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Steven Reschly

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Paradigmatic Paradigm Problems: Theory Issues in Amish Studies

Steven Reschly¹
Professor
Department of History
Truman State University

Abstract

Scholars of Amish history and culture, and scholars of Anabaptist and Anabaptist-descent groups more generally, have not engaged consistently or productively with mainstream theoretical developments in social and cultural studies. The phrase used most often in Amish Studies, “negotiating with modernity,” has limited usefulness because of its abstractions and time restrictions. A viable alternative rises from the research and writings of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, who formulated *Habitus* and *Field* as terms to theorize about the interaction of internal and external in human experience, perhaps the oldest and thorniest issue in the social sciences. Reformulated for more general use as “structuring intuition” and “structured intuition” can help, for example, historicize Amish Studies and, by extension, research on other Anabaptist groups. An example of how this might operate is provided by the history of Anabaptist and Amish agriculture from the early modern European “agricultural revolution” to the early twenty-first century. *Habitus* and *Field* enable one to describe and explain the consistencies of Amish habits of mind concerning agriculture, or their “structuring intuition,” as those habits confront and adjust to shifting economic, political, social, and cultural environments, or *field* as “structured intuition.” Brief examples from eighteenth-century France, nineteenth-century Iowa, twentieth-century Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, and early twenty-first century Iowa must suffice to outline what this portable adaptation of Bourdieu might produce.

Keywords

Agriculture; Organic; Pierre Bourdieu; *Habitus*; Modern; Kalona, Iowa; Johnson County, Iowa; Lancaster County, Pennsylvania; Anabaptists, France

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Introduction

Theory in Amish Studies has made a few cameo appearances. Early publications presented information without mention of social or cultural theory; during a middle period, publications presented theory without evidence or theory separated from knowledge; and finally, publications used a theory or two more consistently, but without historical background or reliable usefulness. A robust theoretical framework for Amish Studies should allow consistent practice in all periods of time, all locations, and all matters under study. One particular set of theories that meets these criteria stems from the extensive and varied writings of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. After tracing the history of theory in Amish studies, this article offers transparent terminology to represent Bourdieu's significant constructs, *habitus* and field, as "structuring intuition" and "structured intuition." These terms represent Amish lived experience more accurately than other options available in current scholarship.

The presence and absence of theory in Amish studies can be traced from early scholarly works in the early 1940s by Calvin George Bachman and Walter M. Kollmorgen. Both wrote descriptive books on the Amish in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, but with little attention to social theory. John A. Hostetler proposed a series of theories in his career spanning five decades, but seldom applied them to his cultural anthropology observations. Donald B. Kraybill proposed "negotiating with modernity" in 1989 and employed this construct most consistently in his many works, providing nuanced definitions and examples. There are problems with "negotiating with modernity," the major one being its limitation to recent historical periods. It cannot be utilized for studies of Anabaptist beginnings in sixteenth-century central Europe, and certainly not to radical precursors of Anabaptism such as Jan Huss, John Wycliffe, the Waldensians, or Petr Chelčický. For historians, "negotiating with modernity" provides limited possibilities for studies of the Amish and related groups.

This article offers an alternative theoretical framework by using Bourdieu's social theory in the context of the historical development of Amish agriculture. Other topics of interest, such as clothing, military service, separation of church and state, swearing of oaths, community divisions, and the tendency to migrate, could also be explored. The one major, indisputable advantage in applying Bourdieu is that a historian can trace Amish habits of thought and behavior as lengthy historical processes, and he/she can discuss the influences of and responses to changing social and political environments that affected those internalized habits. This approach preserves the interplay of internal and external that Kraybill sought to express in "negotiating with modernity," but without the time limitations and other issues raised by that particular phrase. To develop a Bourdieusian perspective, the first step is a brief history of theory in Amish studies, demonstrating the long precedent of theory divorced from praxis.

The Difficult Relationship of Theory and Practice

The Early Work: Facts without Theoretical Grounding

The year 1942 was auspicious for Amish Studies, if not for most of the world. Two publications marked the beginning of scholarly study of the Old Order Amish in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. Pastor of the St. Stephen Reformed Church in New Holland, University of Pennsylvania student, and amateur sociologist Calvin George Bachman published *The Old Order Amish of Lancaster County* in the Pennsylvania German Society "Proceedings and Addresses" series (Bachman 1942). A review two years later in *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* characterized the publication as "purely descriptive," albeit "the first well-rounded, scholarly investigation of this most fascinating topic." Bachman described numerous components of Amish society with no attention to any theoretical appraisal.

