The Necessity and Challenges of Researching Sexual Abuse in Amish Communities

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> The safety, security and healing of the victim should take top priority. . . . Sexualized violence is cancer within the church that we need to expose. In order to become whole, we must bring to light all that has been too long hidden in the shadows.[1]

The *Journal of Amish and Plain Anabaptist Studies* marked the seventy-fifth anniversary of Amish studies in 2017. In the lead article of a special issue of the journal, a critical review of the scholarship containing a much-needed "extensive bibliography of Amish studies references,"[2] Cory Anderson observed that systematic reflection on the field of Amish studies has been overlooked, and called for more scholarly debate on Amish study methods and practices.[3] Responding to Anderson's call for professionalizing the field, I investigate some recent non-fiction narratives and scholarship on sexual abuse among the Amish.[4] Next, I present a short definition of sensitive research and provide a first look at some challenges and risks of research on sexual abuse in Amish groups for both informants and researchers. This essay does not presume to be exhaustive. A closer study of these topics will hopefully raise questions, spark further contemplation and discourse within and outside Amish studies, and expand on some of the promising research in this area. Simply put, this paper attempts to encourage research on sexual abuse within Amish studies.[5]

While it is undoubtedly fruitful to expand scholarship into sexual violence and abuse of all kinds under the auspices of Anabaptist studies,[6] there is also a great need for qualitative research on a micro level due to the diversity of the Amish, their varying degrees of insularity, and their lack of a central authority. At this point, very little is known about sexual abuse in various Amish groups that evidence-based studies can support. Rates of sexual abuse cannot be discerned from official statistics, since data on religious background is not collected by authorities when abuse is reported.[7]

Creating Public Awareness and Empathy for Victims

Research into this sensitive topic should also be pursued because the presence of news articles, memoirs, websites, podcasts, and social media posts on sexual abuse among the Amish is increasing and can no longer be ignored. In addition to local or regional news that primarily describes court cases on child sexual abuse or incest involving Amish people,[8] investigative journalists have started publishing high-profile pieces on sexual violence and abuse in Plain communities. For instance, the six-part series "Coverings: Mennonites, Amish Face Growing Recognition of Widespread Sexual Abuse in their Communities" appeared in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* beginning on May 20, 2019.[9] In 2020, investigative journalist Sarah McClure uncovered "52 official cases of Amish child sexual assault in seven states over the past two decades" and "a widespread, decentralized cover-up of child sexual abuse by Amish clergy."[10]

Posting its first episode on October 29, 2018, the *Plain People's Podcast* testifies to Anabaptist survivors' need to break their silence and share their experiences of rape, molestation, and physical and sexual abuse. At this time, nineteen episodes have dealt with sexual violence among Plain people (including the Mennonites and Amish).[11] Another podcast, *The Misfit Amish*, is hosted by Mary Byler, a former Amish sexual abuse survivor and life coach. As part of a website dedicated to informing the public about sexual abuse and many other issues,[12] materials are geared to all, including Plain and/or LGBTQ audiences. Byler aims to "bridge the cultural gaps between Amish, Anabaptist and English Culture."[13] Among other topics, the Misfit Amish LLC website covers abuse awareness, rape culture, pedophilia, sexual crime, and best practice resources.

Sins of the Amish (2022), a two-part true crime documentary series on the streaming service Peacock, explores eyewitness accounts of four survivors who endured childhood violence and sexual abuse in Amish and Mennonite communities. In May 2022, Misty

Griffin, memoirist and one of the survivors featured on *Sins of the Amish*, started an online petition circulating in social media. Under the hashtag #invisible, the petition supports a child rights act mandating abuse reporting in insular societies and prevention-oriented sex education in homeschool settings and private and religious-based schools. As of July 27, 2024, over 34,000 people have signed it.[14]

Finally, there are eight varying memoirs of sexual abuse, their consequences, and/or survivors' healing published by former Amish.[15] These are reaching a broad audience. According to her website, 500,000 e-book copies of *Tears of the Silenced*, by Misty Griffin, have been downloaded from Amazon.[16] As a form of nonfiction, these narratives help writers contextualize the mental, physical, and spiritual violence committed against them and/or comment on personal, family, and community responses as they work through their trauma and pain.[17] These works seek to inform mainstream society of lesser-known perspectives and also function as testimonials that serve as "a strategic form of rhetoric to promote social change."[18] Due to the scope of this essay, only a few examples can be provided. Future research may consider surveying themes revealed in these memoirs to include victim-blaming, isolation, public shaming, sexual abuse by ministers, failure to safeguard children from repeat offenders, forgiveness rituals and punishments that further traumatize victims, mental health issues, the inability or unwillingness of social services and police to intervene, and religious exit.[19]

The first example I would like to mention involves the unwillingness of parents (in this case mothers) to protect their children from harm. In their memoir,[20] *Reflections and Memories of an Amish Misfit*, Mary Byler describes the suffering they experienced at the hands of their mother who looked away when male family members repeatedly and brutally raped them. Thus, the mother became actively complicit. The sheer disregard for the safety, health, and well-being of her child enabled sexual abuse to continue for years:

> When I told my mem [mom] what was still happening to me everywhere including my bedroom and the outhouse, my mem said, "You should just be thankful you are not pregnant." When I started menstruation, I had no idea what was happening to me. My mem told me that I can have babies and I should make sure that doesn't happen. When my menstruation didn't come in 28 days as it should have, my mem made me a tea to drink. I drank it multiple times a day until menstruation began. This continued throughout the rest of my Amish community life. Today, I know this tea is an abortifacient, but I am grateful I was not forced to carry a rapist[']s baby.[21]

The mother's response posits the "normalcy" of rape in that dysfunctional family. Byler's mother took extreme measures to protect the family secrets. Menstruation was only mentioned when it became a potential "threat."

Liberating Lomie revisits and expands on memories of Saloma Miller Furlong's Amish childhood by taking a more honest look at her mother's role in the mental and physical abuse she downplayed or omitted in her first memoir, *Why I Left the Amish* (subsequently removed from the market). Furlong realized that she had not been completely honest with herself about her mother's complicity, failure to admit wrongdoing, and perpetuation of silence. In *Liberating Lomie*, Furlong describes a scene that also depicts a mother's explicit involvement in sexualized violence. Furlong's mother, Mem, encouraged a family "friend" to rub Vicks VapoRub on her daughter's naked chest: "My breasts were just beginning to grow and I did not want them to be touched. But Mem moved in and took down my nightgown herself."[22] This highly traumatizing incident left the teen confused, severely depressed, and in bed for days. Sexualized violence does occur in Amish homes. Amish parents can be abusers, but it is the children and teens who pay the price.

