers are not required to pay into the Social Security system, as they refuse to accept the benefits of such a program given their patterns of land inheritance (Kraybill, 1993).

In these ways and many others, the Amish have managed to construct and preserve numerous boundaries between themselves and the broader American nation due in large part to their agricultural lifestyle. Agriculture has allowed the Amish to fashion an autonomous public sphere that for the most part exists outside of the public sphere of American society. And though the Amish public sphere is not entirely autonomous from mainstream America – they are, after all, involved in market commerce on a variety of scales – their reliance on agriculture has allowed a degree of separation that offers them a certain level of independence. For the Amish, the realm of agriculture remains an exclusively male space. Amish society has used agricultural themes to structure its cultural identity and, within the Amish community, agriculture has long underpinned what it means to be Amish. In fact, this relationship between agriculture and a more general Amish identity has been well documented, as the public realm of Amish society has been the focus of substantial academic inquiry (see Kraybill, 1993; Hostetler, 1993; Kraybill, 1994).

As I explore in previous chapters, the Amish continue to have a strong connection to their agricultural heritage. Since coming to America in the mid 16th century (Kraybill, 1993), the Amish have sought to maintain an agricultural existence, and for the most part have been remarkably successful. To this day, many retain a strong agricultural tradition, and cite Genesis 1:28-29 in which God instructs Adam and Eve to:

“...fill the earth, and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea, and the birds of the air, and over every living creature that moves on the ground. I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food” (Hostetler, 1993: 88).

The Amish have interpreted these verses to legitimize their agrarian lifestyle as most closely conforming to their interpretation of Christian ideals.

Such closeness to the land has played a formative role in Amish identity. Two hundred years of farming have drastically shaped Amish narratives, and they continue to see agriculture as the utmost Christian occupation (Kraybill, 1994). Physical contact with God’s creation is seen as a

way to affirm their faith and submit to a higher purpose. Farming has also provided the Amish a way to exist largely apart from mainstream America and the American state. The autonomy associated with agriculture has facilitated their living a largely self-sufficient life, and they have minimal interaction with the outside world. Such lifestyle has historically allowed them to live without debt (Romans 13: 8) and enjoy a life of self-sacrifice for the greater good.

In recent decades, however, global shifts in agriculture have compromised farmers' ability to compete in a market increasingly dominated by agribusinesses (Bowler, 1985; Wallace and Smith, 1985; Nogaard, 1989; Napton, 1992; Buttel, 1997; Robinson, 1997; Lobao and Meyer, 2001). Changes associated with global economic shifts have restructured farming in America and Amish farmers are increasingly unable to compete. As a result, farmers across the country are forsaking agriculture and adopting wage-labor positions. For the Amish in particular, this poses numerous challenges (Kraybill, 1994). Not only have they imbued farm life with much social, cultural and personal meaning, but farm life has also provided them with the means by which they are able to maintain considerable distance from mainstream America (Olshan, 1991; Kreps et al., 1994; Smith et al., 1997). As Amish families give up farming as an occupation, they often adopt wage-labor jobs in order to survive (Kraybill, 1994). Little is known about the ways in which this widespread move away from farming as an occupation may challenge some of the boundary constructions upon which Amish social identity rests. The collective Amish public identity that has for so long been tied to an agrarian existence is slowly being refigured as agriculture restructuring alters the nature of farming today. It is unclear how the dissolution of conventional agriculture will impact the public sphere of Amish life and whether the shifting nature of farming from small-scale production to agribusiness will compromise a distinct Amish identity. Of most interest are the ways that agricultural restructuring will change the relationship between the public and the private spheres in Amish society.

Critiquing the Public/Private Dichotomy

As was detailed in the previous chapter, the conventional focus of research – with its particular attention towards those topics that constitute the public sphere – often facilitates the erasure of private social worlds and thus produces a skewed understanding of society. An inquiry into the private or the personal plays a crucial role in our understanding of women's and men's lives. These spheres do not remain constant over time, nor is their meaning universal across different spaces. Instead, the ways that a group of people articulate and delineate the private as well as the public realms of their lives offers a window into how these areas are separated and the meanings associated with their separation. In fact, as a conceptual framework, *public* and *private* are associated with a great deal of ambiguity - they do not necessarily refer to a particular geographic location such as the workplace versus the home (Massey, 1994). Instead, their usefulness as conceptual tool often lies in their attachment to particular gendered traits, with the public associated with individualism and autonomy while the 'private' is linked to interconnection and relatedness. As Massey has argued, the spatial is often a manifestation of the social, the "stretching out" of interactions (Massey, 1994). This is not to say that women are biologically determined to occupy private spheres of social life, it is instead to suggest that the work that women are socialized to do regularly positions them within the private domestic sphere. Feminist researchers do not intend to position one sphere above the other, nor is it their intention to unnecessarily glorify the private sphere. Instead, they argue that an understanding of the private sphere shapes both what we know about women's and men's lives and offers us deeper insight into the gendered nature of social life. The "spatial or-

ganization of society is integral to the production of the social, and not just merely its result” (Massey, 1994: 4).

