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# **‘I am just a part of the community’: Amish and Ultra-Orthodox Women and the Third Person Perception**

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**Abstract:** This article focuses on the third-person perception (TPP) of Amish and Ultra-Orthodox Jewish women. TPP’s central insight is that consumers believe media influences “her/him” (the third person) much more than “me” (the first person). Since media technologies pose challenges to these women’s sense of religious devotion, their TPP toward secular media contributes to the discussion about religion, gender, and media. The study uses quantitative and qualitative methodologies, including a survey, participant observation, and interviews, to answer three research questions: (1) Do Amish and Ultra-Orthodox women have the third-person perception, reflected by their estimation that the negative influence of secular media will be greater on others than on themselves? (2) What are these women’s perceptions of secular media’s potential danger to their community, family, and themselves? (3) What can we learn when comparing women’s perceptions in these two religious settings about secular media influences? The results show that nearly all Amish and Ultra-Orthodox women perceive that secular media holds potential danger for their community, family, and themselves and that no support exists in this study to argue that these women are experiencing the TPP. Their qualitative responses reflect their perceptions about potential dangers to their community, family, and selves. The comparison addressed the two groups’ key similarity: the high perception of the media’s risks and dangers. Simultaneously, it also reveals a key difference: Amish women keep thinking about their resources—mind, soul, and time—while Ultra-Orthodox women’s responses show that they are much more familiar with popular culture. [Abstract by author.]

**Keywords:** third-person phenomenon; gender; religion; media; perceptions of danger; comparative study

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## INTRODUCTION

Old Order Amish and Ultra-Orthodox Jewish women have complicated relationships with media and media technologies. While comparative studies about Old Order Amish (hereafter “Amish”) and Ultra-Orthodox Jewish (hereafter “Ultra-Orthodox”) women have shown that media technologies pose challenges to women’s sense of religious devotion (Neriya-Ben Shahar 2017a, 2017b, 2020), they have not yet considered whether women consider the impacts as harmful for self as for others in the religious group.

The third-person perception (TPP) method (Davison 1983) is a useful tool for exploring whether individual Amish and Ultra-Orthodox women exempt themselves from the impacts of media technology—focusing primarily on the impacts on others—or if they also see media technology as harmful to self. TPP derives from audience studies, which is part of mass communications research. Broadly conceived, mass communications research describes both the relationship between the consumer, on the one hand, and media technologies and content, on the other (Fiske 1986; Ang 1991; Morley 1992; Spitulnik 1993; Press & Livingstone 2006). Audience studies focuses specifically on how audiences’ attitudes toward mass media create the individual’s self- and community-identity (Hirsch 1994; Putnam 1994; Shrum 2002). TPP conceptualizes

when individuals (a) assume that the media will have negative influences; (b) estimate that the impact will be greater on others than on themselves (the perceptual hypothesis); and (c) behave in ways in which they would not have otherwise because of their concerns for the media’s harmful influence on the more-susceptible ‘others’ (the behavioral hypothesis) (Frederick & Neuwirth 2008, 515)

TPP’s central insight is that consumers believe media influences “her/him” (the third person) much more than “me” (the first person). People react toward *others* according to their perceptions of how something impacts people’s attitudes and behaviors. For example, if women think that pornography’s influences on men are more significant than on women, they tend to support censorship of pornographic content for men (Lo & Wei 2002).

This study will focus primarily on TPP (as opposed to the third-person effects (TPE) on behaviors).<sup>1</sup>

Comparative TPP research is important because it overcomes limitations that result from single case studies that ignore important geographic, social, economic, political, and cultural differences. An international comparison, as will be presented in this study, not only broadens the discussion but helps reframe old concepts (Livingstone and Drotner 2011; Shehata & Stromback 2011; Stausberg 2011; Esser & Hanitzsch 2012). Furthermore, by focusing on the intersection of religious studies and audience studies, this study brings a particular emphasis on how people make meaning (Hoover and Lundby 1997; Hoover 2006).

## THE AMISH AND ULTRA-ORTHODOX CASE STUDIES

The research presented in this article deals with the Amish of rural Pennsylvania and the Ashkenazi Ultra-Orthodox Jews in Israel. These religious groups have complex relationships with technology and with the mainstream community. They share strict religious modes of worship, and technology decision-making is an in-group endeavor (Kraybill 1989; Friedman 1991, 1993; Hostetler 1993; El-Or 1994; Caplan 2007; Ems 2014). Both have European historical origins (Neuberger & Tamam 2014). Nowadays, the Amish are laborers, and their economy is based mainly on agriculture, manufacturing, and small