The downside of the Amish virtues of submission, silence, and obedience, as well as the lack of formal sex education or biology in school, is that children and teens may not understand that there are situations in which "saying no" to or telling others about unwanted touching or sexual advances is appropriate. In *Behind Blue Curtains*, Lizzie Hershberger recounts being raped by a man who would later become a church deacon while thinking "I have to obey him. . . . I have to do as I'm told," all the while praying for the mixing (a term for the "forbidden act") to pass.[23] In her memoir, Griffin describes being silenced by her stepfather, Brian: "One of the worst of his rules was that my sister and I were not allowed to talk to each other or to strangers. The only time we were allowed to talk was when we raised our hands and were given permission."[24] These are just a few examples. However, given the role that silence, submission, and obedience play in Amish culture, any time Amish children have the courage to ask for help or infer that (sexual) abuse has occurred, they need to be taken seriously.

Moreover, the taboo nature of discussing sexuality perpetuates a limited knowledge of the body and sex.[25] In her memoir, *Runaway Amish Girl*, Emma Gingerich describes being raped after leaving her Amish community. Due to her earlier lack of education, she neither had the knowledge to know what happened, nor the vocabulary to express it:

> I still felt so disgustingly dirty that I could not take enough baths a day to make me feel clean again. I didn't tell anyone about it, and I made the decision just keep it to myself because, after all, that is what I had been taught at home. I was so used to not being allowed to talk about things which did not make sense that I believed what this guy did to me was something girls had to give into.
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> At the time of the rape, I did not even know what it was called. I did not know anything about sex, which made the horrific experience even more difficult to explain to anyone, even if I had wanted to. I blame the Amish for not educating me about sex.[26]

These narratives and others emphasize that Amish children and teens are left vulnerable if mothers, sisters, and friends fail to pass on adequate knowledge about the body, dating rituals, and sex.

Experiences shared by memoirists unmask potential biases while revealing uncomfortable truths and the agonizing pain and trauma suffered by innocents. Memoirs, along with podcasts and documentaries, by or about those who have experienced sexual violence, assure other victims and survivors of abuse that they are not alone in their struggles.[27] They humanize abstract topics and testify to the immediacy of numerous problems. Many offer advice or point listeners/readers to resources. As resistance narratives, they "begin to allow for the construction of new, more nuanced cultural narratives to emerge."[28]

Resistance narratives can, and do, foster change. Byler explains the importance of survivors raising their voices:

> I remind myself no child deserves what I and others have survived. We are not invisible. We are visible. We are not silent. We Speak, we get together and when we do that, we raise awareness in a meaningful way for those who may not be in a place to speak, we don't speak over or for them, we speak for ourselves. This is our power. We take back our power.[29]

The capitalization of the word "Speak" and four repetitions of the word in the passage above are intentional. For Byler, the act of speaking up and speaking out overcomes silence and creates agency. The spoken word has power—the power to heal. In fact, as Griffin's true crime memoir illustrates, memoirs can hold individuals accountable for their misdeeds. *Tears of the Silenced* was read by a police officer looking into allegations of sexual abuse against the same Amish bishop who had abused Griffin. The officer shared it with a social worker who then forwarded the book to that bishop's children. The majority of them filed charges against their father after reading it. The bishop was imprisoned for "molesting nearly all of his eleven children."[30]

To conclude this section, reports of sexual abuse among the Amish can be found in numerous newspaper reports, dozens of podcasts, a documentary, and eight memoirs. While some people may believe that reports of sexual abuse among the Amish are anomaly, the works of non-fiction described here paint a very different picture. All the writers mentioned above have contributed greatly to bringing awareness to the public. However, the fact remains that Amish studies have not done enough to address the concerns raised in these texts.

I fear that without a formal research group to endorse an initiative to increase Amish studies scholarship on sexual abuse, vast gaps in research will be perpetuated. I also cannot help but wonder if academics and professionals who have published in Amish studies have turned a blind eye to sexual abuse in Amish groups through information avoidance. Though Amish studies is constituted by a relatively small group of scholars as an emerging subfield, and there are certainly other research gaps, this issue is pressing.

Misty Griffin's memoir ends with a desperate plea to doctors, nurses, educators, police officers, and the general public: "For anyone else out there, if you suspect abuse, please trust your instincts. . . . Do not shrug it off and tell yourself it is not your problem. I often think it would have only taken one person to save me and my sister from our living hell."[31] Due to the #MeToo movement, some in literary studies have called for a more activist stance.[32] The #ChurchToo movement and the long list of abuses now coming to light in various churches only add to the necessity for academics to increase their agency. Academics as well as health and social work practitioners have a responsibility to victims and survivors of abuse and other trauma—to openly listen to their stories, to give them the public acknowledgement they deserve, and to engage in meaningful discussions with them and the Amish. But before we move ahead with the discussion, let us take a step back and examine what has been accomplished thus far.

A Critical Reflection on Selected Scholarship on Sexual Abuse in Amish Societies

Although gender roles have been treated in the literature on the Amish for years,[33] sensitive topics such as sexuality and sexual violence—which have become focal points of research inquiry in fields of women's and gender studies—have remained on the peripheries. Yet the tide is changing even in religious studies. In 2020, James A. Cates published an inaugural work on Amish sexuality,[34] creating

new impulses for Amish studies research. But apart from one chapter in Cates's book, *Serpent in the Garden*, the published academic discourse on sexual abuse among the Amish—from what I have been able to locate—consists of one or more sentences,[35] a number of paragraphs or pages in a handful of publications,[36] one case study,[37] and two other journal articles[38] apart from the ones I have written on Saloma Miller Furlong's and Misty Griffin's memoirs.[39]

Instead of offering an in-depth review of the published scholarship in Amish studies, I provide three examples with varying implied audiences so that future research may consider more victim/survivor-sensitive perspectives. First, a three-paragraph entry on "domestic abuse" in the 2010 *Concise Encyclopedia of Amish, Brethren, Hutterites, and Mennonites* includes several sensitive topics such as abortion, homosexuality, and sexuality. An excerpt of the entry on domestic abuse gives cause for concern:

> As in other communities, some individuals in ANABAPTIST communities experience verbal, physical, and sexual abuse, including incest. Because few, if any, systematic studies have documented the level of abuse, statistical comparisons with other groups or the larger society are not available. Over 80% of MENNONITE CHURCH USA, CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN; and BRETRHEN IN CHRIST members in the United States reported in a survey (CMP 2006) that they had never experienced any form of sexual abuse. However, personal *stories*, anecdotal evidence, and report from counselors *suggest* that various forms of domestic abuse are present in Anabaptist communities [emphasis added].[40]

It is commendable that Anabaptist researchers have started mentioning these topics even if systematic research is unavailable. The 2006 CMP (Church Membership Profile) survey cited an alarming rate of sexual abuse. However, unlike governmental statistics of this nature, the emphasis is not placed on the 20 percent of respondents who reported sexual abuse. Instead, it focused on the 80 percent who did not. This perpetuates the invisibility of victims. In addition, the provided statistics are misleading. According to the CMP report on Mennonite Church USA's website, 20 percent of women (not all members) reported "sexual abuse or violation, mostly while children or teens," and 5.5 percent of men were subjected to "incidence of abuse experienced before the age of 20."[41] No further explanation or description of those numbers is provided. In this case, the imposed economy of this text type may be viewed as a limitation.

In June 2017, at the "Crossing the Line: Women of Anabaptist Traditions Encounter Borders and Boundaries" conference held at Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, Virginia, the passage mentioned above sparked a spirited response during the

discussion period of a session where an earlier version of this paper was presented. One unnamed participant was particularly dismayed by the hedging used, noting Kraybill chooses the cautious reporting verb "suggest" that, from that individual's perspective, diminishes the credibility and value of the entire entry. The conference attendee further remarked that the words of some scholars carry more weight than the words of others. The attendee made legitimate arguments. Using the word "suggest" can be viewed as a way of undermining the validity of the cited study: "The hedging of a claim is a negative politeness strategy insofar as it marks the statement as provisional in some way" by implying "that there are alternatives to the claim or claims being made."[42] Sexual violence happens in the United States and elsewhere. Churches and church members do not provide sexual violence–free zones. One study recorded child sexual abuse in twenty different religious groups, including the Amish and Mennonites.[43] When writing about sexual abuse, scholars should not directly, or indirectly, question that fact and use words that hurt the marginalized.

When writing on a highly sensitive topic, the academic practice of economy and objectivity may not always do justice to the subject. The entry above raises many questions that are left unaddressed (economy). The supposed neutrality (objectivity) or use of hedge words signalling "uncertainty" in a vital content sentence may activate an emotional response in those tired of others sidestepping around sexual violence. The frustration of not being noticed or heard and the fear or trauma of not being believed are real for many victims and survivors of sexual abuse. Those suffering from abuse may be triggered, irrespective of the speaker's intentions. In other words, victims may remember or re-live instances in which they broke their silence but were not believed. From my perspective, in this instance, concern for the victim or survivor outweighs the need to adhere to hedging. Furthermore, the word "stories" used in the above entry on domestic violence should be avoided since it is often associated with fiction. The term "narrative" is preferable. In her essay "The Careless Language of Sexual Violence," Roxanne Gay explains: "When we're talking about race or religion or politics, it is often said we need to speak carefully. These are difficult topics where we need to be vigilant not only in what we say but in how we express ourselves. The same care must extend to how we write about violence and sexual violence in particular."[44]

Three years after the publication of the *Concise Encyclopedia*, *The Amish*, written for both academic and general audiences, was published. Donald Kraybill, Karen Johnson-Weiner, and Steven Nolt treat sexual abuse as part of an eight-paragraph subcategory of

the section "Abuse and Violence"—about two pages of the 500-page book.[45] This entry on sexual abuse offers more detail than previous scholarship, referencing a few Amish authors who have written self-help pamphlets or articles in the magazine *Family Life* on sexual abuse circulating in Amish communities. They speak directly to the problem, thereby avoiding the difficulties of hedging as previously mentioned:

> Sexual violations occur both inside the nuclear family and within the extended family or neighborhood. Typical cases involve teenage boys or adult men abusing young women who are not baptized or married. The size of extended families and the high density of Amish communities provide a large pool of potential victims for perpetrators. Compared to those in small-family societies, male Amish predators have easy access to many possible victims—sisters, nieces, granddaughters, and neighbors.[46]

This book section and a three-paragraph entry citing Amish perspectives on sexual orientation have encountered some resistance. For instance, Anderson accuses Kraybill et. al of "peremptory gender-based oppression framing," since their text implies that the perpetrators of abuse are male and the victims female.[47] Yet males as well as females can be victims of sexual violence, just as women can be abusers. The entry on sexual abuse in *The Amish* likewise does not acknowledge that children (not just young women) are often at risk for such of violence.[48] It would have been helpful to have clarified the point that, due to Amish upbringing that teaches submission and obedience and values silence, children may not know that there are times when saying "no" is justified. To debunk stereotypes, it should have been pointed out that women can be sexual abusers, as Furlong's and Byler's memoirs indicate.

Also, Anderson correctly states that greater attention should be paid to research methods, especially about potentially controversial topics.[49] In the introduction to *The Amish*, the authors briefly explain their methodology: "In this book, we report the research that we have conducted over the past twenty-five years in a multitude of Amish communities in a dozen states."[50] Due to the broad readership of *The Amish*, the authors adopt a style of writing that differs from that of peer-reviewed scientific publications, making the publication more accessible to the public. At times, they do not disclose sources for information that would normally be cited in academic journals or monographs. Nevertheless, citing directly, paraphrasing, or referring to text passages as support for each of the statements which Anderson finds "vague," "speculative," or "unspecific" would be impractical for a volume of its size,[51] since the

contextualization of each of those experiences is vital for understanding them. Furthermore, providing extended lists of footnotes would likely alienate general readers.