Feminist scholars – most notable feminist geographers – are increasingly theorizing about the connections that exist *between* public and private spaces (Massey, 1994; McDowell, 1999). They argue that the conditions within the household are directly related to broader patterns of global economic development. Public and private spaces are not isolated realms without connection, but instead exist in relation to each other (Massey, 1994; Staeheli and Martin, 2000). Within this claim, both realms are intimately dependent on the other and changes in one can have a substantial and lasting impact on both. The home is not a solitary space, but is instead related to other spaces, particularly those in the public sphere (Domosh, 1998). Instabilities in the public sphere can transfer to the private sphere and can result in particular domestic habits gaining cultural significance. In many instances, women’s bodies can stand in for this practice, and social and biological events that involve the bodies of women can take on a renewed sense of importance in periods of cultural uncertainty and social change. As scholars continue to document the changing nature of Amish agriculture and the subsequent impacts that this has on the public realm of Amish culture, I suggest that a more sustained focus on the private spheres of Amish life is important if we wish to gain a more complete picture of the shifting landscape of Amish society.

The Amish private sphere

Tensions between dominant and minority cultures have often become most evident during periods of increased contact. At these times, minority societies and their cultures can begin to be assimilated into the dominant society, and may start to lose the distinct markers that separate them from outsiders. Scholars have noted the ways assimilation can spur a deeper entrenchment of cultural differences. Most notably, Franz Fanon, who wrote of the cultural significance of the veil in Algeria, has detailed the ways in which Algerian women’s bodies and the practices that surrounded them came to signify Muslim culture and the Muslim society in general. He describes why this heightened symbolism occurred at a point in time when Muslim Algerians felt most threatened by French colonizers, and finds that times of heightened interaction actually “strengthen the traditional pattern of behavior” (Fanon, 1965). Thus, cultural acts that involve women are increasingly important when the influences of outsiders threaten to erode social and cultural conventions.

As the Amish public identity becomes eroded, it is difficult to predict the ways that the society will re-write the Amish narrative without the agricultural theme that has long underpinned their story. A focus on the public sphere offers only partial answers to the questions surrounding the impact of agriculture restructuring, and many scholars have speculated about the future with little substantiation or evidence (Kraybill and Olshan, 1994; Kraybill, 2001). I suggest that much of this work overlooks the private sphere of Amish life and propose that an investigation into the domestic realm may indeed offer insight to the changing nature of collective Amish identity. As I explore in Chapters 2 and 3, conventional analyses often overlook all that is deemed private, feminine, reproductive, and/or personal because of the assumed connection between privacy and irrationality, emotionality, sentimentality and general female embodiment. Scholarship on the Amish has been similarly disembodied and lacks a systemic engagement with the private realm of Amish life. As a result, important trends are missed as investigations fail to notice the subtle but pervasive changes that are happening within the Amish private sphere and the connection that these trends have to events in the public sphere. In particular, academic aversion to the private realm and female em-

bodiment has led researchers to disregard Amish women and their domestic spaces as potential sites of inquiry.

This study of Amish identity departs from the knowledge that as societies become increasingly integrated, cultural purity is often invested in and invented on the bodies of women and the domestic realm that they occupy. (Fanon, 1965) The Amish have a history of defining themselves against mainstream America, and have often found their women to provide a vehicle through which this can be achieved. Early in the nineteenth, Amish ministers and bishops focused on the paternal authority within the household (housefather rule) as a way to distinguish their society from the individualistic identifications that characterized the early American Republic (Reschly, 2002). Thus, a re-construction of women's subordination within the home was championed as a quintessential Amish identity characteristic in the face of a powerful market revolution that threatened the survival of a distinct Amish identity. Discourses of women's secondary status continue to permeate the narratives of Amish identity and are reinforced and reified in times of social and cultural instability.

Because Amish men are leaving farming and moving into an ever more integrated workforce, the boundaries between Amish and non-Amish are becoming blurred. Men in such a situation frequently turn to their women to bear the burden of upholding cultural authenticity and Amish distinctiveness (Schmidt, 2002). Women are charged with preserving cultural differentiation in times of transition, and often become the actual markers of Amish culture themselves (Pederson, 2002). In such cases, women's bodies and the private spaces that they occupy become the location of culture, and are often invested with meaning as social and economic changes shake other aspects of cultural identity. Women, and the domestic spaces that they inhabit, are seen as representing an authentic Amish identity and these spaces become more symbolic as other aspects of the culture become unstable.

For the Amish, then, it is not surprising that there has been a renewed interest in maintaining Amish culture in the private sphere. The public sphere of Amish life has been altered by agricultural restructuring and globalization – their ability to construct and maintain an identity based on the agrarian principles has been significantly reduced. Instead, the production of a collective social identity seems to have shifted to the private sphere and women are more and more seen as the guardians of Amish identity. A closer look at Amish domestic life offers a new perspective into the production of Amish identity. Below I examine different aspects of domestic life within the Amish household. And while each of these observations seem marginal (as domestic observations often do), I argue that in combination they have a synergistic power to explain the variety of novel ways in which Amish women are shouldering responsibility for the maintenance of Amish cultural identity.

