Amish Shunning: A Ritual of Purity and Shame

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Amish Shunning: A Ritual of Purity and Shame

Traveling on Rt. 340 between the towns of Intercourse and Bird-in-Hand in Lancaster County, PA, one may pass “Peaceful Valley Amish Furniture”, a popular shopping destination for tourists looking to take a piece of the Amish home with them. Indeed, Lancaster County, with its picturesque farms and tranquil Amish inhabitants, appears to be a peaceful valley. Each year, millions of tourists flock to this serene paradise to see these mysteriously peaceful Amish and their simplistic, relaxed lifestyle. Contrary to the idealistic view that many have of the Lancaster County Amish, this is not a utopian society, nor is it always a peaceful valley. Since their formation in the late 1600’s, the Amish have practiced a form of church discipline that many in today’s tolerant churches would deem offensive and strict. An important aspect of this discipline is a ritual known as “shunning”, a practice that has caused much turmoil and controversy among the Amish of Lancaster County.

Sam¹, an Old Order Amish deacon in his mid 50’s, sits on a rocking chair in his living room. He openly discusses the church’s stance on the controversial issue of shunning. Due to his authority position in the church, Sam understands the thinking behind the ritual. He explains the various Bible verses that are used in support of this practice. Sam strongly believes in shunning, sees it as being necessary to protect the church. He admits that shunning is not always done out of love and compassion, but

¹ Name has been changed to protect confidentiality.
when it is done right, he believes shunning helps both the church and the offender (Interview A).

At a different time, in a different church district, Sarah, an easy-going woman in her late 40's, sits on the sofa in a friend’s living room. Although she still dresses Amish, Sarah was excommunicated from the church nearly twenty years ago. She cannot discuss shunning in her own house because she is still married to her Amish husband. Her husband firmly believes in shunning and strictly adheres to its guidelines. Sarah is also very open in talking about the practice of shunning. However, she is less knowledgeable concerning why the Amish use this practice. She knows the church uses the Bible to support shunning but is unable to remember specific verses. Sarah believes the Amish use shunning because of tradition, doing things the way they have always been done. When she was forced out of the Amish church, Sarah felt little love and less sympathy. However, she does remember the shame that shunning brought as she could no longer enjoy normal interaction with the Amish community (Interview C).

Shunning is very much a part of Amish culture. The practice often has two sides. For the Amish church, shunning is a ritual of purity. However, for excommunicated individuals, shunning becomes a ritual of shame. Despite the controversy surrounding it, shunning has a clear role in the history and current practice of the Amish in Lancaster County.

From their conception during the Reformation, many Anabaptist groups have practiced some form of *Meidung*, or shunning. Also known as the “ban” and “social avoidance”, shunning occurs when a deviant individual is excommunicated from the

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2 Name has been changed to protect confidentiality.
church (Mennonite Encyclopedia 1956:221). An excommunication can occur for a variety of reasons, but usually results from disobedience to the church (Interview A). Following excommunication, the members of the church follow ritual guidelines of interaction with the excommunicated individual. These guidelines make up the practice of shunning.

What exactly is shunning? How is it used in the Amish church? Why does a peaceful group like the Amish employ such a seemingly harsh form of discipline? Throughout this paper, I objectively examine the practice of shunning, providing perspectives from both former and current members of the Old Order Amish Church in Lancaster County, PA. First, I explain the foundation of shunning and then provide a detailed description of the process of excommunication and shunning. Finally, using my “sociological imagination”, I apply various sociological and anthropological theories to the ritual of shunning.

The Historical Foundation of Shunning

Although shunning is always preceded by excommunication, it is a separate practice. Excommunication, expelling members from the church, is practiced in many types of congregations. Shunning, the practice of ritually shaming those who are excommunicated, is unique to the Old Order Amish Church. The practice of shunning varies among different settlements of the Old Order Amish. A settlement is a group of Amish families living in a common geographical area. This paper focuses entirely on the Lancaster County, PA settlement. Furthermore, shunning is practiced differently among church districts within a settlement. A church district signifies a particular congregation, usually consisting of twenty-five to thirty-five families. The Lancaster County settlement
has approximately 131 church districts. These districts, although united by similar beliefs and practices, vary in how strictly they follow the rules of the Amish church (Kraybill 2001: 13-14).

The Scriptural Basis of Shunning

The Amish believe the Bible commands them to practice shunning. They follow a process of church discipline outlined in Matthew 18:15-18 (KJV). First, members should address sin by other members through confronting the individual who is sinning, giving him or her chance to repent. If this intervention does not work, the member should take several other members to again confront the sin of this individual. Upon the failure of this second attempt, the member should take the issue to the church. If the sinning member still refuses correction, the church should consider that person a “heathen man and a publican” (v. 18). I. Corinthians 5:11 expresses this idea more fully, Paul says, “...you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolator or a slanderer, a drunkard, or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.” Similar passages include Romans 16:17, 2 Thessalonians 3:14, and Titus 3:10 (Blank 2001:110).

The Amish do not take these passages lightly. They see them as a direct command from God. In the eyes of the Amish church, if they did not practice shunning, they would be disobeying the Word of God. The practice of shunning is not a product of the Amish church; rather, it is founded in the Bible (Interview A).

The Purpose of Shunning

For the Amish, shunning has two major purposes, as expressed in Article 17 of the Dordrecht Confession, the statement of beliefs adopted by the Amish Church (Horst
These purposes are: 1) shunning protects the purity of the church; 2) shunning convicts offenders of their errors (Interview A).

First, shunning is designed to protect the church. By limiting interaction with those outside its boundaries, the practice of shunning works to retain the purity of the church. A church member is required to shun an offender “in eating and drinking and other similar fellowships...so that one is not involved in his way of life or a partaker of his sins” (Horst 1988:35). Describing the major purpose of shunning, an Amish deacon explained that shunning is designed to protect those within the church from evil influence (Interview A). The church is at the center of the Amish world. Therefore, keeping the church pure is one of the highest goals of the Amish community. The practice of shunning helps to achieve this goal.

Shunning does not represent personal animosity. The Amish church does not view banned members as being less than human or inferior in any way (Blank 2001:111). Most ministers do not teach that shunned individuals are destined for hell if they do not repent. Instead, shunning is a policy that the Amish church uses to protect the members of their community. When asked how the Amish view those who are shunned, an Amish deacon said the Amish church sees them as “not abiding by our rules making them unfit for our community” (Interview A). Another Amish man compared shunning to a policy used by a high-rise construction company that forbids workers from using drugs or alcohol. The company informs the workers of this policy before they start. The policy protects the company and the workers, who rely on the safety of their co-workers. In order for this policy to be effective, the company would need to enforce it (Blank 2001:111).
Why is protecting the church such an important goal of Amish society? In the beginning of the Anabaptist movement, Anabaptist leaders rejected the idea that the bread and wine of communion represented the body of Christ. However, they retained one important sacrament. These Anabaptists taught that the church was the literal Body of Christ. The Head of Christ remains in heaven, while His Body is present on the earth through the members of the Church. This is not to be taken as a metaphor but rather as a literal description. In this light, keeping the church pure is extremely important. To protect the actual Body of Christ, the Anabaptists used excommunication and shunning (Snyder 1997:370-73).