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<sup>1</sup> Paul, Salwen, and Dupagne (2000) explain the difference between these two constructs: TPP is “a perceptual or an attribution component, an estimate of the amount one’s self and others will be influenced by media” (Frederick & Neuwirth 2008, p. 515). TPE is based on a “comparison or contrast between the estimate of media influence on one’s ‘self’ and on ‘others’” (Frederick & Neuwirth 2008, 515). These two processes have been found in various populations; for one of the phenomenon’s meta-analyses, see Sun, Pan & Shen (2008). Nevertheless, findings have not been universal. Banning & Sweetser (2007) found no connection between the medium (blogs, online news, and print) and TPE. In contrast, Guerrero-Solé & López-González (2016) and Wei & Lo (2007) found a larger TPE from traditional media than from the internet. Golan (2002) found that religiosity is associated positively with the TPP, as perceived media impact on others, but only on moral issues. There is in-group and out-group bias in terms of the TPP (Gardikiotis 2008), with bias being higher for out-groups favoring messages (Zhang 2010).

businesses (Anderson 2013), compared to the unique intellectual life of the Ultra-Orthodox as a “society of scholars” (Friedman 1991). Both communities differ symbolically from neighboring populations by their unique dress, languages, and separate educational systems (Spinner 1994; Almond, Appelby, & Sivan 2003; Neuberger 2009). In terms of numbers, the Amish are only 0.1 percent of the U.S. population (about 350,665) (Amish population profile 2020), and the Ultra-Orthodox are a large minority, constituting 12% of the Israeli population (about 1,125,000) (Cahaner & Malach 2019).

The academic literature about Amish women (e.g., Van Ness 1995; Schmidt and Reschly 2000; Schmidt, Zimmerman-Umble, and Reschly 2002; Graybill 2009; Jolly 2007, 2014, 2020; Johnson-Weiner 2020) and Ultra-Orthodox women (e.g., Davidman 1991; El-Or 1994; Neriya-Ben Shahar 2008, 2012; Fader 2013) offers many comparative perspectives *within* the particular population but not *across* populations. And while the literature is rich and varied, much room remains for further analysis of women’s attitudes toward the secular media in both groups.

Among the similarities between Amish and Ultra-Orthodox women that make them useful populations to compare are: that both have large families and that women are mothers of, on average, seven children. They differ in their education and work patterns. Amish women normally complete eight years of schooling while Ultra-Orthodox women do 14 years. Most Amish women stay at and work in the house or on the farm, or work part-time for a small family business, while many Ultra-Orthodox women work full-time outside the home.

TPP’s extensive literature does not include studies about Amish women and includes only two studies about Ultra-Orthodox women (Neriya-Ben Shahar & Lev-On, 2011; Lev-On & Neriya-Ben Shahar, 2011, 2012). Since these communities each have complex relationships with media technologies, especially with media produced outside the community, and the women negotiate between their place as change-agents and gatekeepers, their TPP toward secular media could contribute significantly to the discussion about religion, gender, and the media.

This study’s research questions are: (1) Do Amish and Ultra-Orthodox women have the third-

person perception, reflected by their estimation that the negative influence of secular media will be greater on others (their community and family) than on themselves? (2) What are these women’s perceptions toward the potential danger of secular media on their community, family, and themselves? (3) What can we learn when comparing women’s perceptions in these two communities about secular media influences?

## METHODS

My fieldwork on Amish and Ultra-Orthodox women occurred between 2011 and 2019 and employed a mixed methods design, using quantitative and qualitative methodologies including a survey, participant observation, and interviews. The definition of Amish and Ultra-Orthodox is under discussion, so I relied on self-definition by the respondents (Friedman et al. 2011; Pew Research Center 2013). The sample was drawn from relatively mainstream groups: the Amish women were from the Old Order-mainstream denomination (Petrovich 2017) in Lancaster County, PA, and the Ultra-Orthodox women were from Israel’s Lithuanian and Hassidic Ultra-Orthodox Jewish community. I used snowball sampling to recruit participants (Lee 1993), but I also purposively recruited participants with a variety of demographic characteristics. I had questionnaires sent to a number of Amish and Ultra-Orthodox women and received responses from 40 Amish women and 42 Ultra-Orthodox women. The Amish age range was 21 to 85 with an average age of 39. The Ultra-Orthodox age range was 17 to 51 with an average of 35. Marital status of Amish participants were 36 married / 4 single and 36 married / 6 single for the Ultra-Orthodox. The employment statuses of the Amish were: 80% homemakers and 20% employed outside the home, including teacher, cleaner, farmer’s market, and waitress. The employment statuses of the Ultra-Orthodox were: 28% homemakers and 72% employed outside the home, including teachers, computer work, tax adviser, nurse, and graphic designer. (For more details, see Neriya-Ben Shahar 2017a; 2017b; 2020).

The quantitative data used to measure the TPP were based on three Yes/No questions in the questionnaire: (1) Do you think that “English”/secular newspapers, magazines, television, radio, and the internet can be harmful to Amish/Ultra-Orthodox

society? (2) Do you think that “English”/secular newspapers, magazines, television, radio, and the internet can be harmful to your family? (3) Do you think that “English”/secular newspapers, magazines, television, radio, and the internet can be harmful to you?