Spaces of Amish domesticity

Amish domestic spaces may offer partial insight into the ways that women generate and preserve what it means to be Amish. The home space plays a significant role in the community and the maintenance of certain practices that happen within the home have become key components in the construction of an Amish social identity. As the importance of the public sphere diminishes with the advent of agricultural restructuring and the numerous other economic changes that have reshaped life, the private sphere has risen to prominence and has become a dominant site in an attempt to safeguard Amish culture. An examination of the home and the activities that constitute every day living are important to understand the ways in which Amish identity is constantly being created and maintained. That this process happens in the home as well as in the more public realm of Amish life

has yet to be noted. Analysis of the private sphere of Amish life promises to not only illuminate what we know about Amish living and the gendered foundations upon which these practices rest, but also challenge the conventional dichotomy that separates public and private spheres into distinct realms.

The home has a particular significance to the Amish community, both for the purpose that it serves and the ideals that it represents. All noteworthy life events take place in the home – with births, weddings and deaths being marked by their residential location.

The line of buggies and hired vans that stretched from the house was vast. Because Mrs. Beiler was a fixture in the community, Amish from several surrounding towns had come to attend her funeral. Vivian knew Mrs. Beiler well and felt that it was appropriate that she attend the viewing and I (having met Mrs. Beiler on a few occasions) accompanied her to pay my respects. We were directed to park on a nearby lawn by the team of men and boys that were overseeing the cars, buggies and horses. Inside, people had gathered on the 50 or so benches that filled the living room – all the furniture had been removed. The men sat on one side of the room and the women and children on the other and all talked quietly in hushed voices. After passing our condolences to Mrs. Beiler's daughter (we had recently midwifed the birth of her second child), we were led into a small room where the simple pine casket was located. There, in the center of the bare room, lay Mrs. Beiler, dressed in a simple blue dress, adorned only with a starched white apron and cap. After we viewed the body, we joined the women and to converse about the legacy of Mrs. Beiler. Quickly, our conversation moved to events in the community and stories of recent births. It became quite clear that this was as much about a moment for visiting and connecting with friends and family as it was one for grieving for the recent death.

For the Amish, the home is not only a private dwelling for members of the family, but is also a space for regular community congregation. Bi-monthly church services rotate through the homes of congregation members, and it is not uncommon for each home to accommodate the entire parish of 20-30 families. To do this, Amish homes are equipped with partition-style walls that can easily be removed to contain the congregation and host the worship. These partitions are put up to separate the bedrooms from the other living spaces on the downstairs floor of the house. When it is an Amish woman's time to "have church" at her house, she will fold in her partition walls and remove all of the furniture (hauling it upstairs to the second story or downstairs to the basement) in order to create the space for the services. A few days before church Sunday, a horse will pull the "church wagon" over to the house, and the family will fill the house with the 30-50 wood benches that serve as seating for the event. The process is similar for weddings and funerals, though the attendance at these occasions can exceed 250 people.

One of my first visits out with Vivian brought us to an Amish home tucked up on a hill. This was not a midwifery visit, but was instead a day when Vivian would offer body work and chiropractic treatments to members of the surrounding Amish community. We were led into a large room with a few chairs along the wall. A door led off to the kitchen and the entire two walls were covered with what appeared to be closets or storage boxes. As Vivian set up her treatment table and supplies, I sat wondering what could lie within the storage closets. As the day progressed, I took notes on the clients that Vivian saw and on the nature of their interaction, but I continued to wonder why an Amish family would need so much storage space. It

wasn't until the end of the day that Vivian explained to me that the closets were not closets at all, but were partitions that separated one room from the other. As I became increasingly familiar with Amish homes, I realized that these panels were an architectural cornerstone of Amish living. Nearly every house we visited had similar style partitions; some families had even retrofitted entire walls to accommodate the dividers.

The architecture of the Amish home clearly suggests that public and private spaces can exist simultaneously within the domestic structure. The open floor plan and movable partitions clearly articulate a fluidity between the public and the private spheres – a houseful of guests at a church service, wedding or funeral is more than a mere gathering of friends and family. Instead, these events are significant community affairs that offer members a chance to renew connections and strengthen ties. For many Amish men and women, these moments are the only times that they are in touch, as transportation is limited and days are filled with work. As such, the Amish home is not only a private space of domesticity but is also a site of public interaction and community-building.

Having church services in the home is in no way about showcasing one's home or displaying one's own household finery – all Amish homes are decorated exactly the same, including the same furniture, clocks, rugs and wall hangings.

Vivian often joked that you could never get lost in an Amish house. Even without an electric light, she could always find what she needed in an Amish kitchen. Pots and pans were, without fail, stacked on rolling shelf in the corner cupboard. Silverware was in the drawer to the right of the sink. Even clothing was arranged in a similar fashion, and I quickly learned which drawer to open to fetch a nightgown or where in the closet to find a clean dress.

Sameness is a source of pride within the Amish community and each church service is identical – the same food (ham and cheese sandwiches, peanut butter mixed with marshmallow whip, and schnitz pie) is served every Sunday without variation. As a result, having a home that can accommodate church and other community events is not an attempt to parade domestic accumulations. Instead, possessing such a home is a way for families to signify their status as members of the Amish community. Residing in a house that can fulfill this condition is an important part of Amish identity – having church services rotate through the home continues to play a significant role within Amish life.