Second, the practice of shunning serves to convict the offender of his or her sin. An Amish deacon explained that when it is used properly, shunning helps to rehabilitate the offender (Interview A). The practice of shunning shows an individual that they have crossed a boundary, setting them outside the church. Every ritual act of shunning reminds the deviant members of their disobedience to the church. The various methods of shunning work to shame the offending individuals, pressuring them to return to the church.

In theory, shunning is performed with the best interests of the offender in mind. Article 17 of the Dordrecht Confession clearly states that shunning is to be done “in Christian moderation so that it may have the effect not of destroying but of healing the sinner” (Horst 1988:35). Unfortunately this is not always the case. A retired Amish farmer resignedly admits that some Amish misuse shunning as a tool for revenge (Interview B). As a way of punishing them for falling out of the church, some Amish families harshly shun children who are excommunicated. One family in a plainer Amish
church district would not allow their son to return home and refused to talk to him after he was put out of the church. When this former Amish man attempted to visit his brother, the brother physically kicked him off the doorstep. It was not until the brother lie on his deathbed that the two reconciled their differences (Interview F). Extreme cases such as this one have tainted the ritual of shunning in Lancaster County.

For those who do not return to the church, shunning creates a lifetime blockade from the only life they have ever known, the Amish life. Amish children are taught Amish values, beliefs, and traditions in preparation for life within the Amish community. An Amish person’s spiritual, social, and educational experience revolves around being Amish. While excommunication is a one-time event, shunning is a lifetime experience, constantly reminding the excommunicated member that they are no longer accepted by the only people they have ever known. Indeed, the ritual of shunning has torn families apart, ended friendships, and disrupted marriages. An Amish woman, excommunicated for nearly twenty years and still faithfully married to her Amish husband, cannot experience a close marriage because of the ritual that constantly separates them. She cannot eat or sleep with him. She cannot even hand him a plate of food or offer him a hug. With a hint of pain in her voice, she speaks of friends who stopped visiting her after her excommunication and of brothers whom she rarely sees (Interview C).

Although there is almost always pain and hurt experienced for all involved in this process, the wounds of excommunication and shunning heal with time. Many shunned members are able to get past the initial feelings of anger and bitterness as they start over in a non-Amish world. Some remember their days in the Amish community as happy and contented. One former Amish man described the Amish life as “a good life” (Interview
F). Other ex-Amish view their past as a time of repression and constraint (Interview D). Regardless of their viewpoint, many have been able to move on. They have been able to restore some of their past relationships and create new ones. Many have joined churches that hold similar values to the Amish but do not practice shunning. Although some will never escape the shame that shunning brings, with time, many former Amish are able to overcome the pain of shunning and move on with their lives (Interviews C,D,E,F).

**The History of Shunning**

The way shunning is currently practiced in Lancaster County is strongly rooted in history. The history of shunning shows the controversies surrounding this practice and the divisions it has caused. Four notable events have had a great influence on the Lancaster County Amish community and the way they practice shunning- 1) the conversion of Menno Simons, 2) the *Dordrecht Confession*, 3) the Amish division of 1693, and 3) the Moses Hartz incident. To gain a better understanding of the current practice of shunning in Lancaster County, I will survey these four events and their consequent effects.

**The Early Anabaptist Movement**

Amid the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century, a meeting held on January 21, 1525, marked the beginning of a group called the Anabaptists. The Anabaptists were so called because they refused to baptize infants, choosing to re-baptize adults as a sign of their voluntary conversion. These activities were a capital offense that threatened the authority of both the church and the state. Because the Anabaptists argued that the authority of the Bible was higher than the government, they effectively brought about a separation of church and state. During this time, infant baptism was a sign of citizenship
within the state. By refusing to baptize their infants, the Anabaptists were denying the citizenship of the newborns. This meant the non-baptized infants were not registered to pay taxes and serve in the military. Therefore, the ideas of the Anabaptists threatened the welfare of the state (Nolt 1992:7-11).

After this first meeting in 1525, the Anabaptist movement spread throughout Switzerland, Germany, and the Netherlands. Intensely persecuted by the state because of their different beliefs, the Anabaptists withdrew further from the “world” (Nolt 1992:11). During this time of persecution, two distinct groups of Anabaptists emerged: the Swiss Brethren of Switzerland and southern Germany and the Dutch Anabaptists of the Netherlands and northern Germany. Although several other groups also formed during this time, these two were the largest and arguably most influential (Nolt 1992:11).

Desiring a greater degree of organization, the Swiss Brethren met in the village of Schleitheim in 1527 to define the beliefs of their group, what later became known as the “Schleitheim Confession”. They focused on two major issues- adult baptism and church discipline (Nolt 1992:13). From their beginning, many Anabaptists had implemented the “ban”, or the “exclusion of unworthy and corrupt members from the Church of Christ” (Mennonite Encyclopedia 1956:219). In order to retain the purity of the church, early Anabaptists believed in expelling members who were living in unrepentant sin, based on Matthew 18:15-17. The “ban” was the last step in the three-fold process, designed to keep the integrity of the church and help the sinner deal with his or her sin. The “ban” included “avoidance”, or breaking ties with the excommunicated member, called “shunning”, but was not to be used to mistreat or abuse the individual (Mennonite
Encyclopedia 1956:220). Once the sinner repented, the ban was lifted and he or she was welcomed back into the church (Mennonite Encyclopedia 1956:220).

Although they realized the importance of church discipline, particularly the use of the “ban”, the Swiss Brethren struggled with this issue, not knowing how strict to be. Until 1568, the Swiss Brethren took a more lenient approach to shunning, only excluding unrepentant members from the communion table (Nolt 1992:13). Meanwhile, the Dutch Anabaptists were also dealing with church discipline. Nearly all Anabaptists of this time were non-violent; however, a group of violent Anabaptists captured the city of Munster in 1534, in an attempt to establish an Anabaptist state. Although defeated a year later, the activities of this group incited even more persecution. It became increasingly important for the Dutch Anabaptists to separate themselves from this violent group, but they were unsure of the degree of church discipline they should use to distance themselves from the deviant Anabaptists (Nolt 1992:13-15).