The qualitative data were based on three “why” questions. After the initial yes/no response to these three questions, participants were asked in the questionnaire “Why?” Their responses provided insight into their perceptions of the “other,” that is, the secular, worldly influence that bears on their community, family, and selves. In addition to the written responses, I included additional qualitative insights on these questions derived from informal interviews (10 Amish women) that were all face-to-face and included a mix of personal conversations and ad hoc focus groups. Most interviews were recorded and transcribed, or else notes were taken in a field diary immediately after the interview. The interview language was English (the second language of the interviewer and one of two first languages for the Amish).

## **RESULTS, PHASE I: CLOSED QUESTIONS MEASURING AMISH AND ULTRA- ORTHODOX LEVEL OF TPP**

Of the Amish and Ultra-Orthodox women interviewed, 90% and 97.5%, respectively, perceived the English/secular media as harmful to their society (question 1), while 95% of the Amish women and 88% of the Ultra-Orthodox women perceived the English/secular media were harmful to their family (question 2). Finally, 92.5% of the Amish and 88% of the Ultra-Orthodox women perceived the English/secular media as harmful to themselves (question 3). Amish women worried about their family and themselves slightly more than about their community, while Ultra-Orthodox women worried about community slightly more than about their families and themselves, although the differences for all three questions were small. Because of the small sample size, differences between the communities and between the women’s answers cannot be explained statistically.

Notwithstanding, the results show that nearly all Amish and Ultra-Orthodox women perceive that secular media holds potential danger for their community, their family, and themselves, and that no support exists to argue that these women are

experiencing the TPP, that these women perceived greater danger to others than themselves. For Ultra-Orthodox women, these findings contradict past research. Lev-On and I had conducted two studies, one among 53 Ultra-Orthodox women that participated in a closed forum and another among 156 women that work in technological hothouses,<sup>2</sup> something unique for Ultra-Orthodox women (Neriya-Ben Shahar & Lev-On 2011; Lev-On & Neriya-Ben Shahar 2011, 2012). These studies found that the Ultra-Orthodox sample perceived a greater danger to others than themselves. The striking difference between the findings from past studies and from this study for Ultra-Orthodox women is likely explained by the sample size and the sample frame; *all* the women from the other studies used computers, some even using the Internet daily.

In this study, snowball sampling recruited a variety of women. Just 20% of the Amish and 52% of the Ultra-Orthodox women in the current study had ever used the Internet. Perhaps the TPP could be found among Amish and Ultra-Orthodox men, so this might be a case in disparities between the genders; yet, no studies were found in the literature to support or reject this hypothesis. Therefore, to answer whether the Amish and Ultra-Orthodox women (and men) have or do not have the TPP, we need a much larger sample that considers many variables including age, marital status, rural or urban living, education level, employment status and internet use.

Nevertheless, I believe the data from this study presents an intriguing finding: both Amish and Ultra-Orthodox women perceive that secular media is a potential danger to their community, family, and selves. Perhaps the surprisingly low rate of TPP is attributable to the fact that other TPP studies have been conducted in media-saturated Western cultures with individualistic values (Lee & Tamborini 2005), while the Amish and the Ultra-Orthodox represented integrated settings with much less audiovisual media. Could the individualistic/holistic-collectivist cultural distinc-

<sup>2</sup> Technological hothouses are computer incubators - unique workplaces for Ultra-Orthodox women working with computers (sometimes with the internet) as outsourcing for Israeli and international companies. The workplaces are men-free, and they have a separate, strictly kosher, kitchen.

tion (Skender 2020) be an antecedent for the TPP? Lee and Tamborini (2005) compared the effect on U.S. and South Korean college students as a contrast between individual and holistic communities; they found support for the argument, that “collectivism diminished third-person perception and subsequent support for Internet pornography censorship” (p. 292).

Another collectivistic explanation could be based on the second person effect. Neuwirth and Frederick (2002) criticized the TPP by arguing that it focused only on the differences between others and self and ignored situations where others and self are jointly influencing. They defined the second-person effects of the media as

when individuals (a) recognize the influence of the media on themselves, (b) estimate that others are as likely as they are to be influenced by the media, and (c) follow courses of action because they see others as being equally as likely to be affected by the media (Frederick and Neuwirth 2008, 515).

Loa, Weib, and Wuc (2010) found that second-person effects are a significant predictor for supporting Internet pornography restrictions. Therefore, we can see the Amish and Ultra-Orthodox women’s responses as a reflection of the second person effect. This still does not answer why these results are different from other studies about TPP and Ultra-Orthodox women (Lev-On & Neriya-Ben Shahar 2012). Another question to challenge the second person perception critique of the TPP is, why would these women have the second person perception and not the third person perception toward secular media?

Could these women have a social interest that is reflected by this second-person effect? I found that rigorous adherence to religious dictates creates a sense of agency, where individuals both choose to internalize community restrictions and carefully manage occasional selective use of certain technologies (Neriya-Ben Shahar 2017a). Following this reasoning, Amish and Ultra-Orthodox women may use their strictness to control internet consumption as a demonstration of piety, thus building cultural and religious capital. Therefore, women’s second person perception could reflect their demonstration of piety through perceptual isolation. It still does not answer why these results are different from other studies about

Ultra-Orthodox women and the TPP (Lev-On & Neriya-Ben Shahar 2012).