Geographer Walter M. Kollmorgen also published a study of the Old Order Amish of Lancaster County (Kollmorgen 1942a). In contrast to Bachman, Kollmorgen's research was the first attempt to give Amish studies some conceptual orientation. Kollmorgen was born in 1907 and raised in northeastern Nebraska, near Bancroft, in a German Lutheran farm family. His father was a parochial school teacher, and Kollmorgen spoke and wrote fluent German. One of eleven children, Kollmorgen and his younger sister, Johanna, both contracted polio at the ages of three and one respectively. Their father developed epilepsy and the family fell into hopeless debt. Walter and Johanna worked their way through the University of Nebraska, Johanna as a stenographer for the Geography Department at 35 cents per hour, Walter by grading "papers by the sackful" (Kollmorgen 1979; Jellison and Reschly, interview with Walter Kollmorgen, March 20, 1994).

After graduating, he wrote several bulletins for the university Conservation Department on agriculture in Nebraska, then received a \$1,500 graduate fellowship to attend Columbia University. He visited his sister, working as a typist in Knoxville, Tennessee, and observed Swiss, German, and Italian farming communities that seemed quite different from the usual Southern agriculture. He applied and received a more substantial grant from the Social Science Research Council, then completed his dissertation in 1940 under the direction of geographer J. Russell Smith. It was published immediately by the U.S. Department of Agriculture as *The German-Swiss in Franklin County, Tennessee: A Study of the Significance of Cultural Considerations in Farming Enterprises* (Kollmorgen 1940a, 1940b). In his dissertation and in additional articles, he developed the concept of cultural-agricultural "islands" scattered through the South that presented striking differences from their Southern environment: no tenet farming, no cotton dominance, and diverse general farming. He noted in his dissertation, "the European peasant type of farmer has apparently been more successful in the South for he generally avoided large financial obligations and had enough patience to adapt himself to a new agricultural environment" (Kollmorgen 1940a, 4). He considered these "islands" to represent sustainable agriculture and thus sustainable rural communities. Kollmorgen contrasted "yeoman" farmers,

those who considered farming a way of life to be passed on to their descendants, with profit-oriented farmers, and claimed the “yeoman” or “peasant type” to be a more effective foundation for viable rural community (Kollmorgen 1941a, 1941b, 1943a, 1944, 1945; Kollmorgen and Harrison 1946).²

It was in the midst of these studies of cultural-agricultural “islands” that Kollmorgen wrote about the Old Order Amish of Lancaster County. Carl C. Taylor, director of social science research at the Bureau of Agricultural Economics in the U.S. Department of Agriculture, sent a group of “participant observers” in 1940 to six geographically, ethnically, and economically diverse rural communities in order to study varying levels of community stability. The communities studied, on a theorized continuum from least stable to most stable, ranged from the dust bowl community near Sublette, Haskell County, Kansas, followed closely by Landaff, New Hampshire. Harmony, Georgia, was categorized as a bit better on the continuum; Irwin, Iowa occupied a middle position, followed by El Cerrito, New Mexico; and finally the most stable rural community turned out to be the Old Order Amish of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. Kollmorgen resided with the Lancaster County Amish for four months in 1940, beginning in March, accompanied by BAE photographer Irving Rusinow. As a native speaker of German, Kollmorgen made good connections with Amish farmers, albeit mainly the men (Kollmorgen 1942a, 30, 105; see also Kollmorgen 1942b, 1943b; Getz 1946; Loomis 1979).