At the same time, it is essential to include some statements by victims and survivors of abuse in their own words. In other parts of *The Amish*, the authors' observations and commentaries are peppered with remarks by practicing Amish and former Amish. By failing to include direct responses to sexual abuse by victims and survivors, Kraybill, Johnson-Weiner, and Nolt keep readers at a distance and perpetuate the silencing of those voices that have not been heard or acknowledged. In its place, they devote a large portion of their prose to discussing why "cultural factors make it challenging to report sexual abuse to outside authorities."[52] This is a topic that needs illumination but not to the detriment of creating empathy for those who have endured abuse. Fostering awareness and empathy for those harmed by Amish perpetrators is perhaps best achieved in reading, listening to, and/or analyzing non-fictional narratives, interviews, and podcasts featuring victims and survivors of abuse. Yet their voices must be included in all research on such sensitive matters. For example, Richard A. Stevick amply incorporates remarks by young Amish men and women when writing about sexual intercourse in his book *Growing Up Amish: The Rumspringa Years*.[53]

Other rebukes of Kraybill et al. by Anderson are less compelling. He argues that the section on sexual abuse consists of "emotionally charged, public reprimands to the Amish."[54] I submit that the tone used in *The Amish* to describe sexual abuse is mostly on par with the practices of those writing on the subject in the humanities who recognize the limitations of value-free analysis when writing on sexual violence. From this perspective, ignoring or failing to explicitly denounce sexual violence in scholarship may be read as indifference to, tolerance of, or even acceptance of it.

Additionally, Anderson implies that Kraybill et al. might have left discussions on the limitations of Amish social systems to the Amish: "If the Amish find our theories and data helpful in informing their own debates, let them, but to use a scholar's hat to rebuke or arbitrate conflicts before an audience of curious non-Amish is paternalistic and damaging to Amish studies scholarship."[55] In a comprehensive book on the Amish, scholars must mention severe social problems to delineate the complexities of Amish life, especially in a books for a general audience. The Amish are growing in number and expanding into new areas in the US, Canada, and South America[56] and, despite the insularity of many Amish groups, more people will likely interact with them. They must not be put on a pedestal as a model minority.

The positive stereotype of the model minority[57] or a people free of violence, which John A. Hostetler labels "the illusion of gentleness,"[58] circulates in North American society. Cates echoes Hostetler, observing that "the 'pacifist' stereotype is exploited both within and outside the Amish culture . . . as if the use of coercion and force can be rationally excluded from the human experience."[59] As a non-practicing or cultural Amish person, sexual abuse survivor, memoirist, and activist, Torah Bontrager holds many groups, including scholars, responsible for the perpetuation of this stereotype:

> To the outside world, the Amish are peaceful, quaint, nonviolent, gentle folk. This is thanks to the genius of Amish marketing. And the lobbying by non-Amish special interest groups such as the so-called academic experts on the Amish, and Pennsylvania politicians. . . . And the maintaining of strict control by the Amish patriarchy over churches/communities, which keeps us isolated and disengaged from the rest of the world.[60]

Noteworthy is the unknown extent to which this illusion, stereotype, or myth—whatever one wants to call it—contributes to cultural insiders' and outsiders' reticence in acknowledging and perhaps even recognizing sexual abuse.

Until 2015, the lengthiest reference to sexual abuse in scholarship solely on the Amish was eight paragraphs. I have also located a single in-depth article on sexual abuse by William M. McGuigan and Sarah J. Stephenson entitled "A Single-Case Study of Resiliency after Extreme Incest in an Old Order Amish Family."[61] The informant, who left her Old Order Amish family in 2004, recalled more than two hundred rapes by members of her own family over nineteen years. Without help from community leaders, she was "scolded for 'not praying hard enough,' and her perpetrators were given chastisements within the church."[62] It was not until a little sister confided that her brothers were starting to "do bad things with her"[63] that the informant sought charges of rape against the brothers. The informant was shunned.

As the title indicates, the primary purpose of McGuigan and Stephenson's article is to explore themes of resiliency. To date, no other such case studies on sexual abuse in an Amish family or community exist. Citing this particular article, Amy Tishelman and Lisa Fontes call for more research into how victims overcome their trauma and experience of violence.[64] When expanded, the implications of resilience research might well be used for prevention or recovery strategies in the Amish context.

One limitation of this resiliency study is, however, that the results were not reconfirmed, especially since "healing is not linear

but rather an upward spiral filled with both joy and sorrow and ups and downs."[65] McGuigan and Stephenson's findings are thus only a snapshot of the resiliency of one individual at the time when the data was collected. It would be beneficial to study resiliency over time and to permit informants on highly sensitive matters to respond to research before publication, since the publication process often takes several years. In addition to more explorations of survival strategies and resiliency among victims and survivors of abuse, further applications might include case studies of Amish communities that have successfully implemented victim/survivor-sensitive strategies to reduce sexual abuse in their communities. Other case studies might look at a variety of religious and secular organizations that offer sexual abuse awareness training, prevention, and assistance for victims of abuse in Amish communities.

Kraybill; Kraybill, Johnson-Weiner, and Nolt; and McGuigan and Stephenson have explored unchartered territory. It is, therefore, to be expected that their work is not exhaustive. Yet this section has focused on some limitations of their work to underscore the importance of employing a victim/survivor-centred approach to any research dealing with sexual abuse among the Amish. First, insensitive language that may further traumatize victims and survivors of abuse should be avoided when describing sexual violence. Second, victims and survivors of abuse and their first-hand accounts should be included in research projects. Sanitizing their words or acting as gatekeepers by only paraphrasing their statements should be avoided. Third, researchers need to be more mindful of their potential bias, the assumptions they make, and the potential dominant narratives or stereotypes that are inadvertently reinforced. Some Amish do read the research. Avoiding the topic of sexual violence in Amish communities in the research speaks volumes. That silence can be interpreted in a variety of ways. Hence, we must not be silent. Finally, case studies on resilience and other yet-to-be defined topics might be expanded. They would ideally include follow-up studies.

Vetting Treatment Facilities

Since this sampling of secondary literature included a publication geared toward the general public, it is appropriate to include at least one book written by members of the Anabaptist community for community insiders as well as those working in and living near Plain communities. Allen Hoover, an Old Order Mennonite, and Jeanette Harder, a professor of social work, cooperated on a self-help book, *For the Sake of a Child: Love, Safety, and Abuse in our Plain*

Communities. It aimed to assist readers in recognizing, preventing, and seeking help with various types of abuse and neglect.[66] *For the Sake of a Child* provides some factual information about signs of abuse and parenting skills intertwined with personal narratives and religious reflection. The book received some highly negative reviews by Plain survivor advocates[67] and is no longer in print. Nevertheless, it is likely still circulating in Amish and other Plain communities. Therefore, I am including it in this essay since it alludes to an area in which cooperation between Plain people and academics may be difficult or unproductive. However, I will confine my remarks to one research gap that becomes apparent while reading it.