On the issue of the “ban”, the Dutch Anabaptists became divided, with some demanding a strict ban and others calling for a milder ban. There were two main areas of conflict involving excommunication and shunning. The first was whether the ban necessitated a husband or wife to avoid a banned spouse or if a lesser version of the ban could be used in these circumstances. The second issue of conflict was whether the church could implement the ban, without the previous steps of church discipline (Matthew 18), for certain extreme offenses (Mennonite Encyclopedia 1956:221).

The Conversion of Menno Simons

In 1536, a man named Menno Simons, who would later prove to be one of the most influential leaders of the Anabaptist movement, resigned his position as a Dutch
Catholic priest and joined the Dutch Anabaptists. About a year after his conversion, Simons was ordained an elder of the Dutch Anabaptist Obbenites (Simons 1956:15). Through this writings, Simons addressed the still unresolved question of church discipline. Simons taught that the ban should be implemented out of love, hoping to reconcile the unrepentant member (Simons 1956:413). He instructed his followers to “not have anything to do with” those who voluntarily were baptized into the church but later separated themselves from God, through “false doctrine or a vain and carnal life”, whether they be “father or mother, sister or brother, man or wife” (Simons 1956: 412).

Wishing to clear up misunderstandings about shunning and seeking to unite the Dutch Anabaptists with one doctrine of excommunication, Simons wrote a *Clear Account of Excommunication* in 1550. In this document, he reiterated his belief in using church discipline as described in Matthew 18:15-18 (Simons 1956:459). Using this model of discipline, Simons outlined his thoughts on shunning. According to his interpretation of Scripture, Simons argued that church members should have very limited interaction with shunned members. Through the Jewish practices regarding the “heathen” and the “publicans”, Simons explained how shunning should be implemented. Seeing the ban as pertaining to more than just spiritual communion, he believed members of the church should not fellowship with banned individuals, either through buying, selling, eating, or visiting. Simons called for a somewhat moderate implementation of shunning in that he believes members may still do “necessary business” with banned members (Simons 1956:474). His version of shunning also allowed church members to help those who are banned in times of need (Simons 1956: 457-75).
Despite his lenience in these areas, Simons defended shunning within marriage. Stressing that relationship with Christ, the eternal bride, is more important than any type of earthly relationship, Simons urged spouses to be careful that they are not led astray by their errant husbands and wives. He mentions that he has known over three hundred spouses who, after not observing the ban of their mates, fell into sin along with their husbands and wives. For this reason, he urged spouses to recognize and implement the ban against their unrepentant mates in a careful, Christian manner (Simons 1956:972). Simons supported the immediate expulsion of certain seriously offensive sinners. Believing drunkards, thieves, adulterers, and the like were already condemned by God, he did not find it necessary to follow the model of church discipline outlined in Matthew 18 in these cases (Simons 1956:975).

Through the popularity of his writings and the loss of prominent Anabaptist leader Obbe Philips, Menno Simons became the primary leader of the Dutch Anabaptists, or “Mennonites”, as they would later be called. In 1554, Simons met with six other Anabaptist leaders to establish ground rules for their congregations. The Wismar Articles, as they were later named, dealt primarily with excommunication. The Dutch Mennonite leaders set forth guidelines for a strict form of the ban, which included shunning unrepentant spouses and not buying or selling with those under the ban (Simons 1956:1041). The Swiss Brethren and the south German Mennonites, at a conference in Strasbourg in 1557, rejected these guidelines as too harsh. Nevertheless, they adopted Menno Simon’s beliefs on shunning in 1568 and again in 1591 (Nolt 1992:17-18).
The *Dordrecht Confession*

In 1632, the Dutch and north German Mennonite church leaders held a historic meeting in the city of Dordrecht, where they put in writing the *Dordrecht Confession*. The eighteen articles of the *Dordrecht Confession* pronounced the foundation of Mennonite faith, from Creation to the second coming of Christ. These articles would prove to be some of the most influential to the Mennonite faith (Nolt 1992:18).

During this time, the Mennonite church leaders could not draw up a document of faith without addressing the controversial topic of shunning. Therefore, the sixteenth and seventeenth articles in the *Dordrecht Confession* deal with excommunication and shunning. Article 16 describes the necessity to expel from the congregation those members who fall into sin and upon confrontation, refuse to repent. Such a member should be placed outside the church and considered a sinner. The article emphasizes that this expulsion is done as a warning to others but also for the amendment of the individual (Horst 1988:34).

Article 17 focuses on the shunning that accompanies excommunication. In accordance to the teachings of Menno Simons, church members are to avoid interaction with the excommunicated sinner, “in eating and drinking and other similar fellowship” (Horst 1988:35). This practice is done in order to shame the individual and bring him or her to repentance. The article also establishes that the practice be done in “Christian moderation”, attempting to help the sinner, not to destroy him or her (Horst 1988:35). Viewing the excommunicated members as “brethren” not as “enemies”, church members are allowed to help them when they are in need (Horst 1988:35). Again, this article focuses on shunning as helpful to both the fallen member and the entire congregation.
The *Dordrecht Confession* was widely accepted as the governing authority for Dutch and north German Mennonites. After the meetings in 1632, the *Dordrecht Confession* began circulating throughout the Palatinate and Alsatian congregations of the Swiss Brethren. During the 17th century, many of the Swiss Brethren, fleeing mounting persecution in Switzerland, moved into these areas, with promises of land and to a certain extent, religious freedom (Nolt 1992:18-20). Finally in 1660, thirteen Alsatian ministers signed and accepted the *Dordrecht Confession* of faith, uniting them with the Dutch Mennonites. Despite this acceptance, there is evidence that at least several of these ministers did not believe in the practice of shunning as outlined in the Confession. Some may have merely signed it because they thought it was being accepted universally by Anabaptist churches (Gascho 1937:18).

*The Amish Division of 1693*

The signing of the *Dordrecht Confession* did not signal the end of controversy over the issue of shunning. In 1693, amid rising questions concerning Swiss Brethren doctrine, Mennonite congregations in Alsace sent a man named Jakob Amman, along with several other ministers, to probe the practice of church discipline in several communities. Chief among these concerns was the issue of shunning (Roth 1993:9-13). Amman, and those with him, believed that shunning included both spiritual and physical meals (Amman 1693:30). He called for a strict practice of shunning in accordance to the *Dordrecht Confession* (Amman 1693:40). Not willing to compromise on his stance of shunning, Amman, along with several other ministers, excommunicated those who refused to confess a strict type of shunning with him (Giger CA. 1693:24).
In opposition to Amman, a group of Swiss Brethren ministers, led by Hans Reist, believed shunning should only be implemented during communion. Therefore, they excluded shunned members from partaking in communion. However, they still associated with these people in other aspects of life (Giger CA. 1693:22). After Amman excommunicated Reist and several others, both Swiss and Palatine ministers, among them Hans Reist, signed a letter stating they could no longer recognize Amman and his followers as “brothers and sisters” (“Statement from Ohnenheim” 1694:50). With the lines clearly drawn, the debate continued concerning which interpretation of shunning was supported by Scripture. Meanwhile, Amman and his followers continued to challenge their opposition and excommunicated those who did not agree with them (Hostetler 1980:39).