Kollmorgen depicted the Old Order Amish and Old Order Mennonites as a sort of island-within-an-island, a more enduring segment of the Pennsylvania Dutch, themselves an island within the larger American rural society. In an overview statement, Kollmorgen wrote, “The main and primary objective of the farming of the Old Order Amish and Old Order Mennonites is to accumulate sufficient means to buy enough land to keep all the children on farms. To this end they work hard, produce abundantly, and save extensively.” The drumbeats of Kollmorgen’s investigation were the biblical concepts of separation from the world, nonconformity to the world, and avoiding the “unequal yoke” with unbelievers. His closing paragraph is revealing:

The fact that some of the ideals and practices of the Old Order Amish are being subjected to considerable strain and that some modifications have taken place in their program of nonconformity must not lead to the quick assumption that their community faces immediate and steep decline. A group that has survived centuries of persecution in Europe and has so far resisted many of the onslaughts of factories, with their standardized products, and the appeals of higher education must have qualities that make for survival. Important among these qualities are a tradition of hard work, a willingness to make sacrifices for the good of others, and an enviable tradition of constructive diversified agriculture. (Kollmorgen 1942a, 105)

In his 1942 publication, and in later articles, it seems Kollmorgen viewed the Old Order Amish and Old Order Mennonites through the lens of his studies of cultural-agricultural islands in the American South. They practiced general farming, considered agriculture a way of life rather than a business, relied on family labor rather than capital, made community decisions by consensus within a general orientation toward patriarchal leadership, and remained aloof from

politics, consolidated secondary schools, and higher education, and most other manifestations of contemporary mainstream society.³ He seemed to consider his subjects to be transplanted German peasants, and did not engage with more mainstream social and cultural theory.

John A. Hostetler's Evolving Paradigms

After early steps taken by Bachman and Kollmorgen in 1942, and in the wake of growing interest in and promotion of tourism to “Amish Country” in the post-war period of prosperity and Cold War anxieties, John A. Hostetler began his long career as the dominant voice in Amish Studies. Hostetler (1918-2001) was born and raised in Old Order Amish communities in Pennsylvania and Iowa. Hostetler's father, Joseph, was banned and shunned by the Peachey Old Order Amish church in 1929 in Mifflin County, Pennsylvania, after which the family moved to a farm near Kalona, Iowa, in 1930. In his late teens, Hostetler left the Amish church before requesting baptism and began attending a nearby Mennonite Church, East Union, north of Kalona. He wrote later that he sensed a calling to higher education and writing. As a native speaker of Amish dialects (whereas Kollmorgen spoke High German) and since he had never been baptized in an Amish congregation and therefore was not banned and shunned for leaving, Hostetler could move freely within many Amish communities. He attended Hesston College, a Mennonite junior college in Kansas; worked in Civilian Public Service during World War II; attended Goshen College, a Mennonite college in Indiana; and later earned M.S. and Ph.D. degrees in rural sociology from Pennsylvania State University in 1951 and 1953. He taught in universities in Alberta, where he became acquainted with the Hutterites, and Pennsylvania, finally settling at Temple University in Philadelphia in 1965. He thus lived in Amish, Mennonite, and scholarly worlds, though he existed, to a greater or lesser extent, in a liminal position in relation to all three worlds. In terms of scholarly identity, Hostetler considered himself a “cultural anthropologist” (see also Weaver-Zercher 2005).

Hostetler began his publishing career with *Annotated Bibliography of the Amish* in 1951, while still a student at Penn State. His best known and most influential book, *Amish Society*, appeared in 1963 and in three revised editions (1968, 1980, and 1993). The four editions sold over 100,000 copies and the fourth edition is still in print. Thus, Hostetler influenced Amish Studies directly for the better part of five decades, and indirectly into the twenty-first century, from Hostetler (1951) to Hostetler (1993) and later. Two observations can be made for certain. *Amish Society* grew much larger from first to fourth edition. Second, the number of suggested theoretical models grew, though not in use in the main body of the book. In the first edition, Hostetler expressed the most interest in Robert Redfield's (1940, 1947) “Folk Society” and “Little Community,” in contrast to large, impersonal human groupings like the nation-state or anonymous cities. It may reflect the nearly ubiquitous dichotomies of social theory, beginning with the contrast between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* formulated by Ferdinand Tönnies (1940[1887]). By the fourth edition, Hostetler (1993) offered a basket of potential “Models for Understanding Amish Society” (chapter 1) and had switched his main focus from “folk society” to “charter” (chapter 4), perhaps in response to critiques published by sociologist Marc A. Olshan