Lydia was a newly married girl of 19 who, with her new husband, had recently moved into a 3 bedroom ranch-style home. Not yet retrofitted with partitions, it could not accommodate the large congregation to which she belonged. Because Lydia could not host church, she assisted her Amish neighbors in preparing their homes for upcoming services. She also engaged in a variety of charity projects to accommodate for her inability to host church. When we visited her for her first prenatal, she was in the process of collecting clothes for a clothing drive that she was helping to organize. Later in the pregnancy, Lydia baked donuts and pastries for a bake sale and even helped serve at a chicken dinner fundraiser. In these ways, Lydia's domestic duties (helping others clean their home and ready it for church or baking sweets for an upcoming sale) became acts of Amish identity construction.

It is not only those families who host church that are seen as being authentically Amish. Instead, Amish identity is built in a variety of small ways through daily domestic actions. Preparing for church or organizing fundraisers are part of the rhythm of life for Amish women and the community significance of these events can not be easily overlooked. Amish women's domestic work certainly plays a significant role in sustaining the family, but it also helps foster the moments that bring the

Amish together in culturally specific ways. Without these community-centric events in the private spaces of the home, the communal principles that underlie Amish identity would be difficult to sustain. Contrary to the conventional binary that locates the home on the private side of the public/private division, the Amish home serves as both a private space as well as a site of public identity within the Amish community.

Church services are not the only times when Amish families come together to network in the domestic environment. As Kraybill perceptively notes, “Visiting is the national sport of Amish society.” (Kraybill, 2001: 150) Not only is it common for families to gather during the Sundays that they are not attending church (twice monthly) but it is also common for families to travel great distances to stay at each other’s homes for days to weeks at a time. Because farming no longer offers a sustainable source of income for many Amish families, it has become more common to move to new areas or across state lines to explore economic possibilities – both agricultural and wage labor. As a result, voyages are often made to connect with distant siblings or parents across the miles. The responsibility for familial connection falls primarily on the women, who will often purchase bus tickets or hire a van in order for themselves and their children to visit family in outlying regions.

We arrived at Sarah’s prenatal appointment just as her and her children were getting settled from their ten-day-long visit to Wisconsin. Sarah and her three sisters had chartered a bus to take their collective families (30 in all) to visit a brother and sister who had moved to Wisconsin. Their trip involved not only reconnecting with family, but also allowed Sarah and her husband to educate her family on the success of their organic raw yogurt business. Sarah wanted her brother and sister in Wisconsin to convert their dairy into an organic operation given the success that Sarah’s family had had with their own organic business. Sarah’s trip was certainly an attempt to reconnect with her extended family, but it also served as an opportunity to discuss future business strategies and in some ways bring the Amish into a new era of agricultural production.

So while it is primarily the women who organize these cross-country trips, their contribution to the maintenance of Amish identity extends beyond the actual voyage. Because communication between family members is minimal, it is primarily during these extended visits that ties are renewed and cemented. Moreover, important information is passed between the Amish as they negotiate and re-negotiate what it means to be Amish. Decisions about whether or not to enter into the organic market or to leave farming all together are often determined in the domestic spaces of Amish life and are strongly influenced by the family and surrounding community. The home is not only a private space, but also functions as a site of identity construction and preservation as the Amish negotiate the uncertainties associated with the public sphere.

These domestic connections between Amish families and community members take on new shape as children grow, and it is very common to send older children and young teenagers to live with extended family members for months at a time.

When Sylvia had her first baby, her sister’s daughter Rebecca came to serve as her hired girl. At the age of 15, Rebecca was easily able to handle the domestic tasks for which she was responsible. She worked from sun-up to sun-down, preparing all of the family’s meals as well as taking care of the laundry and other household chores. She took care of the new baby when Sylvia slept and she helped in the barn during the evening milking. For all of this work, Rebecca was paid about \$25 a week and she stayed for a full six weeks.

Rebecca's tenure as a hired girl not only allowed her to make a small amount of extra money, but it also provided her with an in-depth apprenticeship into Amish domestic life. This learning allows for a community approach to education, rather than one that falls primarily on the parents. Young girls may circle through between five and ten homes before they marry and find themselves in their own home. This training is not limited to girls and young women, as a teenager may become a "hired boy" at his uncle's wood-working shop, earning a bit of money, connecting with extended family members, and becoming schooled in the particular details of Amish identity. These sorts of practices are unique to Amish society and bring Amish children and young adults into the Amish community through the production of a distinct Amish identity. It is within these domestic sites that Amish identity is fashioned and revised – the public and the private spheres seem increasingly blurred in the moments when the Amish invent and re-invent their particular identity through these sorts of inter-generational training.

This is not to suggest that the two spheres do not operate in significant ways within Amish society. Indeed, even within the home, there can be both a public and a private sphere. During church services, women with young children (particularly those who are still nursing) are often encouraged to make their way upstairs while the sermons proceed on the first floor of the house. Beds and chairs accommodate the visitors, and some women spend the entire day upstairs in these private, women-only enclaves. The atmosphere is more relaxed than the tenor a floor below, and the casual nature leads to easy conversation between women. Many women look forward to attending church once they've given birth, as it allows them access into this secluded realm.

Fanny was very excited about the birth of her first baby. At her six week post partum visit, she reported that she had already been to church – willfully overlooking the mandatory six week recovery period that all Amish women abide. Fanny explained the excitement of bringing her daughter upstairs, where women sat on chairs and beds talking about local events and issues. As Fanny detailed the degree to which the women fussed, oohed and aaawed over her baby, I suggested that she was a celebrity. She agreed and smiled as she recalled lounging upstairs for the day in the company of women and children.