In the late 1600’s, there was a clear division between the Anabaptist congregations of Switzerland, Alsace, and southern Germany. Twenty-seven of the sixty-nine ministers in these regions agreed with Amman, while the others opposed him. Those who followed Amman were called the “Amish”, with the other group becoming the “Mennonites”. Despite attempts in 1700 by the Amish to reconcile, including excommunicating themselves from the church, the groups still disagreed on the issue of shunning, along with several other issues (Nolt 1992:37-38). By this time, the damage had been done. The Mennonite church had been divided into two groups, mainly due to the conflict over shunning. Of these two groups, the Amish emerged as the more conservative both in appearance and behavior (Nolt 1992:39).
The Moses Hartz Incident

Following this division, to escape persecution and in hopes of finding a better life, many Amish left Europe for the new world in the mid 1700’s. The Lancaster County, PA settlement may have been inhabited by Amish as early as 1742 (Hostetler 1980:59). The Amish in Lancaster County continued the use of “strict shunning” (“A Report and Clear Statement of the Ban and Shunning”)\(^3\). In the 1850’s, two types of Amish, the tradition-minded and the change-minded, began to emerge, causing considerable conflict. In 1877, two change-minded groups withdrew from the Amish church. These groups built meetinghouses for their worship services. The tradition-minded Amish became known as the “Old Order Amish”, while the change-minded group was dubbed “Amish Mennonites” (Kraybill 2001:25). Despite their differences, the Amish Mennonites and the more conservative group maintained some ties. People, who left the conservative group, in good standing, could join the Amish Mennonites without fear of being shunned. However, if a member in disobedience to the Old Order group attempted to join the Amish Mennonites, he or she would not be accepted into this group (Nolt 1992:204). The splitting into these two groups would play an important role in the Moses Hartz incident of 1890.

Having married into the Amish church in 1849, Moses Hartz was ordained a minister a few years later (Lemar and Mast 1982:38-39). Hartz had a son, also named Moses. Not willing to obey Amish standards, Moses Jr. left the Amish church and joined a Mennonite congregation. For this action, he was excommunicated and placed in the

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\(^3\) This was taken from a letter written in response to questions concerning how the old ministers dealt with shunning. At age 75, David Beiler was asked to write out the rules the ministers used in implementing the ban. He wrote that a ministers meeting held in 1809 united the ministers in using a form of shunning that is in accord to the strict form described throughout this paper.
ban. However, his father, Moses Sr., refused to shun his son. After several years of disagreements with the Amish church, Moses Sr. attempted to join a congregation of Amish Mennonites in Conestoga. Not wanting to accept those in disobedience to the Amish church, the church in Conestoga requested that Moses Sr. first make peace with the Amish church. Once this condition was met, he could join their congregation. However, Moses Sr. was not able to make peace because he refused to exercise the ban on his own son (Guengerich 1912).

After some time, the Conestoga congregation accepted Moses and his wife as members of their church. As a result, the Amish church excommunicated and shunned Moses along with his wife, creating strife between the Amish Mennonites and the “old” church. In an attempt to resolve this matter, several outside ministers were asked to intervene. Upon their recommendation, Moses and his wife were allowed to make a confession in the Amish Mennonite church; once made, the ban would be lifted. Having done this, the Old Order church agreed to lift the ban on Moses and his wife. However, several members of the Amish church did not agree with the exoneration of the Hartzs. After several meetings, the Amish church reinstated the ban against them (Guengerich 1912).

A direct result of this incident, although it did not occur until twelve years later, thirty-five families left the Amish church, in hopes of establishing their own church without the practice of strict shunning. Planning to remain Old Order Amish, these families did not have a minister to help them. Finally, receiving help from several ministers from Mifflin County, this new group became known as the “Peachey” church,
from the Peachey ministers who assisted them. They would later become the “Beachy Amish Mennonite Church” (Yoder 1987:106-111).

After the Moses Hartz incident, the Amish church broke relational ties with their progressive counterpart, the Amish Mennonites. From this point on, Old Order Amish members, even those who left the church in good standing, could not join the Amish Mennonites without being shunned. In fact, Amish church members now could not join a non-Amish congregation of any kind without being placed in the ban. Some believe that the practice of shunning became even more rigid in the years following the Moses Hartz incident. Older ministers began to teach their predecessors to firmly enforce the ban in hopes of avoiding another division such as the one, which resulted from the Moses Hartz incident (Interview F).

In the past twenty years, the practice of shunning has become more lenient in Lancaster County. A former Amish man, in his late 50’s, remembers when he was young, his shunned uncle had to eat at a separate table, placed in the corner, during a Christmas dinner. Now, during the Christmas meal, the ex-Amish man, who now is also shunned, ate at the same table as the rest of his family, with a slight separation in the boards of the table (Interview F). However, some individuals and church districts still follow the same guidelines adopted by Jakob Amman during the Amish division. Some ministers in Lancaster County require their members to shun an excommunicated spouse; others would not. An excommunicated Amish woman is not allowed to eat meals or sleep in the same bed as her Amish husband (Interview C). In a different district, a woman is not shunned by her Amish husband except in a public setting (Interview E).
Therefore, in recent years, many Amish have relaxed in their practice of shunning; however, some still follow strict shunning guidelines.

**Current Practice of Excommunication and Shunning**

**The Process of Excommunication**

In the Amish community, an individual becomes a church member by being baptized into the church. This usually occurs in the late teens or early 20’s (Kraybill 2001:117). By agreeing to be baptized, a person commits himself or herself to following the rules and guidelines of the Amish church for the rest of their lives. Baptism always signifies a lifetime commitment to the church that can almost never be broken without sanctions. During meetings with the ministers prior to baptism, potential church members learn what will happen if they break their baptismal vow of commitment to the church (Interview A).

When a church member commits an infraction that is discovered by the ministers, the member will receive a visit from their minister and deacon. From this point, a number of procedures can be followed, depending on the gravity of the infraction, the previous behavior of the offender, and the response of the deviant member. In most cases, the response and attitude of the offender weighs more heavily than the type of infraction committed. Although the practices of ministers vary among different districts in Lancaster County, most ministers attempt to work with offending members. Excommunication is supposed to be the last resort; after all other attempts to reconcile have failed (Interview A).