(1981). The basket of headings in Chapter 1 included Commonwealth, Sectarian Society, Folk Society, and High-Context Culture. Charter, meaning the core concepts of Amish society, included “Gemeinde as Redemptive Community,” “Separation from the World,” “The Vow of Baptism,” “Ordnung and Tradition,” “Exclusion: Excommunication and Social Avoidance,” and “Closeness to Nature” (Kraybill 2005).⁴ Most of Hostetler’s *magnum opus* consists of insightful anthropological observations on Amish society and culture, with frequent brief mentions of a range of additional theoretical models. All editions relied on, and likely could not have been written without, the unpublished dissertation of Gertrude Enders Huntington (1956) at Yale University, “Dove at the Window: A Study of Old Order Amish Community in Ohio.” Huntington’s work was mainly descriptive, with a goal of studying the function of religion in community survival and persistence. Hostetler and Huntington published several books and articles together, in particular *Children in Amish Society* (1971, 1992) and *The Hutterites in North America* (1967, 1980, 1997).

Hostetler was enormously influential and shaped a generation of scholars engaged in Amish studies. He expressed interest in multiple theoretical models, but in the end, did not apply any of them consistently to his own research and writing. Theory was detached from facts and observations.

Rootless Boundaries

An even clearer disconnect between theory and praxis, with long-term consequences, is rooted in the rootless history of “Boundary Maintenance.” The phrase appears first, in Amish studies, in a 1957 book by Michigan State University sociologists Charles P. Loomis and J. Allan Beegle. In *Rural Sociology: The Strategy of Change*, they placed the heading “Boundary Maintenance” in a chapter on “Religious Social Systems,” but the authors cite no writings in support of their use of this phrase (Loomis and Beegle 1957, 229-31). They should have cited, at a minimum, the works of Durkheim and Weber, followed by references to structuralism and developments related to structural-functionalism. Instead, they treated “boundary maintenance” as self-evident with no further explanation necessary, and its frequent use in Amish studies, particularly in popular works, became self-referential. It was thus a missed opportunity to engage, in a serious way, with mainstream social and cultural theories and discussions. A work that takes into account the full range of scholarly discussions, uses, and critiques of “boundary maintenance” would be welcome.⁵

On the other hand, “boundary” gives the impression that the Amish live in absolute splendid isolation from mainstream society, so while the term may have uses in many research areas, it may actually do more harm than good in Amish studies. Similar observations can be made about “tradition,” and pop culture treatments of “Rumspringa,” banning and shunning, rejection of any and all technology, and the older issues of bundling and various “improving the gene pool” mythologies that approach the status of urban (rural?) legend.

Negotiating Donald B. Kraybill

In contrast to this muddle, at least one theoretical construct has dominated Amish studies for several decades. The most consistent use of a theoretical model in Amish studies can be found in the many published writings of sociologist Donald B. Kraybill, one of John A. Hostetler's graduate students at Temple University. Kraybill introduced "negotiating with modernity" in his 1989 paradigm-shifting book, *The Riddle of Amish Culture*. Kraybill completed a Ph.D. in sociology in 1975, published *The Upside-Down Kingdom* in 1978, winner of the National Religious Book Award, served as chair of the Department of Sociology and Social Work at Elizabethtown College, a Church of the Brethren school in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, from 1979 to 1985, directed the Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies at Elizabethtown College from 1989 to 1996, succeeding Hostetler, served as provost of Messiah College, a Brethren in Christ school in Mechanicsburg, Cumberland County, Pennsylvania, from 1996 to 2002, and returned to Elizabethtown College and the Young Center in 2003.

In the first edition of *The Riddle of Amish Culture*, Kraybill proposed *resistance* and *negotiation* with *modernization* as "the primary social strategies that the Amish have used to preserve their identity." In an endnote, he offered a nuanced, tripartite definition of "negotiation": "direct, face-to-face bargaining between Amish representatives and government officials," such as Amish parochial schools; "informal negotiations" that occur "quietly" over a longer period of time, such as using permanent press fabric to make traditional Amish clothing; and "negotiation" as a "metaphor in a symbolic way" to describe the "dynamic dialogue between Amish life and modern culture" (Kraybill 1989, 15-21, 267 n. 31). In the revised edition of *Riddle*, Kraybill (2001) continued to use similar formulations of "negotiating with modernity" and added "social capital" and "cultural capital" to the theoretical framework (pp. 20-24, 343-44 n. 31, 344 n. 33). In numerous books and articles, co-authored books and articles, and edited and co-edited collections, Kraybill consistently used "negotiating with modernity," sometimes adding concepts such as "hypermodernity" in conversation with Valerie Weaver-Zercher (2013) as she researched Amish romance novels. Many other scholars and writers have picked up the "negotiation" terminology and it is the most widely-used framework in Amish studies in the early twenty-first century.