Birth has always held a privileged status within Amish culture, and setting aside particular spaces for women who are raising small children reminds the entire community that reproduction remains the central achievement of an Amish woman's life. This separation, however, does divide the women from the larger congregation, where matters of Amish business are discussed. Excluding women from these conversations on the social and economic future of the Amish society serves to reinforce the public/private split even within the home – with men applying their inherent skills of rational and logical analysis while women are upstairs breast-feeding... theoretically and materially reduced to their embodied position as reproducers.

The notion that the public and private realms are dichotomous spaces is troubled by an analysis of Amish society. For the Amish, much of their identity construction and maintenance happens within domestic sites rather than in the public sphere, as had been previously assumed. As agriculture recedes from view as the central pillar of Amish identity, more attention must be focused on the private spaces of Amish life if we are to gain a complete understanding of Amish life. It is increasingly the small domestic interactions that have become imbued with meaning as the conventional sites of identity production in the public sphere become outmoded by the changing structure of agriculture. The public/private dichotomy is useful as a conceptual framework, but only if these structural divisions are understood to be fluid and mobile. Amish society is not easily reduced into a public and private realm, and it is these moments of overlap that offer particular insight. The

home, conventionally coded as a private space, actually has become a relatively public feature in the Amish landscape, and seems to serve as the central stage upon which a great deal of Amish identity gets acted out. Because the home has been traditionally coded as a feminine space, its significance has been largely overlooked. This research suggests that the home space, and the events that take place there, can illuminate Amish society in ways that have previously gone unnoticed.

Chapter 7 Some Conclusions

People living in extremity are often viewed as victims by outsiders; however, a focus on reproduction can provide a sense of human agency by emphasizing people's efforts to sustain what is of value to them under transformed circumstances.

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Introduction

In this dissertation research project I have shown that birth plays a significant role in the lives of Amish women and men. And though birth has long been understood as merely a biological process, my research demonstrates that it is also a significant feature in the landscape of a society. Using an analysis of birth in several Pennsylvania Amish communities yielded knowledge about both the particularities of Amish women's birth experiences as well as the sociocultural significance of birth within the larger Amish community. Aspects of the domestic realm, such as birth, continue to be overlooked in sociological analyses because of their location in the private sphere. Instead of lacking sociological relevance, these personal matters hold the key to unlock a more nuanced understanding of communities and of society more generally. It is unlikely that sociological findings of consequence will be generated without an appreciation of the relationship between the public and private spheres – this has certainly been the case for the scholarship on the Amish. It is only with a careful attention to the interwoven relationship between the public and the private that we will be able to produce research that approaches the level of complexity and intricacy inherent in society today.

Dissertation Review

The various scales of analysis that I employed in this dissertation research project further speak to the importance of an attention to both public and private realms. My fourth chapter focuses on Amish women and their embodied experiences of birth. In discussing issues of shame and seclusion, I demonstrate the means by which the social discourses of birth are experienced by particular women. I draw on my data to illustrate the ways in which many women internalize these discourses, and present evidence that some women actively resist these normalizing discourses. The concept of *interdiscourse* proves useful as a lens through which to view both resistance and acceptance and to more fully appreciate Amish female embodiment. I shift scalar levels in Chapter 5, and move to a community-level analysis. Here, I showed that research into the private realm challenged conventional community theories. My ethnographic work with midwives in the Amish community demonstrated that even as non-members of Amish society, they hold a great deal of influence within the community. This unconventional site of community power was not visible without sustained attention to the private realm of Amish life, and suggests that community authority can accrue in locations previously overlooked. In Chapter 6, I draw on observations of Amish domestic spaces to support my claim that the home is not only a place of residence, but is also a location of socio-cultural meaning for Amish society. Because a number of significant life events take place within the home, including birth, marriage and death – not to mention bi-monthly church gatherings – Amish domestic spaces play an important role in the structure of their society. The home also serves as a point of connection between members and is central to the way women and

men live their lives as Amish citizens. Most importantly, the private realm of the home is increasingly serving as a site of Amish collective identity and is therefore a place of social significance.

I conclude by suggesting the particular birth practices that Amish women adopt are not chosen in a cultural vacuum and are instead shaped by the various social and cultural discourses within which they are located. The particular way that birth is socially constructed within Amish society and the social and cultural discourses of Amish society support and encourage Amish women's body confidence. As a result, Amish women have a low level of fear of and concern about the birth process and their births are marked by a markedly reduced level of intervention and medicalization. A number of organizations, including the World Health Organization, have shown that these lower levels of medical intervention directly correlate to lower rates of infant and maternal mortality. This suggests that creating an environment where women feel confident in their ability to birth not only makes for easier births but makes for safer births as well. Despite the patriarchal nature of Amish society, they have managed to create an environment that bolsters women's body confidence. I posit that these social constructions have very real material consequences on how women relate to their own bodies. The strength of this research rests not only on the insights it offers into the private realms of Amish society, but goes beyond the particularities of the Amish and speaks to our own (non-Amish) society as well. An analysis of the private birth practices of Amish women today yield great insight into the nature of society – both Amish society and our own social world.