Offenses against the Amish church can be categorized as major and minor. Minor violations of Amish rules—such as owning a radio or wearing jewelry—may only require a
verbal warning from the ministers. However, if the member refuses to admit the offense or is uncooperative, the ministers may initiate the next step of church discipline, asking the member to appear before the congregation. On the other hand, major violations of Amish church rules, such as owning a car or committing adultery, almost always end in excommunication. Because these violations grossly oppose Amish values, the church usually deals with them quickly, limiting the influence they will have on other members. In dealing with these violations, the ministers will always order the offender to appear before the church, a type of Amish hearing (Interview A).

For minor violations, the ministers will discuss the situation with the offender. If the individual is repentant, the ministers may only give a verbal warning to the guilty member. In some cases, the ministers may give the individual several months to think about and change his or her behavior. An Amish woman who had been listening to gospel tapes, a violation of church rules, is given six months to repent (Interview E). A church member who refuses to agree to shun an excommunicated couple is given until the next church council meetings to begin shunning these people (Interview C).

In cases involving major violations or uncooperative offenders, the ministers will order the offender to appear before the church congregation the following Sunday, called sitz gma or “members’ meeting”. A family that began attending a non-Amish church is asked to appear before the congregation (Interview F). A bishop who discovered that one of his church members was rebaptized, a major offense in the Amish community, wastes no time in ordering this member to attend a hearing before the church (Interview E). An Amish woman, whose sister was given six months to stop listening to gospel tapes, must
come in front of the church the following Sunday for committing the same offense, due to her previous history of disruptive behavior (Interview D).

On the Sunday of the members’ meeting, after the main church service, the bishop, the leader of the church, will ask all nonmembers to leave the room. At this time, the accused member will join the ministers in the front of the congregation where the ministers will ask him or her questions about the alleged offense. Most ministers will then give the accused a chance to explain his or her side of the story. Next, the ministers will ask the member to leave the room. Before the members of the church, the bishop will pronounce the form of punishment he believes is needed to reconcile the member and the church. The other ministers will voice their opinion concerning the bishop’s recommendation (Interview A).

Following the thoughts of the ministers, the bishop and one minister will go to each member of the congregation and ask if they are in agreement with the bishop’s decision. Every member must agree in order for the punishment to be implemented. Although Amish members are given opportunity to voice their disagreement at this time, they rarely do. In fact, one Amish deacon said he could not remember ever hearing a member disagree with the bishop’s decision (Interview A). A former member of the Amish church once disagreed with the ministers’ decision but changed her mind due to pressure from the minister and the congregation (Interview D).

Following the vote from the congregation, the accused member is allowed to return to the meeting. The bishop informs the offender of the church’s decision. In cases of excommunication, the bishop often reads I. Corinthians 5:5 which says, “To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the
day of the Lord Jesus.” With this, the meeting is adjourned, and the member is
excommunicated, cut off from the Amish church (Interview C).

Often, if a member knows that he or she is going to be excommunicated, they will
choose not to attend the members’ meeting, in hopes of avoiding the shame of
excommunication (Interview D). In this case, the ministers would visit the offending
member the following week and inform them of the church’s decision. Some ministers
will quote the verse from I. Corinthians, while others will not (Interview A). Once
excommunicated, former members may still attend church services, but it is clear that
they are no longer a part of the congregation. An excommunicated member who wished
to attend church with her Amish husband could not share the songbook with the person
next to her and had to eat at a separate table during the meal after the service (Interview
C).

Although the Amish will push away disobedient members, the arms of the Amish
community are nearly always open to those who desire to return. Only excommunicated
members who divorce and get remarried will not be accepted back into the church
(Interview A). The church will never completely close its doors to former members. In
fact, many excommunicated members return, rejoining the same church district that cast
them out (Interview A). In one case, an Amish man who left the church for thirty years
was welcomed back, after confessing his sin and passing a six-week trial period
(Interview B).

Shunning

For former Amish members, excommunication can have harsh consequences.
Amish church members are required to shun those who have been dismissed from the
congregation, according to the 17th article of the Dordrecht Confession described earlier in this paper. Shunning is done to retain the purity of the church and remind offenders that they are outside the congregation. Although the Amish are still allowed to converse with and visit shunned members, they must follow ritual guidelines in their interactions with the excommunicated. In Lancaster County, adherence to these guidelines varies among church districts, families, and individuals. Some ministers will require members to strictly follow shunning guidelines; others are more lenient. Often, shunning is practiced more firmly in a public setting (Interview A).

*The Guidelines of Shunning*

The practice of shunning is carried out in three major ways. First, an Amish member may not receive anything directly from a non-member. Second, a church member may not eat at the same table as a shunned individual. Third, a church member may not receive a car or buggy ride driven by an excommunicated member.

In the first form of shunning, a church member may not directly receive anything from an excommunicated member, including money, gifts, etc. If an shunned person wants to give an item to a church member, they must first set the item down before the member is allowed to accept it. Again, this varies in how it is implemented. Some Amish businesses will not accept any payment from a shunned person. Shortly after being excommunicated, a former Amish lady attempted to purchase items from an Amish health food store; the Amish cashier would not accept her money. Other businesses will require the person to lay the money on the counter. In contrast, an Amish member is allowed to give something directly to a former member, encouraging the congregation to help those expelled from the church. The Amish are often encouraged to visit people
who have been recently excommunicated, in hopes of persuading them to come back to
the church (Interview A).

A second manner of shunning can be equally as shameful for shunned individuals. Amish members are not allowed to eat at the same table as an excommunicated member. In private settings, this guideline is often relaxed. A mother separates the table a few inches when eating with her shunned son (Interview F). A sister places a different tablecloth on the side of the table used by her shunned brother (Interview F). However, in public settings, particularly during meals at weddings and funerals, shunned individuals will be required to sit at a different table during the meal (Interview A).

As a third way of shunning, the Amish are not allowed to accept a ride in a car or buggy driven by a shunned individual. One Amish man, who rode in a car driven by an excommunicated member, was himself excommunicated for not following the guidelines of shunning (Interview G). In contrast, the Amish would be permitted, and even encouraged, to offer a ride to a shunned person, as a way of helping them (Interview B).

**Sociological Theory and Shunning**

**Shunning as Ritual**

What makes shunning a ritual? Why do Amish church members participate in this ritual? What purposes does the ritual of shunning fulfill? In attempting to understand the ritual of shunning among the Amish, I will examine the definition of ritual and how it applies to the practice of shunning. By discussing the different aspects of ritual and several interpretative theories, we will be able to better understand the ritual of shunning among Amish in Lancaster County.