There are problems with "negotiating with modernity." I offered a critique in the context of reviewing *The Amish* for the *Journal of Amish and Plain Anabaptist Studies*, to which the authors responded (Bogden, et al. 2014). I will concede the point they made that they did not "borrow" as much as I stated, for example, "hypermodernity" and "liquid modernity" from Weaver-Zercher's book on Amish romance novels. However, I wish to restate more clearly other points of critique and then offer an alternative theoretical framework. "Negotiation" is similar to "boundary" in that the word, without nuanced symbolic and metaphoric explanations, can be taken as depicting the Amish as overly self-conscious. My sense is that Amish individuals and communities, when they become self-conscious about explaining their beliefs and practices, find themselves in danger of losing the unselfconscious intuitive essence of their faith and life. For

example, the “tradition-minded” faction among Amish leaders in the mid-nineteenth-century *Diener Versammlungen* strongly resisted keeping minutes of those meetings of ordained leaders, while the “change-minded” faction insisted on minutes that could be utilized later. Minutes removed the flexibility of intuitive Amish community in favor of a rigid, fixed set of meanings and rules (Yoder 1991; Yoder and Estes 1999).⁶ “Informal” or “symbolic” negotiation addresses some of this problem, but those finer points are often lost in the continuous use of “negotiating with modernity” in Amish Studies. “Negotiation” too often trends toward an unacceptable degree of self-consciousness.

To be sure, the issue of Amish individuals and communities making “conscious” choices is contested. Interestingly, in the first edition of *The Riddle of Amish Culture*, Kraybill asserted that a critical component of an Amish strategy of “resistance” and “negotiation” is “restricting consciousness” (p. 248). Following a critique of “folk society” by sociologist Marc A. Olshan, who asserted that the Amish exercise “rational choice” and that “[t]he essence of modernity is the perception of choice” (Olshan 1981, 299), Hostetler backed away from the notion of limitations on self-consciousness and Kraybill followed. Given what comes below, on Bourdieu and the dialectic of *habitus* and field, recognizing a paradox in “conscious unselfconsciousness” seems possible.

Second, “modernity” is an abstraction, and “modernization” has been widely criticized as teleological and biased toward Western colonialism and models of political economy. To a historian, a much more serious problem is the time limits of “modern.” Historians and scholars in other disciplines use “early modern,” “late modern,” and “postmodern” to refer to different periods of time, but contest and debate the times when each periodization began and ended. Most often, in Amish Studies, “modern” simply means the contemporary society and culture when the author happens to be writing. It is difficult to think historically about “negotiating with modernity.” For the sixteenth-century Anabaptist movement, one would need to use “negotiating with early modernity” or “pre-modernity,” depending on when “modern” is taken to begin. Discussing the Swiss Brethren Division of the 1690s, which produced Amish and Mennonite factions in Switzerland and Alsace, is not possible within the “negotiating/bargaining with modernity” rubric.

The problems with “negotiating with modernity” are not necessarily fatal. The interplay inherent in “negotiating” is well-taken, although human beings cannot “negotiate” with an abstraction. Persons can negotiate with *representatives* of modern institutions, whatever those may be, but not with an ethereal, incorporeal “modernity.”