Since numbers tell only part of the story, I also asked the Amish and Ultra-Orthodox women directly about their perceptions of media influences. Together with the qualitative responses to the “why” question that accompanied the three third-person questions in the questionnaires, I launched a second phase of qualitative research in which I conducted numerous formal and informal interviews, and some focus groups, with Amish and Ultra-Orthodox women.

## RESULTS, PHASE II: QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF AMISH AND ULTRA-ORTHODOX REACTIONS TO MEDIA’S PERCEIVED HARM

The “why” questions of my research explored women’s perceptions toward the “other” secular/worldly influence on their community, family, and selves. Their qualitative responses to these three “why” questions, with their responses to the interviews and focus groups, enabled me to inductively identify themes about potential dangers: (1) **danger to everyone** which includes (1a) danger to mind and soul; (1b) danger to the religion; (2) **danger to our community and family**; which includes (2a) danger to culture; (2b) danger to children and youth; and (3) **danger to self**. These answers point to a foundational attitudinal commonality Amish and Ultra-Orthodox women have: perception of danger. In these responses, the women used similar terms and descriptions when explaining harmful influences, which reflected a sense of responsibility for the purity of their community, families, and selves.

### Theme 1: Danger to Everyone

The first danger is general, without reference to a specific person. Amish women gave examples of the danger of content in the media that is worldly, ungodly, and unholy.

Too much worldly news.

There are many worldly trends that go with those things.

All the shooting and talking about gay rights.  
[emphasis in original]

Less sensitivity, worse discourse. All subjects become legitimate.

[Worldly media] leads to temptations and evil thoughts.

The Ultra-Orthodox women said,

[The secular media] is a poison. It has non-Jewish culture in it.

Nobody is immune. Even a skillful driver could have a car accident.

People can be dragged to extremely dangerous places.

### ***1A: DANGER TO MIND AND SOUL***

The second theme is danger to the mind and soul. Amish women described the danger in these ways:

Too much time spent with gadgets can be harmful to the mind!

Only a few seconds of loud music or pictures can stay in one's mind a long time.

It fills the mind with negative ungodly information.

It can plant bad suggestions in minds that should be filled with good things. Bad suggestions can lead to bad thoughts, which can lead to bad action.

Their Ultra-Orthodox counterparts wrote:

This distances man from his God; bad influences enter the soul and a person's thoughts.

Seeing, reading and hearing influences a person, even influences which are not felt.

The soul gets into a spiritual maelstrom.

The moment the bacteria enters the body, the person is infected, and it affects the entire body. The eye sees, the ear hears, and the heart covets.

### ***1B: DANGER TO THE RELIGION***

The third theme is danger to religion. Many of the Amish and Ultra-Orthodox women's responses were connected to aspects of religion such as God and worship. Their faith is endangered by current secular media. The Amish women said:

There are so many better things to do, like taking walks with God's nature and handiwork or doing goodwill to someone in need or reading the Bible or praying.

I would rather read devotions such as 'Our Daily Bread,' 'Jesus' Calling'.

A mind full of the worldly thoughts does not leave room for Godly thought.

I pray that God may keep us true, fill us with good thoughts, and His Spirit. It takes lots of effort to live a pure Christian life, without yet filling our minds with bad suggestions, negative news, or impure thoughts.

We want to serve the Lord the way our Forefathers did, and they did not have such.

[The] God that we worship is not the God that [the] world worships. Fame, lust, greed, violence, power. All sorts of things like that are portrayed in the wrong light.

If the Amish would have all those things, they would not be what we want to be: followers of Jesus, walking according to His examples.

I want to stay away as much as possible and follow the path of my Forefathers.

It would distract me too much from living a life totally for God. I need to give my all to Him, not to other things.

It would be harmful for me to listen, watch, and read about all the evil and sin going on in the world. As a Christian, I want to keep my thoughts focused on God, our Creator, and Jesus our Savior who died and rose again so that we can have victory over sin through Him.

We desire to live a life like Christ did, a quiet, peaceful life and not be conformed to the world, not living like the world and we all know Jesus would not have spent His time with the things of the world, but things that are most important - preparing for eternity.

The Ultra-Orthodox women's religious responses were focused firstly on the rabbis' directives:

The rabbis said that the users [of secular media] would be harmed and spoiled. If somebody does not listen to the rabbis, there will be sickness in his house and sorrow in his family.

If the rabbis scream that death is preferable to these sins, what can we say?

They also addressed the harmful content of secular media as “impure, contrary to piety, and against moral[ity] and against the Torah.” The effect of the content on the religious person “creates distance between the person and God.” “Even when people guard their eyes, they can accidentally see something that’s against the Torah, and it harms their soul.”

## Theme 2: Danger to Community and Family

The next theme is danger to our community and family. Amish women spoke a great deal about the danger of secular media to the family.