For the Sake of a Child ends with a list of treatment facilities and counselling centres, including six mental health and psychiatric facilities and sixteen residential counselling centres run by or affiliated with Anabaptist groups. No selection criteria (e.g., information on their mission statements, quality of care, strategies for handling uncooperative patients, certification, financial information, or the experience or medical training of personnel and administrators) is provided. Without such information, the list seems to give the impression—since the treatment facilities and counselling centres are all run by or affiliated with an Anabaptist group—that they are all equally competent and their outcomes similarly successful. It is also unclear which facilities and residential counselling centres focus solely on, or go beyond, faith-based treatment. Considering the complexity of mental health and medical care, from an academic point of view, at the very least a disclaimer or warning should have prefaced these recommended resources. McClure's investigative reporting, mentioned earlier, points out questionable medication practices at one Amish-run facility. It further details the recommendations the staff gave to a young Amish woman: "Her [Esther's] discharge notes recommended she 'be submissive' and that she 'challenge unhealthy thoughts toward ministers and others using positive/good thought.'"[68]

Harder is aware of the need to assess the results of the Amish-run health facilities but argues elsewhere that "established evidence-based practice methods would likely do more harm than good with this unique cultural group,"[69] a statement absent of any support or reasoning. Ideas about respectful ways for vetting treatment centres in Plain communities or having conversations about these centres with Plain people are greatly needed. Granted, it would be exceedingly difficult for outsiders to gain access to these facilities. At the same time, the safety and well-being of victims and survivors of abuse must be ensured. Therefore, until more work can be done in

this area, I would advise against recommending any uncertified facility.

Challenges of Researching Sensitive Topics among the Amish

This final section—which does not pretend to be exhaustive—outlines some of the complexities of researching sexual abuse in Amish communities. For the purpose of this essay, sensitive research is defined as "research which potentially poses a substantial threat to those who are or have been involved in it."[70] According to Raymond M. Lee, the risks or threats can be threefold. First, the threat may be of a stressful, private, or religious nature. Second, the threat may relate to deviance or social control which may stigmatize or incriminate oneself or others. The third type of risk or threat involves the political domain and refers "to the vested interests of powerful persons or institutions, or the exercise of coercion and domination."[71] There is a notable interplay between the sensitive topic and the social or cultural context in which the research is conducted. Thus, conducting sensitive research causes several concerns for informants, researchers, and/or other groups including families, communities, social groups, research institutions, and society at large.[72] The first two types of threat are highly relevant for conducting sensitive research in Amish communities. Political threats include, in this case, the fear some scholars may have of harming the reputation of the Amish and thereby potentially threatening their exceptional treatment by local, state, and federal governments. This may also play a role in the reluctance to conduct research on sexual violence and abuse in Amish settings. However, no studies have been done to confirm that assumption.

This research also poses risks to potential informants in Amish groups. Discussing "improper" topics may cause extreme stress and embarrassment. Researchers must also consider where and when they approach potential informants in order to respect their privacy and well-being.[73] It is reasonable to assume that Amish individuals generally open to interviews would be less likely to participate in studies on disturbing or taboo subjects.[74] Furthermore, informants may be concerned about the potential repercussions of reporting abuse to outsiders inasmuch as the Amish tend to view sexual abuse as a "sin" and thus a religious matter to be dealt with internally by the church.[75] Once forgiven, the sin is erased from public communication.[76] In other words, victims and survivors may feel they are sinning if they disclose information about abuse after completing

forgiveness rituals. Thus, religious teaching may keep some practicing Amish from participating in studies on sexual abuse.

Due to the diversity of the Amish, those involved must be well-versed in the particular community's culture and know in advance how they will respond to potential disclosures and calls for help. This recommendation also applies to anyone doing seemingly unrelated research on health or gender roles in Amish communities, since disclosures about sexual abuse may come as a side effect of other research. Consulting brochures or websites on the reporting of sexual abuse is highly recommended.[77]

Next, those researching abuse should be mindful of victim-sensitive and culturally specific interviewing practices.[78] For example, using the statement "Please tell me more about that" is subtler than probing for concrete details. In this way, victims and survivors are placed in charge of their own narratives and the details they feel comfortable sharing. With regard to culturally specific interviewing, some informants may not have the exact vocabulary to express what has happened to them since biology, health, and sex education are not officially taught in Amish schools (that end after the eighth grade). Knowledge of the human body is limited.[79]

Interviewing may be further complicated by the fact that the Amish speak Pennsylvania Dutch as a first language and learn English in school. According to the brochure "How to Report Abuse," words for the clitoris, vulva, vagina, penis, foreskin, scrotum, and testis do not exist in the Pennsylvania Dutch used by Plain people.[80] This underlines the extremely taboo nature of talking about the body. The Amish are a high-context culture that value indirect communication, thus informants may describe sexual intercourse as "mixing a batch,"[81] and sexual violence as "bothering" someone[82] or "do[ing] bad things";[83] a survey by Mary Byler and Tara Mitchell found use of a variety of other terms, including "fornication, lust, . . . sin, . . . abuse, bad stuff, improper behavior, . . . moral failure, [and] stumbling."[84] Therefore, interviewers should be aware that sexual abuse may lurk behind a wide variety of terms and are advised to use the victim's wording if clarifications are needed. Depending on the age and background of the informant, a translator (ideally chosen by the interviewer and not related to the victim) may be necessary.

Undoubtedly, there are obstacles to studying sexual abuse among the Amish as well as risks to researchers. Since Amish seek separation from and limit personal contact with the outside world, it may be easier for interviewers with an Anabaptist background to gain the trust of potential informants.[85] Another key to obtaining access within a Plain culture is through informal sponsorship from an

Amish community member.[86] Building trust with potential informants and community leaders takes time. Communication via telephone or the internet will likely be more limited in Old Order Amish communities. Nevertheless, times are changing and, with them, telephone use practices.[87] In addition to rejecting videotaping, some informants will insist on notetaking instead of employing recording devices.[88] For these reasons and in addition to the reluctance of victims to speak out, finding Amish willing to participate in evidence-based studies on taboo topics with an outsider poses logistical challenges.