Pierre Bourdieu: *Habitus*, Field, and Amish Studies

In my University of Iowa dissertation and book, *The Amish on the Iowa Prairie, 1840-1910*, I proposed the theoretical formulations of French sociologist and social theorist Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) as more flexible and portable terminologies for Amish Studies. The scope

and extent of Bourdieu's writings are intimidating. Most scholars use a small piece of Bourdieu's work. In my case, it was the dialectic between *Habitus* and *Field*, explained and employed most thoroughly in *Distinction* (Reschly 2000; Bourdieu 1984[1979]; see also, Bourdieu 1989). I commented in my review of *The Amish* that these terms are likely too obscure for widespread use in Amish Studies, and Bourdieu is less well-known in North America than contemporary French theorists such as Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. In Bourdieu's writings, *Habitus* and *Field* are never separated since they are mutually influential and mutually structuring.⁷

Equivalent terminology that may be more understandable and memorable for scholars and general reading audiences alike are "structured intuition" (*field*, that is, the ways in which the environment shapes an individual's or group's internal sense of itself, what "feels" right and "normal"), and "intuitive structuring" (*habitus*, that is, the ways in which an individual's or group's sense of itself shapes the environment). An example of how "structured intuition" and "intuitive structuring" can add historical depth and breadth to a common topic in Amish studies is agriculture. If a writer begins with "negotiating with modernity," the topic would deal with technology, genetic modification, pesticides and herbicides, land prices, and other aspects of contemporary mainstream agriculture and Amish resistance or adaptation. By way of contrast, utilizing Bourdieu's *habitus* and *field* extends the agricultural topics open to exploration to longer historical periods, that is, the ways in which Amish forms of agricultural innovation and preservation, their communal habits or *habitus*, have developed in dialectic interaction with their changing environments, whenever and wherever they may live. Stated more explicitly, Amish agricultural habits formed during several centuries of experience, not merely during several recent decades.

This example of the interaction of "structured intuition" and "intuitive structuring" over time stems from the author's recent research in Johnson County, Iowa, with reference to historical experience and formation. "Jake" discovered one day that one of his field tile lines was "broke" (his word). He called a tile guy to fix it, and the specialist dug down to find the problem. He told "Jake" that the tile was clogged by corn roots. "Jake" replied, "That's not possible. The tile is too deep." So the tile guy showed him in the field, and the corn roots had, indeed, grown 40-45 inches deep (more than a meter for those in the rest of the world who use the metric system). "Jake," an Old Order Amish farmer who expressed great enthusiasm for organic agriculture, credited the "looseness" of his soil to his adoption of organic methods over many years. "Friable" soil means the corn plants have the need and ability to grow deep roots, as opposed to chemical agriculture in which the plant food is on the surface and corn roots tend therefore to be shallow. As "Jake" exclaimed later after similar stories, "I hope I live long enough to see how good my soil can get!"

According to local informants, at least half of the Old Order Amish in Johnson County, Iowa, have shifted to all-organic agriculture, certified by a variety of government and independent agencies. Their land, livestock, and products such as milk and eggs are all certified organic. Several informants claimed that the Amish around Kalona were more "agriculture

minded” than members of other Amish communities. Indeed, I observed fewer small businesses in this area, other than the usual grocery stores. There are quite a few in Davis County, Iowa: shops selling windows, tarps, kitchen cabinets, roof trusses, lumber yards, a livestock auction, and many others. The Old Order Amish around Kalona do use steel-wheel tractors, like the Amish near Yoder, Kansas, though “Jake” claimed that soil compaction is much less of a problem on his land. The landscape around Kalona is diverse, in contrast to the landscape surrounding my home town of Wayland, Iowa, where a giant factory hog operation has led most farmers to raise corn with large machinery, chemical fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides.

Other Anabaptist denominations in the Kalona area are also moving into organic farming, though not at the same percentage yet. A Mennonite farmer told me his land has been organic since 1976, with no sprays of any kind since then, though he was first officially certified in 2001. Organic farming is not a new idea, after all. J.I. Rodale founded *Organic Farming and Gardening* magazine in 1942. Congressional legislation in 1990 commissioned the USDA to establish national organic standards, which were published in the *Federal Register* in 2000 as the National Organic Program (NOP). By 2015, there were some 80 USDA “Accredited Certifying Agencies” (ACA), 48 in the United States and 32 in other countries.

The Amish in Johnson County often did not need to change very much in order to become certified organic. It was often a matter of keeping records, submitting applications, and paying inspection fees. “Jake” said he had used some chemical fertilizer and some nitrogen before deciding to seek organic certification, but never herbicides or pesticides and always manure. In my own research, in rather disparate locations and historical periods, I have noted a remarkable consistency in this Amish/Anabaptist agricultural system. These are the 17th and 18th century agricultural revolution in central Europe; two townships in Johnson County, Iowa, in the 19th century; Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, in the 1930s and 1940s; and a brief foray into contemporary Old Order Amish agriculture in Johnson County, Iowa. In struggling to explain this consistency, I turned to French sociologist and social theorist Pierre Bourdieu for concepts and vocabulary.