It could be damaging to [my family’s] soul. They are the only thing I have that I hope to take along to heaven.

A family needs harmony and unity, not access to the worldly things.

The violence, immorality, and individualism have proved harmful to the larger society’s family unit, so we do not want to take the risk.

I am a mother. I choose to have devotions and to keep in touch with God in my work and in raising our family.

One Ultra-Orthodox woman simply asked, Everyone will be connected all day to these devices, and when will there be family discussions? Where is the connection between family members?

Another said,

Families [are] destroyed because of Facebook. Parents busy with the Internet cannot cope with the family.

Ultra-Orthodox women also spoke about the danger of media on the family’s connection to the community.

People have enough experiences; they need to build a wall to the things that destroy families.

It destroys our community and every member.

It is harmful to our community; people watch immodest pictures against the Torah and therefore leave the community and their family, to meet with outside people.

One woman referred to “the other” inside the community, trying to argue, maybe as part of the TPP, that “they” have a problem.

There are some parts of the community that do not follow the rules. It is hard for them to find themselves inside the Ultra-Orthodox community. Therefore, they are likely to fail. In contrast, people who are strict to not use those things, will not fail.

## 2A: DANGER TO CULTURE

Amish and Ultra-Orthodox women described how secular media was hard to control and how it could penetrate and destroy them. Their descriptions portrayed an “us-versus-them” perception of the world.

*i. Secular media is hard to control:* Amish women said it this way:

If we would just watch whatever comes around, it would sometimes be hard to stop, when something comes up, to turn it off.

Always a fear we will get too involved in worldly affairs over which we have no control, other than praying for them - and we can do that without knowing details.

Ultra-Orthodox women agreed.

None of us are safe; the movies and advertisements are so tempting that we are afraid. [We’re] trying to educate against the destroyer, but the danger is huge.

The internet is the most unclean device. The more you watch, the more exposed you become. And it fills your head with nonsense and bad deeds.

*ii. Secular media could change our people:* Amish women provided these insights:

I think all the advertising would make an impact, make us wanting more when we can easily do without.

It may lead to bad and worldly actions, contrary to what they are being taught.

It dwells too much on the ‘what if’s,’ ‘could be’s,’ and not filling our minds with godly [edifying] thoughts and deeds.

Satan has won many souls to his ‘Kingdom of fire’ by the many evils on television, radio, and the Internet.



The Ultra-Orthodox women also perceived additional impacts on their world:

This is a war of the religious life, and especially the Ultra-Orthodox [life].

It is necessary to flee from this as from fire.

The [secular media] portrays inappropriate and heartbreaking views, which are not customary for the entire Ultra-Orthodox public, who tries to protect itself from futile values that prevail today in the modern world.

People try to imitate each other. If they surf the internet, they will learn from all these actions, and this will bring violence, and crime, and break-ins, and murder.

People of the Torah got addicted to the internet and left the world of the Yeshiva. We have heard from women that were exposed at work and left their homes because of it. Children cry about their parents. The heart is shocked.

The issue of media entered our districts; we are involved with it and exposed to all the downsides it brings. It turns people into radio, internet, computer, and movie addicts.

The Ultra-Orthodox community is closed and fortified; these devices break through the fence to the outside world.

The internet can cause a decrease in following after God and provide connection and communication with those who are not from us.

## **2B: DANGER TO CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

Since children and youth are considered vulnerable to outside influences, the next responses enable us to see Amish and Ultra-Orthodox women's fear and concern about their children and youth. The fear is connected to the impact of exposure to outside world content and ensuing damage to community values. Amish women said things like:

We do not want our little children to grow up and know all this stuff about the world.

Lots of shootings [that...] children should not be exposed to.

I think it can be harmful because there is a too big a chance that our children see or hear things that would pollute their minds with evil.

The temptation to see and read harmful things is so strong, it is best to protect our young, innocent people and just keep it out of reach.

The Ultra-Orthodox women felt the same:

When children's [immature] souls are exposed to this kind of destructive information, for example, the life of an improper family or violence, it leads to and teaches them unrestrained behavior.

There is an evil inclination that is so big that it is impossible to rely on ourselves and say, 'This won't happen to me.' We need to flee from this as if from fire. And this is what I want to instill in my children.

Evil speech is on the radio, and this destroys children's education.

The young generation is not discerning enough between good and bad. The danger is very great compared to the chance to come out pure when dealing with the media.

Pictures, advertisements, pastimes, vanities of this world and other serious and forbidden things diminish people, especially youth and children.

The seen destroys the eyes and the voice destroy[s] the soul of children.

The women in both communities worried about damage to their youth's understanding of their community values. The Amish women stated:

While here, we try to pass on the 'Amish values' to our children; they are exposed to the temptation of worldly evils. Youth who are trying to 'figure out life' and 'themselves' and treasure 'Amish values' before they personally know God, have the temptation to indulge themselves in evil fun.