Likewise, it may also prove challenging for researchers to find the appropriate balance between maintaining objectivity and building rapport with potential informants, and between making personal disclosures and showing empathy. When listening to stories filled with pain, suffering, and trauma, researchers will likely be affected by the personal narratives conveyed. In fact, conducting sensitive research can pose potential health risks to practitioners and scholars. Dickson-Swift et al. empirically confirm that researchers may be "emotionally and/or physically exhausted both during and after their research."[89] They further observe that when researching emotionally charged topics, scholars "expressed concern about feeling guilty undertaking sensitive research interviews," particularly when considering the effects of sharing narratives on informants.[90] Researching and writing about sexual abuse takes its toll. Mentors or support groups may help to reduce the stress of doing this type of research.

Conceivably, some researchers may even fear losing professional standing and prospects in Amish communities. They may assume they will have to endure poor reviews or even attacks on their scholarship. Without a doubt, anyone doing this kind of research needs to have a thick skin. Cates was well aware of the stir that his book on sexuality might cause:

> Writing about Amish sexuality crosses a line. While my admiration and respect for these Plain people has [*sic*] only deepened, some will see this work as unnecessary. Worldly. Even offensive. Spotlighting an aspect of their lives better left in shadow. I disagree, or the book would not be in your hands.[91]

In addition to receiving potential backlash from cultural insiders and outsiders, highly specialized Amish studies scholars may also be concerned that they risk future access to Amish members.

Researchers should also be cautious about employing surveys, which have distinct limitations in oral cultures that do not emphasize expressing one's views (and feelings) to outsiders. Highlighting

a survey of women of childbearing age in an eastern Pennsylvania Amish community in which none of the nearly three hundred respondents confirmed having been "hit, beaten, or forced to have sex against their will," Cates warns against making conclusions based on a single survey. He further states that it should not be assumed that respondents were "uniformly truthful, since the interviewers were strangers to the respondents and were highly unlikely to have been given valid answers to such personal, probing questions as domestic violence and depression."[92] Therefore, it appears that qualitative research methods within Amish communities would be initially preferable to surveys.

Depending on the context, researchers may need to get the permission of their university's ethics commission to do research on human subjects—another formidable task. Paying careful attention to recruitment strategies and recruiting adult survivors may facilitate the process. Trauma researchers such as Rebecca Campbell, Rachael Goodman-Williams, and McKenzie Javorka recommend recruiting participants in post-assault care, such as hospitals or crisis agencies. They argue that in such cases, since potential participants are aware that their victimization is the subject of the study, and "researchers know the victimization status of the individuals they approach about study participation," researchers "are often able to obtain high consent and study completion rates."[93] They recommend using a ten-step trauma-informed approach including practices such as pinpointing trauma recovery as an aim, increasing "survivors choices' and control," and including cultural competence.[94]

Cooperation with task forces or non-profit organizations that work to prevent abuse or help victims and survivors in areas where many Plain people reside can help researchers translate research findings into action. At the same time, they may also assist with locating allies within Amish communities and encourage more survivors of abuse to come forward and share their experiences with researchers. As a first step, researchers might consider starting with "victim advocates, nurses, or archival data" (at vetted or certified treatment facilities with Amish patients or clients), as Rebecca Campbell et al. emphasize.[95]

Despite the challenges facing researchers, there may be additional ways to increase knowledge about sexual abuse without the need for large-scale studies of Amish communities. Those working on religious exit from the Amish might have an easier time locating informants and respondents via social media. Such respondents may also be more open to surveys that include questions on sexual abuse. Information on sexual abuse may also result from other research as an unintended byproduct. Caroline L. Faulkner has, for example,

published groundbreaking work on the identities of former Amish as well as gendered motivations for religious exit. Her study, based on interviews with fifty-nine adults from thirty different Amish settlements across the US and Canada, includes one respondent who explained that

> in order to marry, her Amish community's cultural traditions placed women in positions in which they were vulnerable to sexual advances but required to fend them off. These experiences placed a heavy, guilt-inducing burden on Barbara and exposed her to substantial trauma through the sexual assaults she appears to have experienced.[96]

When sexual violence is alluded to in an interview, it is vital to ask for clarification and share the results with the academic community, provided that the research participant consents to provide further details and does not ultimately withdraw portions of their shared testimony. Their rights and well-being take precedence over the need for documentation. Ideally, to overcome research gaps, a database associated with an Amish studies program or journal might collect qualitative research on sexual abuse as well as oral histories in general.

This section has primarily addressed the need for evidence-based scholarship on sexual violence through survivor-centred interviews and qualitative research. It has outlined some challenges of doing this type of research in insular religious communities that view sexual violence as a sin to be handled within the church. Its aim is not to raise the question whether this type of research is possible but to raise the question how such research might be done. As someone trained in the humanities who does not do evidence-based research, I admittedly do not have all the answers, just as a colleague with a background in religious studies or sociology might not have the needed background in trauma studies or psychology. Thus, research in this field must be a collaborative and interdisciplinary effort. If a project is built on a solid ethical foundation but ends up failing, that effort nonetheless produces a result that can be documented. It is a result that someone else in the future can build on.

Conclusion and Outlook

In sum, this article calls for more discussion on sexual violence in Amish studies scholarship. Compared to the considerable number of publications on gender roles in Amish communities referred to at the beginning of this essay, the current research on sexual abuse is meagre. Publications on Amish gender roles, health, education, and

religious exit might consider increasing discourses on sexuality and sexual abuse as Cates, Harder, Natalie Jolly, and Robert Strikwerda have recently done.[97] University courses in Anabaptist studies and any training programs on interviewing about and researching in Plain communities should debunk the stereotype of the Amish as gentle, non-violent people and develop strategies to deal with disclosures of sexual abuse or violence. Reading memoirs or listening to podcasts on the topic may also increase the number of future scholars willing to contribute to the research. Research in these areas does not require permission from university research ethics committees.