As we look at the ritual of shunning, it is necessary to define what a ritual is. In their book, *The Riddles of Human Society*, Kanagy and Kraybill (1999) defined ritual as
“orderly, repetitive, and meaningful social interaction” (p.183). Ritual does not concern individual behavior; rather, it predicts interaction between two or more people. Ritual tells us when to shake hands, when to bow our heads, and when to cheer. It is the patterns we follow every day as we interact with other people. With the help of ritual, we can predict how someone will respond when we say, “Hi”. We can know, often without conscious thought, when is the proper time to sit or stand. We are able to identify when to speak and when to be quiet. In essence, ritual organizes our lives into predictable patterns (Kanagy and Kraybill 1999:183).

The practice of shunning among the Amish meets the three aspects of Kanagy and Kraybill’s (1999) definition- social interaction that is “orderly, repetitive, and meaningful” (p.183). These three aspects suggest different characteristics that combine to form the ritual. Each of these aspects is present, and very influential, in the practice of shunning.

In ritual, social interaction is orderly. Behavior is not chaotic or random; it occurs in patterns that can easily be predicted. Amish members follow certain guidelines when practicing shunning. If a shunned person attempts to hand them something, the Amish church member may refuse it or ask the person to set it down before accepting it. Shunned members are required to sit at a separate table during a meal. These guidelines give order to the practice of shunning. If a church member interacts with an excommunicated member, one can predict the actions that will occur. In this way, shunning is orderly by foretelling when certain behavior will happen.

Ritual suggests repetitive social interaction. By doing the same action over and over again in the same way, shunning becomes repetitious. Every time an
excommunicated person visits an Amish business, they must lay the money on the counter. Many Amish do not even think about what they are doing when they shun a person (Interview A). It becomes a natural part of life, something that can be done without conscious thought.

Finally, shunning is meaningful. It conveys the values and beliefs of the Amish community. When an Amish church member shuns a former member, he or she is upholding Amish values of separation, obedience to the church, and submission (Kraybill 2000). By being orderly, repetitious, and meaningful, shunning meets the requirements of a ritual.

**Shunning as Public and Private**

Orderly, repetitious, and meaningful social interaction suggests not only how behavior will occur but also when it will happen. Kanagy and Kraybill (1999) distinguished between public and private rituals (pgs.193-95). These rituals are often very different in the way they are practiced. Public rituals usually occur in large crowds and include cheering during a baseball game, participating in a protest, and performing in a concert. On the other hand, private rituals take place among only a few people. These rituals are more intimate, where the participants often know each other. Private rituals include a father-son talk, a family eating dinner together, and meeting a doctor in his office (Kanagy and Kraybill 1999:193-95).

The ritual of shunning is practiced quite differently in public and private spheres. Most Amish strictly obey the guidelines of shunning in public settings, where many fellow members are watching them. An Amish man, who does not shun his excommunicated wife at home, eats at a separate table during a wedding meal (Interview
E). In fact, one would rarely see an Amish church member eat at the same table as an excommunicated member in a public setting such as at a reunion or a restaurant (Interview B). However, in the privacy of her home, an Amish woman shares a table with her shunned sister (Interview E). The same Amish man who will not sit with his wife during a wedding does not shun her in any way at home (Interview E). The guidelines, which are strictly adhered to in public, are often relaxed in private. Through ritual, behavior occurs in different ways depending on the environment.

How do we explain this discrepancy in the way shunning is practiced in different settings? What causes many Amish to strictly shun in one setting and relax shunning in another? For most Amish, shunning presents a conflict of interests. On one hand, they wish to obey the rules of the church. At the same time, they may desire to retain ties to family and friends who they are required to shun. The public and private aspects of shunning allow some Amish to resolve this conflict. In public, the costs of not shunning far outweigh the possible benefits for Amish church members. An Amish person, who does not engage in shunning in public, risks being seen by a minister or another member who may report the disobedient member to the church. This disobedience could lead to disciplinary action. In this case, although the Amish member may be able to retain a friendship by not shunning, he or she could face punishment if caught. However, in a private setting, an Amish person is less likely to be seen not shunning a former member. The Amish person may view the benefits of not shunning in private as higher than the possible costs.
Shunning as Habitus

Why do Amish church members agree to shun former members? Why does an Amish mother shun her children? A former Amish member estimated that half of the Amish in Lancaster County practice shunning, not because they believe it is right or Scriptural, but out of obedience to the church (Interview F). Other former and current members agree with this estimate. Does this reflect a blind adherence to the ritual of shunning or is there another explanation? At times, due to its repetitious nature, ritual is performed without conscious thought. However, ritual can involve strategy. For help in understanding this, we will examine Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of “habitus”, an attempt by Bourdieu to explain cultural behavior by combining both subjective and objective influences (Bourdieu 1977:2-9).

In his analysis of Bourdieu’s theory of practice, David Swartz (1997) describes Bourdieu’s belief of action not as merely “unwitting conformity” to social norms but as strategy (pgs.98-100). Rather than blindly following rules of conduct, humans adhere to social norms using strategies, according to their interests (Bourdieu 1977:9). Swartz (1997) says, “Whether or not actors conform to norms or follow prescribed rituals depends on their interests” (p.99). However, by strategy, Bourdieu does not indicate “conscious choice or rational calculation” (Swartz 1997:100). Modes of behavior do not solely depend on the objective situation at hand or on societal norms and rules. Rather, they are produced by master dispositions, combining subjective sentiments and feelings with the objective situation, that take into account both the situation and the societal norms influencing it (Swartz 1997:100).
For Bourdieu (1977), these master dispositions compose “habitus”. Habitus is defined as

“systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively regulated and regular without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them” (Bourdieu 1977:72).

Habitus is a set of master dispositions that generate action. These dispositions are usually a result of early childhood socialization experiences where external structures become internalized (Swartz 1997:103). Habitus does not guarantee that a person will act in a certain way- this would make it deterministic, which Bourdieu wishes to avoid. Rather, the master dispositions of habitus “predispose actors to select forms of conduct that are most likely to succeed in light of their resources and past experiences” (Swartz 1997:106). For example, habitus explains why both men and women, who grew up in male-dominated societies, will continue to act according to this structure, even though it may seem detrimental for women to do so. At an early age, the external structure, where men have power over women, is internalized. It later becomes a disposition that influences how both men and women will act. Due to this disposition, a man may act domineering toward his wife, while the wife willing submits according to a similar disposition (Bourdieu 1977:79).

What is the habitus, or master dispositions, of the Amish? How does this habitus affect shunning? In his book, the Riddle of Amish Culture, Kraybill (2001) identifies a major, underlying disposition of the Amish, found in the German word Gelassenheit (p.29). Gelassenheit refers to “submitting, yielding to a higher authority” (Kraybill 2001:31). It includes obedience, humility, and submission. The Amish person’s life is
greatly influenced by Gelassenheit (Kraybill 2001:29-31). Amish children learn the importance of the concept of Gelassenheit through observing their parents and the community, through the educational system, and through work (Kraybill 2001:38). The idea of Gelassenheit fits very well with Bourdieu’s concept of habitus.