The Ultra-Orthodox women described the lifelong influences of secular media:

Children are like a clean slate and whatever is drawn on it stays. Even if you want to erase it, it stays. The influence is for forever.

All my hope is that my children imitate Ultra-Orthodox figures, people of truth and mercy, people whose fear precedes their wisdom, not [imitate] actors.

### Theme 3: Danger to Self

Amish and Ultra-Orthodox women were aware of the influence of secular media on their own lives. The Amish women respected their mind, soul, and time. They tried not to allow negative things in, lest they waste precious resources.

[Secular media] gets my mind off of things of greater value - Bible verses, songs, etc. Because it is still those unnecessary rock and roll songs that ring in your mind after hearing them on the radio and seeing too many magazines with pictures that are not modest, you can get too many unhealthy thoughts. I am much better off, not even seeing them and reading the daily news.

My mind would be too crowded for godly thoughts.

When I fill my mind with any of these things' information, I am filling my mind with bad things. I am much better off filling my mind with Bible verses, prayer, and good thoughts.

It will pollute my mind and take me further away from God's world.

If I read or watch or use it in any wrong way, it can be harmful to my thinking.

If I fill my mind with much immorality, violence and harmful actions may follow.

The Bible says to think on the things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report (Philippians 4:8). I am human and can easily get carried away, especially if I am not open to the Holy Spirit. Filling my heart with anything else and not God's Word would take my thirst for His Word away. Having an interest in other things in moderation is needed, too, if it does not distract or is not condemned in the Bible. (It is probably good for me to do this questionnaire and think about it. My weakness is books. Even up[lifting] ones can distract me from my present duties. Not that that is not OK sometimes (to read). Wow! I am scribbling this up). ☺

The next precious thing for the Amish women was time. One mother of seven children wrote;

While I may occasionally get a taste here and there, I am fully convinced that a steady diet of 'English' (although I do realize there are some Christian influences in some of them, but not nearly enough) would be seriously detrimental

to my time with God, my time with my family, and how would I get all my work done? Nevertheless, I think the scars in my soul would be my biggest concern.

Another Amish woman wrote,

I could become obsessed - neglecting work, family time and reaching out to neighbors.

The Ultra-Orthodox women addressed the effects of secular media on themselves, comparing it to living without insurance. They were aware of their limits.

The pictures and voices of impure content, gossips, lies, and slander, lust; everything influenced me.

Everything can penetrate.

In the moment that I will listen, surf the internet, or watch these things, I can be soiled and learn from these things. And everything my parents sought to teach me can be destroyed, all the education.

Even though I try hard to worship God, I know that [a] lot of consistent exposure will influence me. Therefore, I keep my distance.

No one has the assurance that it won't happen to me. Everyone needs to place his boundaries. Much prayer is needed that no obstacle will come from under my hand.

My immune system is not stronger than anyone else's.

I am part of a community and my family, therefore it could harm me [too] .

I am exactly like everyone else.

Their awareness of their limits was impressive:

Everyone needs to know his boundaries; and the more you have the better.

I pray to not be exposed [and fall].

I need to guard myself, as in a fort, [using] a filtered internet.

This can influence my wishes and desires to change my daily behavior, which is true according to the true principles and the way of truth, until deviation from the way.

While both communities are similar in terms of the women's self-perception as subjects for

negative media influence, their responses also illustrate some differences. Amish women keep thinking about their resources - mind, soul, and time. In contrast, the Ultra-Orthodox women's responses show that they are much more familiar with popular culture. They explain in detail the multiple effects. They talk about the limits and the failures, because they have been there, or know people who had been there. Like the Amish, they do not think that they are unique. However, different from the Amish, they expressed the need to protect their fundamental values from outside worldly values, evident in their use of words such as insurance and immunization.

### Complex Responses

Some complicated answers also emerged in the interviews. I define "complicated" as any response with more than one direction - a positive or negative view toward worldly media. Even though, in the end, it is clear that the women opposed these media, some of them considered other options, including alternative media sources, demonstrating that respondents perceive differences among media types. Furthermore, considering alternatives to a question with the loaded term "could be harmful to" is brave so evidences sincerity.

#### *1: CONTENT AND THE MEDIUM*

The Amish women considered the content and the medium:

Our focus should not be on worldly things. I know you can hear Christian songs on the radio and get Christian magazines. But why not work together and sing together as a family?

If the magazines are selected, it can be helpful, but many, many tend to be harmful.

They can keep us informed but can also influence our lifestyle and our contentment in our culture.

#### *2: DEPENDS ON THE PERSON*

Women from both communities thought that it depends on the person. Amish women said:

It truly could be [harmful], and it could be OK - but the temptation to see and read harmful things

is so strong, it is best to protect our young, innocent people and just keep it out of reach.

Even while the TV, radio, and Internet are just as good as the person who uses it, and most likely has helped a soul find God with the 'good' on it, the bad outweighs the good by great numbers. [*emphasis in original*]

Although anyone can fall into temptation, I feel I am mature enough as a Christian to turn it off if necessary and I recognize the values of our culture enough to know that we don't want these things on an everyday basis.