My dissertation research project demonstrates that an analysis of birth enhances our understanding of the private realm in public society. Birth is a social act, albeit one that has been largely overlooked by sociologists. Because of its location in the private sphere, birth has gone unnoticed and lacks academic credibility as a topic worthy of inquiry. I assert that the popular dichotomy between the public and private spheres is an unnecessary bifurcation that obscures a number of important social processes from view. I have shown that an integrated analysis of both spheres yields important conclusions on the role of the home in the construction of a social identity, the gendered structure of community power, the embodied experiences of women and the ways in which social discourses can be leveraged to shape people's choices. These findings are not limited to the Amish, and have relevance in our society as well. Public and private spheres are mutually constituted, and personal matters always intertwine with the social in a cascade of ways. Scholars interested in gaining an appreciation for the social fabric must consider both the neat hems and seams of the public sphere as well as the rends and shreds that often typify the private sphere.

Reflections on the Study

My most interesting reflection on this research project had to do with issues of reciprocity in the research process. Topics such as power and reciprocity have been theorized by feminist scholars (Oakley, 1981; Stacey, 1988), who have warned about the dangers of exploitation and manipulation that can attend qualitative research. They have suggested that the power differentials that exist between research and researched become operational precisely because of the researcher's temporary involvement in the lives of the research participants. Interestingly enough, my experience of power and reciprocity did not follow the conventional pattern, which warns researchers to attend to their power and mobility within the research and to be aware of the multiple ways in which they occupy a position of superiority in the relationship. I found that I rarely possessed power in my dealings with both my gatekeeper and my research subjects and was much more likely to be in a relationship of dependence and reliance. And while I was grateful for the access I had been granted, I often struggled with what, exactly, constituted an appropriate level of reciprocity.

Upon beginning this research, I was quickly aware of my dependence on my gatekeeper and the access that she provided. Because Vivian was facilitating my entry into the field, I felt particularly indebted to her, and took up the study of midwifery so that I would be able to serve her as an assistant. I read numerous books on the topic, joined several midwifery listservs, and even attended two midwifery conferences. I committed to being on-call for large stretches of time and would stop everything and leave immediately if Vivian needed my assistance at a birth. Often, these calls would come in the middle of the night, and I would immediately get up and drive to the birth – even in the middle of a snowstorm! At the birth, I quickly learned the necessary procedures to set up for the birth so that I could assist in gathering materials and arranging the necessary supplies. Afterwards, I would clean the area and pack up all of Vivian’s instruments. I would load her car while she gave post partum instructions to the new parents. On numerous occasions, Vivian expressed her gratitude for my assistance and even awarded me the title of ‘best apprentice’. Because I was equally grateful for her commitment to ensuring my entry into the field, we established a relationship based on reciprocity and mutual friendship.

Because of the power inequalities that characterized my relationship with the Amish women I studied, I was particularly attentive to the ways in which I could establish mutuality between all of us. Because of my growing skill as an assistant midwife, I was able to provide my study population with access to information in a similar way that they were able to offer me insights into their daily lives as Amish women. All of the women who participated in this research project had my cell and home phone numbers, and could call at any time if they had questions. When the midwife was unavailable, these women often called with basic questions about supplies or concerns about symptoms and I would always spend time addressing these matters to their satisfaction. During labor, I worked to learn the specific skills of labor support, and underwent training to become a doula. These skills allowed me to assist women in labor, suggesting position changes and monitoring labor progression. I focused specifically on the tactile support that I could offer a laboring woman, and studied specific massage techniques and pressure points to help women manage their pain during the process. I was regularly the person who stayed up with the laboring woman while the others slept so that they would be ready for the birth. Many nights were spent sitting alongside a woman laboring in a bathtub while I poured cup after cup of warm water over her belly and down her back. These sorts of physical supports were an important part of my reciprocity, as I was sharing a very intimate experience with them and so I needed to become personally involved in the situation myself.

These skills and this level of commitment to both my research participants and my key informant was my way of mitigating the power inequalities that can threaten to derail feminist ethnographic work. For me, the most difficult issue that stemmed from my reflection on my position as a researcher was exactly how much was enough. This issue concerned me throughout the research process and I found little discussion of it in the literature. At times, I was unsure of what was necessary to ensure reciprocity – was it sufficient to be available most of the time, or did my commitment need to be 110% at every moment? I struggled over whether I should attend an academic conference during a period of numerous births, when Vivian would certainly need my help. My Amish research subjects would occasionally call at 5:00am to ask an innocuous question about their appointment later that day, not realizing that because they awake at 3:30am not everyone else does! A few Amish women asked if I would pick up something at the store and drop it off at their home, oftentimes 30 to 60 miles away. I faced many of these sorts of dilemmas throughout the research process and was disappointed to find little discussion of similar situations in ethnographic scholarship. And though a few ethnographers cited situations where “harm and injustice operated

quite differently from what had been suggested” in previous work, there was little evidence of a sustained focus on this topic (Irwin, 2006: 156). I do think that a more nuanced notion of reciprocity is necessary if we are able to approach the true liberatory potential inherent in feminist ethnography. It is through a more critical examination of our own experiences that we can “seek to illustrate that feminist methodology does support the possibility of a radically different and transformational research methodology if we do not idealize or unproblematically accept it or our practices of it” (Bloom, 1997: 116).