How does Gelassenheit help to explain the ritual of shunning? According to Bourdieu, the Amish are predisposed to obey the authority of the church, a value at the heart of Gelassenheit. At an early age, Amish children see the church’s position at the center of their society. The external structure of the church’s authority is internalized through early socialization—mainly observation and education. This structure—the authority of the church—then becomes a “structuring structure”, which forms the disposition of the Amish. Through habitus, an Amish person will act according to their internalized concept of the authority of the church. Indeed, Gelassenheit helps to predict Amish behavior.

In a situation where shunning is required by the church, an Amish person will most likely engage in this ritual out of obedience, according to their disposition. This obedience is in the best interests of the Amish individual. By obeying the church, the Amish person ensures that he or she will be allowed to remain in it. As stated earlier, disobedience to the church is usually the reason for excommunication. In light of habitus, shunning is not a mindless following of a group rule; instead, it is a strategy that protects the interests of Amish individuals.

Shunning as Separating Sacred and Profane

In his book, The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life, Emile Durkheim (1915) separates religion into two parts, beliefs and rituals (p.36). In order to understand ritual,
Durkheim believes we must first understand beliefs. He further divides belief into two opposing parts, the profane and the sacred, which he describes not only as opposing each other but as being categories from two different worlds. “Sacred” refers to parts of life that are set apart, while “profane” suggests everyday, commonplace aspects of life. Sacred things demand an attitude of respect and awe. This attitude is what transfers things from profane to sacred (Ritzer 2000:91). For instance, a group of people meeting together could be considered normal and commonplace. However, the Amish hold a reverential fear for the congregation, moving this group of people from the profane realm to the sacred. In the Amish community, the church decides what is sacred and what is profane through the practice of shunning. Shunning creates and reinforces clear boundaries of what is accepted behavior for a person in the Amish church. Because the actions of individuals within the church represent the sacred, behavior that is deemed profane is confronted through shunning.

Beliefs always express the nature of sacred things, and rituals define the behavior appropriate to express these beliefs (Durkheim 1915:41). Durkheim compares beliefs and rituals with thought and action, with beliefs being similar to thought and rituals to action. Thus, our beliefs are expressed through ritual. Along with this idea, Durkheim sees ritual as tying beliefs to actions. In other words, rituals work to reinforce beliefs. By performing religious rituals, people are able to experience their beliefs. In other words, there exists a two-way relationship between beliefs and rituals- beliefs support rituals, and rituals in turn support beliefs (Bell 1992:20).

Applying Durkheim’s thinking on ritual to shunning, we are able to gain insight into how this practice works. One of the core beliefs of the Amish is that they are called
by God to be separated from the “world” (Kraybill 2001:22). How is this belief expressed? Every ritual act of shunning is an act of separation. Whether eating at a separate table, refusing to accept something handed to them, or declining a car ride from an excommunicated member, an Amish church member is expressing the Amish belief of separation. They are setting themselves apart from what they view as an evil influence.

Continuing with Durkheim’s ideas, the Amish belief of separation becomes real through the act of shunning. When an Amish person sees themselves shunning an excommunicated member, it works to reinforce their belief of separation.

Similar to Durkheim, Clifford Geertz (1973) separated religion into two categories, ethos and worldview (pgs.126-27). He describes ethos as the “moral and aesthetic aspects of a given culture” (Geertz 1973:127). It is a people’s “underlying attitude toward themselves and their world that life reflects” (Geertz 1973:127). In other words, ethos is how people think the world should be, their ideal version of reality. It includes the lifestyle of the people and how they like to do things. On the other hand, Geertz (1973) describes “the cognitive, existential aspects” of a culture as “worldview” (p.127). This is a people’s “picture of the way things in sheer actuality are” (Geertz 1973:127). It is how the world really is.

At times, Geertz (1973) associates ethos with religious ritual and worldview with religious belief. He states that “religious belief and ritual confront and mutually confirm one another” (Geertz 1973:127). In other words, Geertz sees ethos and worldview being fused together by ritual (p.127). In ritual, a people’s idea of how reality should be supports how the world really is, and in return, the reality of the world supports ideas of how the world should be. Perhaps Geertz (1973) described it best when he said, “In
ritual, the world as lived and the world as imagined...turns out to be the same world” (p.127).

How does Geertz’s idea of ritual help us to explain the practice of shunning? Looking once again at the Amish belief of separation, we can see ethos and worldview at work. The Amish desire to be separate from the world makes up their ethos. In their ideal view of reality, they are set apart, separated from evil. In this case, the worldview would be whether or not the Amish really are separated from the world. The religious ritual of shunning brings the ethos and worldview together. The Amish church’s desire to be separated is realized when they shun those who have been expelled from the church, a sign of their actual separation from the world.

Latent Functions of Shunning

Earlier in this paper, I mentioned the purposes of shunning as expressed by the Amish church (p.4). In their opinion, shunning is designed to protect the purity of the church and convict the individual of his or her sin. Aside from these manifest purposes, shunning serves other functions in the Amish community. Although these roles may be less obvious, they are just as important in understanding shunning.

Shunning reinforces the moral authority of the Amish church, making it very functional for the congregation. During instruction classes, which occur before baptism, potential members learn that the Amish church reserves the right to excommunicate and shun disobedient members (Interview A). An Amish person is well aware of the consequences of disobeying the church, of the possibility of being expelled from the Amish community. Most of them know people who are excommunicated and shunned. The possibility of facing shunning keeps people in the church. When asked what would
happen if the Amish stopped using shunning, an excommunicated couple said most would leave, a sentiment shared by several other former members and at least one current member (Interview B, C, D, E, F). On the other hand, an Amish deacon disagreed, saying the Amish church would not lose a significant amount of members if they ceased using shunning. He points out that the purpose of shunning is not to keep members; instead, shunning is used to ensure the purity of the church (Interview A). Despite its manifest purpose, it seems shunning does, in some cases, keep people in the church.