Bourdieu’s three core concepts are *Habitus*, *Field*, and *Capital*. Using Bourdieu’s language:

- *Habitus* means schemes of perception, thought, and action; structured structures that function as structuring structures; predispositions; a “sense of one’s place”; mental structures as a product of internalizing the social world.
- *Field* means objective social structures; social and economic classes; a setting in which agents and their social positions are located, structured by power relations.
- *Capital* takes economic, social, cultural, and symbolic forms; these are assets that promote stability, survival, and/or mobility in a society; capital enables human agents to position themselves in the world according to their habitus, both allowed and limited by external social ordering.

Habitus and *Field* are always mutually influential, mutually structuring, in a dialectic relationship. The internal habits of thought and action, what “feels right,” are structured by external economics, politics, society, and culture; in turn, the external world is structured by those internalized structures.

The “fields” that shaped a distinctive Anabaptist/Amish agricultural system were situated in early modern Central Europe, following the destruction and rural depopulation of the Thirty Years War. Local rulers in Alsace and the Palatinate invited Anabaptist farmers, both Amish and Mennonite, to new farms that were independent of village agriculture. In effect, Anabaptist farmers exchanged their social capital as expert farmers for religious toleration and long-term land leases that could be inherited.

From about 1700 to about 1850, French authorities considered them models of efficient agriculture. Landowners sought them because of their innovative methods and reliable payment of taxes and rents. Toward the end of the *ancien régime*, the Marquis Masson de Pezay praised Mennonite agriculture in these words:

It was by their more careful and better understood cultivation that I could distinguish the valleys inhabited by Anabaptists in Alsace. I would look at the hills before entering the cottages; and when the hills were better cultivated, even before seeing the shoes without buckles and the clothes without buttons, I said to myself: there are Anabaptists here. (Seguy 1973, 183)

In nineteenth-century Iowa, I used federal agricultural censuses for 1850, 1860, 1870, and 1880. In comparison with their township neighbors, Amish farmers produced more hay, grew a greater diversity of crops, raised more livestock and more kinds of livestock, produced more butter and eggs (proxy for women’s agricultural production), used all the latest farm equipment until the advent of the tractor, continued acquiring more land in order to settle their children on farms, and were similar to their neighbors in producing commodities for the market (Reschly 2000, Ch. 2).

In 1930s Lancaster County, using the 1935-1936 Federal Study of Consumer Purchases, Amish farm households made more profit with fewer expenses, using family labor and taking advantage of limits on technology such as expensive tractors and automobiles. Amish women sewed clothing and reduced clothing expenses, produced more eggs and butter, cooked many meals for hired hands and temporary farm laborers, and kept household expenses low. The farmers produced tobacco, an effective way to create more value from the same amount of land and also an effective use of family labor, but also produced dairy products, livestock, and poultry. They spent no money on recreation, other than the occasional dog license. The Amish farm families were well-positioned to survive the Great Depression (Reschly and Jellison 1993, 2008; Jellison 2001, 2002).

In Iowa in the early twenty-first century, many Old Order Amish farmers have taken the trouble to be certified organic as another way to create more value from the same amount of land. Several informants told me that organic corn and milk, in particular, are worth about twice as much as “normal” corn and milk. Another valuable product is goat’s milk, and there are several thousand goats in the community. The milk is shipped to a creamery in Wisconsin and must be certified as non-GMO but not as organic.

Innovations to actuate their agricultural *Habitus*, in addition to organic certification, included founding the Kalona Creamery to market their own products (including SuperNatural milk and yogurt, even Greek yogurt) and the Farmers Hen House to process and market eggs. They may need to find an alternative market for goat’s milk because, rumor has it, an industrial goat operation with 9,000 goats is being planned near the creamery in Wisconsin. Planting more cover crops, such as rye, is part of effective crop rotation and weed control. They will continue innovating, guided by their communal *Habitus* within the opportunities and constraints imposed by the field they live in, that is, the American rural political economy.