To overcome existing research gaps, when sexual abuse or violence is encountered in interviews of any kind, colleagues ought to document it, not discard it as an anomaly. When it may be implied, victim/survivor-sensitive clarification strategies should be used to find out what the informant means along with providing information on resources about where to get help—e.g., A Better Way (https://abetterway.org/), RAINN (https://rainn.org/), or hotlines such as the National Sexual Assault Hotline (1-800-656-4673). Increasing attention to sexual abuse in scholarly literature may positively affect the number of victims who report abuse, the number of people willing to do sensitive research, or the willingness of other victims to speak out. We can and must provide a safe space for truth-telling and do our part to educate others.

The list of potential risks to victims and researchers outlined here is clearly incomplete. There is a great need for discussion about how this research might be done, which groups are best suited, and what should be done with the knowledge attained. Mentors and research groups need to be identified because those doing such demanding and potentially heart-breaking work may require an emotional support system. Since the Amish are not the only religious group to struggle with sexual abuse, other churches addressing sexual abuse within their faith traditions might be consulted to determine which approaches might be best applicable to various Amish groups. Burkey et al. (2022) propose a number of prevention and intervention strategies.[98] Mennonite Church USA has also produced prevention resources[99] after struggling to overcome numerous cover-ups and bring John Howard Yoder to justice.[100] (It is estimated that roughly one hundred women fell victim to his sexual advances.)[101] Since the Amish and Mennonites are both Anabaptist faiths, it makes sense to include Mennonites in projects relating to sexual abuse.[102]

In addition to the numerous research gaps I have underlined, Harder mentions four topics pertaining to abuse and neglect of all

types that are especially relevant to sexual abuse: the reporting of abuse, identifying child welfare workers' and systems' experience in investigating abuse, promoting safety and reducing child abuse, and determining "practices and outcomes of outpatient and residential programs that serve Amish communities."[103] Although Byler and Mitchell's study was not peer-reviewed, it provides interesting results. They recommend considering "family dysfunction, church dysfunction, and social status" in future research, as well as language differences, the impact of generational abuse, and the loss of community support for victims and survivors of abuse.[104] As their cooperation shows, including victims and survivors of abuse in the process can produce more nuanced results.[105]

Regarding informants, most of Harder's list indicates that it would be easiest to start with projects that do not directly involve the Amish—for example, social workers.[106] Within the culture, she proposes starting with those Amish "at the progressive end of the continuum."[107] In addition, Amish teens in *Rumspringa* may also be more open to inquiry into other sensitive topics since they have not yet been baptized and are more likely to have phone access. But who knows? There may even be more practicing Amish willing to speak out than we might now imagine. One such person (Esther) is cited in McClure's news article on sexual abuse among the Amish.[108]

Fostering alliances with health groups and non-profit organizations may also yield positive results. In 2022, a task force on sexual abuse in Plain communities located in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, was revived in response to recent cases of sexual abuse reported in the news.[109] Safe Communities, a Lancaster child sexual abuse prevention non-profit that assists survivors, has partnered with A Better Way and members inside and outside of Plain communities, including Misty Griffin and County Court Judge Dennis Reinaker.[110] It is part of the Plain Communities Task Force (PCTF).[111] Over time, the number of similar task forces will hopefully increase and they may also be willing to cooperate with researchers in translating research findings into action.

There is still much to be learned and room for all types of methodology and disciplines, for the application of a variety of theories and practices, for cultural insiders and outsiders. Harder is optimistic that her suggested research may be completed within five to ten years.[112] Therefore, it is no longer a question of whether research on sexual abuse and its prevention among the Amish can be done—it is only a matter of how long it will take for more to join that effort.

Notes

1 "Statement from the Panel on Sexual Abuse Prevention," Mennonite Church USA, Mar. 30, 2016, https://www.mennoniteusa.org/news/statement-from-the-panel-on-sexual-abuse-prevention/.

2 Cory Anderson, "Seventy-Five Years of Amish Studies, 1942 to 2017: A Critical Review of Scholarship Trends (With an Extensive Bibliography)," *Journal of Amish and Plain Anabaptist Studies* 5, no. 1 (2017): 1–65.

3 Anderson, "Seventy-Five Years," 2, 29.

4 Assuming readers of this journal are familiar with the Amish, a general overview of this diverse, insular Anabaptist group will not be provided.

5 I would especially like to thank the sexual abuse survivors who grew up Amish and the roughly fifteen colleagues from a variety of fields who have taken the time to provide insightful feedback on this paper, seven years in the making. Without their support, I would not have been able to see this project to fruition.

6 See, e.g., Mary Byler et al., "Child Sexual Abuse in Amish, Mennonite, Anabaptist, and Other Religious Groups," SSRN, Feb. 28, 2024, https://ssrn.com/abstract=4727151.

7 Jeanette Harder, "Keeping Amish Children Safe," in *Child Maltreatment in Insular and Isolated Communities*, ed. Christine James-Brown et al. (Washington, DC: CWLA Press, 2018), 49.

8 Selected examples: Kat Cisar, "3 Amish Men Charged with Incest," *SWNew4u.com*, Aug. 16, 2019, https://www.swnews4u.com/local/3-amish-men-charged-incest/; Associated Press, "Amish Man Sentenced to Prison for Sexually Abusing Girls," *Pennsylvania Live*, Jan. 24, 2020, https://www.pennlive.com/news/2020/01/amish-man-sentenced-to-prison-for-sexually-abusing-girls.html; Lee Brown, "Amish Brothers Avoid Jail Time for Sex with 12-Year-Old-Sister," *New York Post*, Sept. 25, 2020, https://nypost.com/2020/09/25/amish-brothers-avoid-jail-time-for-sex-with-12-year-old-sister/; Peter Smith, "Amish Bishop Enters Guilty Plea for Failing to Report Abuse," Oct. 26, 2020, https://www.post-gazette.com/news/faith-religion/2020/10/26/Amish-bishop-enters-guilty-plea-for-failing-to-report-abuse-lancaster-county-levi-esh/stories/202010220115; Kris B. Mamul, "'5 Years Is Not Enough for You': Amish Man Sentenced to Prison in Sexual As-Sault Case," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Nov. 4, 2021, https://www.post-gazette.com/news/crime-courts/2021/11/23/Court-sentencing-Michael-Kauffman-Plain-Amish-Coverings-sexual-abuse/stories/202111230136; Peter Smith, "'This Is Happening in Our Community': Clothing Display Spotlights Sex Abuse among Amish, Others," *Pennsylvania Live*, May 6, 2022, https://www.pennlive.com/news/2022/05/this-is-happening-in-our-community-clothing-display-spotlights-sex-abuse-among-amish-others.html; and Leonard L. Hayhurst, "Amish Man Gets 20-Year Sentence for Sex Crimes against Young Girl," *Coshocton Tribune*, Oct. 12, 2022, https://www.coshoctontribune.com/story/news/local/coshocton-county/2022/10/12/amish-man-ohio-sentenced-prison-sex-crimes-against-young-girl/69547316007/.