Another purpose of shunning is to shame individuals have who been cast out of the church. One of the most shameful and demoralizing aspects of shunning is that shunned individuals cannot directly hand anything to an Amish church member. In his study of reciprocity, Alvin Gouldner (1960) identified the norm of reciprocity as a universal characteristic of all societies (p.171). The rule of reciprocity states that "we should try to repay, in kind, what another person has provided us" (Cialdini 1988:21). Gouldner (1960) believes reciprocity is an internalized moral norm (p.174). We are morally obligated to give back to those who have given something to us. The norm of reciprocity leads to a balanced, stable social system by creating interdependence among its members. One does not merely benefit from another without feeling the need to repay that person in some way. Those who are unable to repay a donor are indebted to that person until they can pay. A housewife cooks for her husband, who financially supports her. A man who cannot afford to repay his neighbor tries to make up for it in other ways. In both cases, the norm of reciprocity is at work. Of course, one can choose to break the rule of reciprocity but not without social sanctions. Thus the norm of reciprocity is essential to the order and cohesion of society (Gouldner 1960:174-76).
Whether or not the norm of reciprocity is a universal theme is irrelevant at this point, it does indeed seem to be present among the Amish. The Amish community relies heavily on mutual aid. Instead of being covered by outside insurance companies, the Amish church provides insurance for all its members. When a person joins the church in baptism, they are expected to help each other in times of need. If an Amish man loses his barn in a fire, his Amish neighbors will gather to rebuild his barn, knowing that he would do the same for them. If an Amish person incurs a high medical bill, a minister will travel to each member of the congregation to raise money for the bill. Each Amish person who gives to a needy fellow Amish church member knows that his or her gift will be repaid if the tables are ever turned (Kraybill 2001: 154-56). In this way, the norm of reciprocity binds the Amish community, providing mutual aid for each member.

Shunning disrupts the norm of reciprocity among the Amish. Most Amish church members will readily help a shunned member in need--as commanded in Article 17 of the Dordrecht Confession (Horst 1988:35). However, some Amish will be reluctant to receive help from an excommunicated member. A few would not want a shunned member to help in a barn raising or give to a medical bill. In some cases, Amish members would not allow a former member to reciprocate their help (Interview A). An Amish business may refuse to receive money from a shunned member; instead, telling the former member to take the items free of charge (Interview C). An Amish person may offer, but may not receive, a ride from an excommunicated member. In this way, the Amish create a sense of indebtedness where the shunned member is unable to pay the church member back for a service received. This does not allow the banned member the
dignity of aiding someone in the church, thus breaking the tie to the community. It seems this is practiced by a small minority of Amish in Lancaster County (Interview A).

For the most part, an excommunicated member can still give to a church member. Most would be allowed to participate in a barn raising or give to a medical bill. However, there are still clear differences in reciprocation between church members and shunned individuals. An Amish businessman can directly hand a bag of goods to a shunned Amish woman, but she cannot directly hand him the money. Instead, she must lay the money on the counter. By not directly receiving anything from a banned person, the church member is saying, whether intended or not, that person is not on an equal level. An excommunicated member is not considered a member of the community; therefore, they are unable to return favors in the same manner. Instead, an excommunicated member must first set the object down on a neutral place before a church member can receive it. Although the norm of reciprocity is still at work in situations involving shunning, the nature of the exchange is altered, resulting in shame for the shunned individual.

**Conclusion**

Clifford Geertz (1973) views ritual as a cultural text, an open book that reveals a story about the larger culture (p.448). In ritual, we see culture in practice. Therefore we are able to describe not only the ritual itself but aspects of the larger culture evident in the ritual. By observing the ritualistic cockfight in Balinese culture, Geertz noticed cultural values at work. He saw gender roles, class rivalry, and spiritual beliefs in the Balinese cockfights. Much like a book, Geertz (1973) “read” the text of Balinese culture through the cockfight (pgs.448-50).
What does the ritual of shunning say about Amish culture? Shunning reveals the two cornerstones of the Amish church: 1) unconditional obedience to the church; 2) separation from the world. Amish life, as evidenced in shunning, revolves around these two principles.

First, shunning shows complete obedience to the church. Here, the master disposition of the Amish, *Gelassenheit*, is at work. Gelassenheit predisposes members to yield themselves to the higher authority of the church. In excommunication and shunning, it is the church that dismisses a disobedient member and excludes that person from the community. Although individual members are allowed to disagree, the church has the final say. In this way, shunning establishes the church as the highest authority in Amish society.

Among the Amish, the church holds a higher place than the family and the individual. In mainstream American society, we find this hard to understand. Individuals stand at the very top of our hierarchical authority structure, followed by the family and finally the church. We give individuals the authority to make their own decisions. The church rarely limits the choices of individual and family members. If it does, the individual and family can always leave and join another church. Amish society is the exact opposite of mainstream America. In Amish life, as evidenced in shunning, the church has the ultimate authority in nearly every matter. The church reserves the right to separate family members, break friendships, and even alter the sacred institution of marriage.

Second, shunning displays separation from the world. The Amish church is to remain pure and sacred. Shunning promotes this purity by providing clear boundaries
between the sacred and profane. Of course, the church has the authority to establish these boundaries. The practice of shunning allows the church to remain sacred by limiting interaction with the profane.

By separating from the world, the Amish stress the importance of the community. They suppress individualism to promote community. Instead of focusing on the welfare of the individual, the church works to protect the community. As shown in shunning, the Amish church would rather lose one member than risk corrupting the entire congregation. They have set clear boundaries to protect their community and are willing to use shunning in enforcing those boundaries.

By demanding obedience to the church and separation from the world, shunning reinforces the significance of baptism. On the day of their baptism, Amish church members pledge to obey the church and separate from the world. By shunning excommunicated members, often without question, the Amish uphold their baptismal commitment. They express their obedience to the higher authority of the church and their desire to be separate from the world through shunning.

The practice of shunning is a window into the heart and soul of Amish culture. It shows the values and founding principles of the Amish community. Shunning displays how Amish life centers around these values and principles. In our age of tolerance, the Amish have chosen to set clear boundaries to protect the purity of their community, even though these boundaries may result in shame for disobedient members. The sign says, “Peaceful Valley Amish Furniture”. Although it may be controversial and sometimes abused, the Amish use shunning to keep their valley peaceful, ensuring that members remain obedient to the church and separate from the world.
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Interview A. Interview conducted by Amos Stoltzfus with an Amish deacon and his wife. The Amish deacon is a retired farmer and currently works in construction in his late 50’s.

Interview B. Interview conducted by Amos Stoltzfus with a retired Amish farmer. The farmer is in his mid 80’s.

Interview C. Interview conducted by Amos Stoltzfus with a former Amish lady, in her mid 40’s. This lady still lives with her Old Order Amish husband.

Interview D. Interview conducted by Amos Stoltzfus with a former Amish lady, in her early 50’s. Sister to Interview C. This lady and her husband now attend a non-denominational church.

Interview E. Interview conducted by Amos Stoltzfus with a former Amish lady, in her early 40’s. Sister to Interview C and D. This lady is still married to her Amish husband.

Interview F. Interview conducted by Amos Stoltzfus with an ex-Amish couple that left the church approximately seven years ago. This couple is in their mid 50’s.

Interview G. Interview conducted by Don Kraybill with a former Amish couple. At the time of this interview, the wife was not yet excommunicated.