Some Ultra-Orthodox women agreed:

[It] depends on the person. Generally, it is more frequent among men. They have a tendency for addictions and tempting to lust more than women. Some people in my family are very connected to curious things, so visual is hard for them, but listening - such as radio - I am not sure that it can hurt them.

Thank God I have tools for piety, separation between good and bad, allowed and prohibited, negative and positive, and lots of self-criticism.

Evidently some Ultra-Orthodox women have some third-person perception, thinking that men have more temptations than women, and that women can evaluate or examine themselves.

#### *3: DEPENDS ON CONTROL*

Both Amish and Ultra-Orthodox women wrote that it also depends on control. The Amish women wrote:

I think [secular media] can [be harmful] depending on why or how you use it.

As a family, we can discuss the good and bad and sort it out.

I think you must have self-restraint with what you watch and listen to.

Only if they use it in a wrong kind of way.

I think there are dangers anywhere if you do not use your judgment. You need to have a line of what you do and do not do.

The Ultra-Orthodox insights were similar:

Generally - I don't think that it is able to directly hurt, but it is clear to me that the consequences

are far-reaching. And in any case, things that are used to guard against it can slowly turn into things that are routine, to lead to unfit places.

Outside content, if it drips and drips, it will influence. Every big change starts with a small step. And therefore I am aware that even though I am connected to the Torah, perhaps hearing or surfing once isn't harmful (even in this I'm not certain). Long term use does have an impact. A great digression starts with a small digression.

Sometimes I regret that I heard or saw something that was bad for me, but generally I am meticulous about my negative exposure, and of course - always praying about it.

I try very hard to screen all information and literature, visual, or hearing or everything that gets to me.

## DISCUSSION

The main goal of this article was to learn about the presence of the third-person perception (TPP) among Amish and Ultra-Orthodox women. The first research question was: Do these women have TPP, reflected in their estimation of whether negative influences of media will be greater on others (their community and family) or themselves? This study did not find the TPP among the sampled Amish and Ultra-Orthodox women, and between the two religious groups, their perception of the secular media's potential danger to their community, family, and themselves is almost the same.

Addressing the second research question, the "why," I found that the Amish and Ultra-Orthodox women's detailed responses show that they are not naïve, shallow, or uneducated. In both groups, I found many complex answers, showing deep thought and deliberations, understanding different aspects of media, including content, control, and the nature of people themselves. However, with this complexity in mind, their answers for the yes/no questions above were clear: these women perceived the secular media as harmful for culture, community, family, youth, and self.

While they recognize that content is harmful, difficult to control, and limits time with family and community, and these results can be found in other studies about religious media users (Stout 2001; Cohen, Lemish, & Schejter 2008; Deutsch 2009; Campbell 2010; Ems 2014), their perceptions

toward information communication technologies are multiple and complicated, much more than the overly simplistic traditional/modern binaries, as Stoltzfus-Brown (2020) recently argued in his literature review of Amish media usage. Perhaps the most critical lens to figuring out these communities' perceptions and experiences is their sense of "us-versus-them," that their people are on one side and the world is on the other (Neriya-Ben Shahar 2017b). The world is not passive and it constantly tries to impact them. The terms they used are meaningful, as if in a battle. Some of them reflect the potential to be overrun or overcome by the secular: *damaging; harmful; war; destroy; break through the fence; defenses; penetrating*. Other terms appear neutral, such as *lead; access; influence; exposure*. Nevertheless, for communities with a fear of the invasion of their holy space, the secular media is a threat that can break their defenses.

These Amish and Ultra-Orthodox women's (non)third-person perceptions are an excellent example of media meaning-making within religious communities (Hoover and Lundby 1997; Hoover 2006). I want to suggest that their deep religious beliefs create honest relationships between God and themselves. The sense that God sees them—their activities, thoughts, and, in this case, their media usage—is stronger than the TPP. The third-person theory shows that most media users are not aware of the media's negative influence on themselves while very aware of the media's negative influence on others (Davison 1983). The Amish and Ultra-Orthodox women's perceptions reflected their deep and honest awareness of negative media influences. There were some differences between the communities, such as how Amish women reflected their awareness of the negative impact on their mind, soul, and time, while the Ultra-Orthodox women addressed multiple effects of media on a person, the strict control of media; religiously, the Amish mostly addressed God and worship, while the Ultra-Orthodox focused on the Rabbis' rules. However, they shared a lack of TPP. For example, parents globally tend to worry about their children's exposure to media (Ribak 2001). When they think that the media content might influence their children, they tend to try to control it. Mcleod, Detenber, and Eveland (2001) found that when people perceive the "other" as vulnerable, they tend to act in a paternalistic way and

protect the weak. Likewise, the Amish and Ultra-Orthodox women discussed their concerns about media's influence on their children and youth, but they also perceived the secular media as harmful to themselves. The most interesting findings were in women's complex answers, which included a mix of negative views and some level of acceptance of secular media. Their responses indicated awareness of various kinds of media, with varying degrees of influence on different persons with various levels of self-control.