As another example of how “structured intuition” and “structuring intuition” may be traced in research praxis, I return to recent research in Iowa. “Jake” had a soybean field ready to be harvested. Someone was going to combine them for him. The combine guy looked over the field and commented that he had never seen so many bean pods on each plant. So we drove out to look at the field. I took pictures as he counted the bean pods on one plant. He said a normal number is about 60 pods per plant. On the plant he picked, he counted 140. To my untrained eye, the plants did look pretty loaded.

Conclusion

This article argues that a viable and portable theoretical construct for Amish studies should be serviceable in all historical periods and socio-political contexts. Any use of “modern,” and its variants such as “postmodern” and “hypermodern,” is necessarily limited in time and space. That is, premodern eras, however those are periodized, and less-developed areas of the world, however “developed” is defined (a nagging problem with “modernization” as a concept), are both excluded. Pierre Bourdieu’s formulations of *habitus* and *field* are relevant in all times and locations as descriptions of how human individuals and communities are shaped by and shape the world around them. The terms allow for agency and for limits on agency. Humans internalize the external world and, in turn, manipulate that world; it is a constant interplay of internal and external without prioritizing one over the other. Various forms of *capital* enable humans to situate themselves in the world according to their *habitus*. More transparent terminology for English-language readers to represent *habitus* and *field* are “structuring intuition” (*habitus*) and “structured intuition” (*field*).

This article offers an alternative theoretical framework by using Bourdieu’s social theory in the context of the historical development of Amish agriculture. The one major, indisputable

advantage in applying Bourdieu is that a historian can trace Amish habits of thought and behavior as lengthy historical processes, and he/she can discuss the influences of and responses to changing social and political environments that affected those internalized habits. This approach preserves the interplay of internal and external that “negotiating with modernity” sought to express but without the time limitations and other issues raised by that particular phrase.

As a Bourdieusian example relevant to Amish studies, the Amish agricultural system is changing and persisting, and seems able to continue adjusting to new economic and social conditions in order to continue caring for the land and preserving their cherished face-to-face small community. *Habitus*—structuring intuition—and *field*—structured intuition—continue to constitute one another. This interaction creates and expends *capital* in economic, social, cultural, and symbolic forms. These same insights can be used in studies of Amish small business and entrepreneurial activities; relationships with local, regional, and national authorities and institutions; education; gender; communication and mass media; medicine; and all other topics in Amish studies. Most importantly, using Bourdieu enables historicizing the Amish and preserves the coin of the realm in historical scholarship, which is change over time.

Endnotes

¹ Contact information: Steven Reschly, Department of History, Truman State University, 100 E. Normal Ave, Kirksville, MO 63501; sdr@truman.edu

² Anthropologist Sonya Salamon (1992) made a strikingly similar argument based on research in Illinois, using the terminology “yeoman” for German farm communities that treated farming as a way of life, and “entrepreneurial” for Yankee farmers who considered farming a business and sought to maximize profit.

³ For a detailed discussion of Anabaptist women’s farm and home production activities in Lancaster County, not discussed by Kollmorgen, as well as their significant reproductive rate, see Reschly and Jellison (1993). For further discussion of the significance of Amish women’s role in their community’s success, see Jellison (2001, 2002) and Reschly and Jellison (2008).

⁴ The connection to Olshan’s critique, and the shift from “folk society” to “charter,” may be found in Hostetler (1993, 44-45). Hostetler cited Malinowski (1944) as his source for “charter” as a summary of the “organizing principles that support Amish community,” the “major elements in their world view and their view of themselves,” and their “fundamental values and common ends” (p. 73).

⁵ This literature is voluminous and complex, and not at all self-evident. Possible points of entrée include the writings of Émile Durkheim and Max Weber, and nearly any discussion of sociological theories and their histories, for example, Lamont and Molnár (2002).

⁶ “Tradition-Minded” and “Change-Minded” are terms used by Paton Yoder as alternatives to the potentially confusing “conservative” and “liberal” designations.

⁷ German sociologist Norbert Elias (1982[1939]) used *habitus* to describe transformations in behavior, feelings, and personality structures, that is, “habits” resulting from social experience.

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