Limits of the Study

This research project was not immune to the variety of limitations that characterize academic research. My contact with a small sample of Amish women allowed for only a very partial insight into Amish life. The women with whom I worked provided me with numerous observations on matters of Amish culture and society, but I have no doubt that the particular nuances of my study reflect their unique situation. A larger sample of Amish women would substantiate the conclusions drawn from my particular study or would allow them to be more thoroughly theorized. In addition, this research was limited to a few select valleys in the surrounding community and thus had a narrow geographic focus. This project was not able to capture the regional variation among Amish communities, as local customs do vary across the country. Because there is limited sustained contact between Amish communities across states, it is important to investigate whether these findings hold true in Amish communities outside of the central Pennsylvanian region. Many of these issues are critiques frequently leveled against qualitative research and do not necessarily weaken the study, but instead offer new venues for future research.

On another level, my study was limited by my gatekeeper, Vivian. Because she was my primary vehicle for access into the Amish community, her particular position in the community colored the data that I collected. I have previously demonstrated the ways in which my connection to Vivian was a strength to the research, but it also needs to be acknowledged as a limit. Vivian’s strong personality was welcomed by the Amish that she served, but I have no doubt that there existed a small contingent of detractors who were not pleased by her forthrightness. As a result, my research reflects only those clients who chose Vivian as a midwife as I did not have access to those Amish women who decided not to use Vivian’s midwifery services. More research into the decision-making process involved in selecting a midwife would address this partiality and would allow for insights not limited to the particular position of my gatekeeper.

Without an established body of knowledge from which to depart, I spent much of my early data collection gathering a basic understanding of Amish women’s daily life. I also spent a great deal of time learning about the particular practices of midwifery and homebirth. These tasks required a substantial time investment and necessitated a two-year long study period, though much of this early learning is not featured in the study itself. It was difficult to gauge my findings without a selection of previous literature within which to situate my observations. Attending national conferences on topics pertaining to both the Amish and to issues of midwifery offered me a limited check on my data, but future research that concentrates on these issues is certainly necessary to corroborate my findings.

Because of the two years I spent in the field, I was able to amass a large amount of data. And while this served as a boon in terms of evidence for my findings, it also became unwieldy at times. The hundreds of hours of conversations that I have recorded were not only difficult to transcribe, but were arduous to review and catalogue. As a result, data management became a

significant portion of the research process and made analysis difficult. Unfortunately, I was not able to include all of data that I collected in the analyses presented here and a number of fascinating stories and vignettes did not make it into the research. Many qualitative researchers report facing similar situations and offer a variety of advice on how to navigate this issue, though I was unable to find a way to easily incorporate all of my data into the final document. As a result, there is material that, while interesting and insightful, was not included in the research project.

Each of these limitations suggests that much work still needs to be done on this topic. Establishing a body of literature on Amish women is necessary to flesh out the scholarship on Amish society that draws so heavily on the experiences of Amish men. Using the private sphere as a point of departure, as well as focusing on reproduction as a site of analysis offers unique ways to gain insight into this topic. Studies that follow in this vein will not only substantiate the findings associated with this particular project but will broaden our understanding of Amish culture and society more generally.

Future Research Directions

My academic inquiries will continue to engage with the ways that birth is woven into the social fabric. I intend to further develop my ethnographic findings and continue to theorize my research on birth in the Amish community. There is much potential for comparative work and I anticipate comparing this research on Amish birth to birth in a variety of different contexts.

I am increasingly interested in the growing rate of elective (also known as patient-choice) cesarean section deliveries in the United States. (Klein, 2004) My investigation will center on the degree to which celebrity culture has shaped this trend and I seek to use as my point of departure the popular assertion that women today are “too posh to push.” Through an analysis of popular culture, as arbitrated by media imagery and standard press, I will unpack the layered meanings couched within today’s birth practices. This work stems from the assertion that the ‘popular is political’ and speaks to the growing feminist interest in the increasing medicalization of the female body. (Beckett, 2005)

I anticipate beginning an ethnographic exploration of women who birth while incarcerated. In this research I will situate women’s birth experiences within a larger analysis of state control over women’s bodies. (Kitzinger, 2005) Such work grows out of a critical feminist ethnography of women’s birth experiences and I anticipate working with both incarcerated women themselves and the medical community who serve them. An interdisciplinary project drawing on work ranging from the fields of Criminal Justice to Nursing, this research promises to contribute to the growing body of work concerned with women’s experiences as incarcerated subjects of the state.

Excited about the possibility of broadening the geographic scope of my work, I expect to begin exploring the possibility of conducting ethnographic research in Brazil. In a country where womanhood and femininity are rigidly defined, the intersection between body image and birth experience is particularly profound. (Hopkins, 2000) Brazil leads the world in cesarean deliveries with over 1 out of every 3 women electing to birth via cesarean section. (Behague, 2002) A critical ethnographic inquiry into the ways in which “choice” has been operationalized within the birth practice offers insight into the future of medical birth and introduces a much needed feminist response to the growing cesarean trend.