The Amish responses show a holistic self-perception of their "lived religion" and as followers of God (Ammerman 1987; McGuire 1997; Škender 2020). As Orsi (2005) wrote: "This is what research in religion means, [...] to attend to the experiences and beliefs of people in the midst of their lives, to encounter religion in its place in actual men and women's lived experience" (p. 147). These women perceive their entire existence - body and soul, deeds, and thoughts - as religious. The secular media, inevitably, will take essential parts away from these components and their entire existence.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates—to a certain degree—the non-existence of TPP among Amish and Ultra-Orthodox, plus the detailed descriptions of their conceptions of the out-of-community potential danger represented by secular media devices and content. By extension, then, as a comparative study, we have further evidence of a relationship between attitudes towards secular media and community social capital. I showed how Amish and Ultra-Orthodox women's self-control on internet consumption is a key to enabling them to use their strictness as valuable cultural and religious capital, demonstrating their piety (Neriya-Ben Shahaar 2017a). Taking a step back, I would like to refer to Putnam's (1995) definition of social capital as "Features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit" (p. 67). He argued that connectedness, formal and informal social engagement, and collective activities, lead to social capital (Bourdieu 1986), while the privatization of leisure time (television and then new media) reduced society's social life. The Amish and Ultra-Orthodox communities have very high

social capital, and their limited or non-use of television and media enable them to invest time in face-to-face social networks.

In both communities, women are accruing social-religious capital through the limitation of secular media, enabling them to function in multiple capacities. Their active contribution to their communities and families takes a tremendous amount of time, accompanied by emotional, mental, and social resources. The distance from English/secular media not only raises their status in their communities but also gives them multiple opportunities to invest time and considerable power in face-to-face—not digital—social capital and strong social network connectedness, collective activities, and in/formal social engagement.

Future studies could research TPP not only among a more extensive number of Amish and Ultra-Orthodox women but also among men of those same communities and among religious and non-religious communities. Another possibility for future research is a study of Amish women's concern for "mind, soul, and time" and the individualistic cultures of North America.

## AFTERWORD

I wish to share a personal experience from research among the Amish women and a rabbinical story, as told by an Ultra-Orthodox participant. Both illustrate my findings and participants' rationale for those findings. Spending many hours among members of the Amish and Ultra-Orthodox people sharpened my understanding of the issues I was investigating. For example, one lovely summer afternoon, shelling peas together with four Amish women on the porch, with the "ping" of fresh peas ringing in the bowl, a respondent looked at me and said, "I cannot understand you ... You asked me why I do not think that the English media is less harmful to me than for other people in my community? I am just a part of the community! So, if the community might be harmed, it is harmful to my family and me as well!" Another day I went with my Amish hosts to a community gathering. On the benches around the room, standing upside down and arranged in rows, were the women's black head coverings. Each covering included a label inside with a name: Lovina, Rachel, Susan, Lizzy Ann, etc. As I observed the bonnets, my insight deepened; when people live in a com-

munity in which they wear a sort of uniform, they have to mark their apparel with their names if they want to find their own item of clothing at the end of the evening. There are minimal personal signs, so how could their wearers feel unique and different? Indeed, they are a just part of the community.

A rabbi was approached by a man who said, "Tell me why you all give yourselves so many barriers. Give your children a little leeway to choose things by themselves, to experience, to decide for themselves. So many people dictate rules and do so much to guard against the forbidden. Lighten up a bit, don't be so strict." Then the rabbi asked the man, "Listen, have you ever fallen from your bed? At night, as you slept, have you fallen from your bed?" The man answered, "No." The rabbi replied, "What, you have never fallen from your bed?" The man said to the rabbi, "No, why would I fall from my bed?" Then the rabbi said, "I want to ask you, perhaps if I go tonight and place your bed on the 10th floor right on the ledge of the roof, would you go to sleep there? Will you agree to go to sleep at night when I put your bed on the ledge on the 10th floor?" The man asked the rabbi, "And the bed teeters?" The rabbi replies, "No, no, the bed is completely stable, but without a railing, sitting on the ledge of the 10th floor. There is where you will go to sleep." The man said to him, "Are you crazy? The 10th floor?" Then the rabbi said to him, "You have never fallen from your bed, why would you suddenly fall? What is the difference? Why are you afraid to sleep up there? Ah, maybe there is a small chance that you will fall. If you fall from your bed at home, nothing will happen to you, but if there's a small chance that you will fall from the 10th floor, we don't need the risk. So this is exactly the point. When you see our children fall, you see it as a small fall, but for us, this fall is as if it is from the 10th floor. So we understand that if there is a fall, it is a great fall. It is a fall from the 10th floor and not a fall from the bed at home." According to the woman who told this story, using the Internet is just as dangerous as sleeping on the ledge of the tenth floor roof. In talking about the influences of the secular media on everyone, themselves included, many women responded practically, "Nobody can be 100% sure that it won't happen to me."

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