A widely varied usage of qualitative methodology is central in each of these future projects. In particular, I look forward to developing a much more nuanced knowledge of ethnographic research techniques. My work will continue to rely on feminist ethnographic practices to study

women's birth experiences and will employ myriad critical feminist theories to situate those experiences within a broader social framework. Critical feminist ethnographies have the potential to augment what we know about gender in society – particularly the ways that gender constructions shape the daily lives and experiences of women and men. (Hesse-Biber, 2006b) Ethnographic work offers us further insight into the multiple ways that people resist the constraints of normative discourses in small acts of insurgency. Social scientific research continues to be dominated by quantitative methods, and my research projects exemplify the qualitative work that is increasingly functioning as an antidote.

Contributions to the literature

My dissertation research project suggests that research which uses birth as a point of entry can augment not only what we know about the specific cultural practices of reproduction, but also what we know about a society more generally. Because the social significance of birth has long been overlooked by sociologists, little is known about the ways in which women and men make sense of this important event. My research on birth in the Amish community demonstrates that Amish culture offers women a sense of bodily self-confidence that often results in them having unmedicated and largely uncomplicated births. I do find, however, that Amish culture is not universally supportive of women's bodies, and I explore the ways that female bodily shame is constructed and perpetuated through pregnancy and birth. I also investigate the role of the midwife in the Amish community, finding that despite their non-Amish affiliation, these women play a significant role in the structure of the Amish community. I conclude with a discussion of the role of the private sphere in Amish society and find that an analysis of the home provides a more complete understanding of the ways in which Amish culture is responding to external pressures in the public realm.

This research makes a number of contributions to the existing work on the Amish as well as to feminist scholarship on birth and reproduction more generally. Research on the Amish has primarily focused on the public sphere of Amish life and has detailed the work, religion and education practices of Amish society. Because this project investigates the Amish world from a new perspective, I am able to expand the horizons of what we know about the Amish. In particular, this research provides a great deal of insight into the lives of Amish women – a topic that has until this point not been thoroughly investigated. My findings suggest that Amish women play a significant role in Amish culture and that their role as birthers is supported in a number of significant ways. The midwives that serve the Amish community pose a further challenge to the conventional scholarship on the Amish and demonstrate the ways in which power within the Amish community may in fact stem from a variety of different sources. All of this supports the feminist argument that sociological investigations of the private sphere can often challenge how we comprehend societies and can broaden our understanding of the ways in which social forces impact women and men.

Finally, this dissertation informs the growing body of literature that investigates the efficacy of using feminist ethnography as a research method. My findings were generated from my experience as a participant observer and demonstrate the usefulness of this qualitative method. Because of my ability to enter the community as an assistant midwife, I was uniquely positioned to investigate birth and midwifery. Such entrée into the Amish community provided me with a rich collection of data and allowed for in-depth analysis that would not have been possible using other research techniques. New thoughts on the issues of the researcher's position in the research process as well as issues of reciprocity between research subjects and researcher will certainly augment current

ethnographic scholarship and challenge researchers to approach ethnography with greater attention to these matters. It is studies such as this one that will allow ethnography to gain a stronger foothold in the field of sociology, offering evidence that qualitative research holds much promise for enhancing the ways in which researchers create and obtain knowledge about society.

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EDUCATION

- August, 2007 **Ph. D.** Departments of Rural Sociology and Women's Studies @ Pennsylvania State University
Dissertation: *Public Culture, Private Birth: Social Patterns of Amish Domestic Space*
- June, 2001 **M.A.** Department of Geography & Urban Analysis @ California State University, Los Angeles
Thesis: *The cumulative impacts of upstream development on the Santa Clara River*
- June, 1998 **B.A.** Departments of Environmental Studies and Philosophy @ Univ. of California, Santa Barbara
Thesis: *Obligations to future generations: An environmental perspective*

RESEARCH INTERESTS

Cultural production of birth • Medicalization of women's bodies • Domestic geographies of Amish homebirth • Birth trends and popular culture • Cesarean as vogue birth practice • Feminist theories of the body • Incarcerated birth

PUBLICATIONS

Articles

Natalie Jolly (2007) "Feminism tastes del.icio.us: Using Social Bookmarking in the Women's Studies Classroom." *Feminist Collections: A Quarterly of Women's Studies Resources*. 28(2)

Natalie Jolly (2006) "To Join the Feminist Blogosphere, Click Here! Blogging and the Women's Studies Curriculum." *Feminist Collections: A Quarterly of Women's Studies Resources*. 27(2): 16-17

Book Chapters

Natalie Jolly and Stephanie Springgay (forthcoming) "Birthing the (M)other: Birth, Technology and Embodiment in a Third Wave Era." In Kinser, Amber (Ed.) *Mothering in the Third Wave: Contemporary Feminist Journeys*.

Natalie Jolly (2007). "Cesarean, Celebrity and Childbirth: Students Encounter Modern Birth and the Question of Female Embodiment." In Springgay, Stephanie and Deb Freedman (Eds.) *Curriculum and the cultural body*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing Group. 175-187

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Book Reviews

Natalie Jolly (2003) Review of Lu Ann Jones. *Mama Learned Us To Work: Farm Women in the New South*. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press. 2002. Reviewed in *Rural Sociology* 68(4): 581- 584

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

- 5/06 – 7/07 Online Instructor: A Virtual Introduction to Women's Studies
Women's Studies Program @ The Pennsylvania State University
- 9/04 – 4/05 Instructor: Introduction to Women's Studies
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