9 Peter Smith and Shelly Bradbury, "Coverings: Mennonites, Amish Face Growing Recognition of Widespread Sexual Abuse in Their Communities," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, May 20–June 5, 2019, https://newsinteractive.post-gazette.com/coverings/mennonite-amish-sexual-abuse-forgiveness-in-their-communities/.

[10] Sarah McClure, "The Amish Keep to Themselves. And They're Hiding a Horrifying Secret," *Cosmopolitan*, Jan. 14, 2020, https://www.cosmopolitan.com/lifestyle/a30284631/amish-sexual-abuse-incest-me-too/.

[11] Jasper Hoffmann and Marc Masoner, hosts, *The Plain People's Podcast*, 2018–2024, https://www.theplainpeoplespodcast.com/.

[12] The Misfit Amish LLC, https://www.themisfitamish.com/.

[13] "Meet Mary Byler," The Misfit Amish LLC, https://www.themisfitamish.com/meetmary. "English" refers to the English-speaking dominant culture in North America.

[14] Misty Griffin, "Congress: Pass a Child Rights Act, No Exemptions, No Exceptions!," change.org, May 12, 2022, https://www.change.org/p/congress-pass-a-child-rights-act-no-exemptions-no-exceptions/.

[15] Saloma Miller Furlong, *Why I Left the Amish: A Memoir* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2011); Saloma Miller Furlong, *Bonnet Strings: An Amish Woman's Ties to Two Worlds* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2014); Emma Gingerich, *Runaway Amish Girl: The Great Escape* (Aledo, TX: Progressive Rising Phoenix Press, 2014). Torah Bontrager, *An Amish Girl in Manhattan: Escaping at Age 15, Breaking all the Rules, and Feeling Safe Again* (New York: Know-T Publishing, 2018); Misty Griffin, *Tears of the Silenced: An Amish True Crime Memoir of Childhood Sexual Abuse, Brutal Betrayal, and Ultimate Survival* (Coral Gables, FL: Mango Publishing Group); Lizzie Hershberger with Molly Maeve Eagan, *Behind Blue Curtains: A True Crime Memoir of an Amish Woman's Survival, Escape, and Pursuit of Justice* (New York: Nauset Press, 2021); Saloma Miller Furlong, *Liberating Lomie: Memoir of an Amish Childhood* (Broadway, VA: Memory Pages Press, 2022); and Mary Byler, *Reflections and Memories of an Amish Misfit: "My Therapist Says That's Not True, but I Digress"* (self-pub., 2022).

[16] Misty Griffin website, Feb. 22, 2023, https://www.mistygriffin.com/.

[17] Maria Mikolchak, "Rape and Sexual Abuse," in *Encyclopedia of Women's Autobiography*, vol. 2, ed. Victoria Boynton and Jo Malin (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2005), 480.

[18] Maryemma Graham and Mercedes Lucero, "Life Writing," in *The Routledge Handbook to the Culture and Media of the Americas,* ed. Wilfried Raussert et al. (New York: Routledge, 2020), 131.

[19] See Sabrina Voelz, "Writing Life, Writing Back, and Writing Through: Saloma Miller Furlong's *Why I Left the Amish: A Memoir* and *Bonnet Strings: An Amish Woman's Ties to Two Worlds*" *Journal of Amish and Plain Anabaptist Studies* 4, no. 2 (Autumn 2016): 201–19; Sabrina Voelz, "Exposing Sexual Abuse among the Amish and Seeking Social Change: Misty Griffin's *Tears of the Silenced*," in *Life Narratives, Creativity, and the Social in the Americas*, ed. Wilfried Raussert and Susana Rocha Teixeira (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2024), forthcoming.

[20] As a non-binary person, Byler prefers singular "they" pronouns.

[21] Byler, *Reflections of an Amish Misfit*, 39.

[22] Furlong, *Liberating Lomie*, 115.

[23] Hershberger, *Behind Blue Curtains*, 67.

[24] Griffin, *Tears of the Silenced*, 21.

[25] See Karen M. Johnson-Weiner, *The Lives of Amish Women* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2020), 40–41.

[26] Emma Gingerich, *Runaway Amish Girl*, 119.

[27] "Victim" is the term that law enforcement and the courts use. Whereas for some the term "victim" connotes powerlessness, others prefer it because it "makes clear who's at fault—the perpetrator." *How to Write about Sexual Assault: An Incomplete Guide* (Salt & Sage Books, 2020), 57. If a victim has successfully recovered, the term "survivor" positively connotes agency and even defiance. Yet some who prefer the term "victim" may feel that "survivor" denies the pain and trauma they have experienced—trauma that may take years to overcome. These terms are often used in pairs. *How to Write about Sexual Assault,* 55, 59–62.

[28] Robyn Fivush, "Speaking Silence: The Social Construction of Silence in Autobiographical and Cultural Narratives," *Memory* 18, no. 2 (2010): 92–93.

[29] Byler, *Reflections of an Amish Misfit*, 31–32.

[30] Griffin, *Tears of the Silenced*, 328.

[31] Griffin, *Tears of the Silence*, 336.

[32] Heather Hewett and Mary K. Holland, "Introduction: Literary Studies as Literary Activism," in *#MeToo and Literary Studies: Reading, Writing, and Teaching about Sexual Violence and Rape Culture*, ed. Mary K. Holland and Heather Hewett (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 16–17.

[33] See, e.g., Julia Ericksen and Gary Klein, "Women's Roles and Family Production among the Old Order Amish," *Rural Sociology* 46, no. 2 (Summer 1981): 282–96; John A. Hostetler, *Amish Society*, 4th ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Marc A. Olshan and Kimberly D. Schmidt, "Amish Women and the Feminist Conundrum," in *The Amish Struggle with Modernity*, ed. Donald B. Kraybill and Marc A. Olshan (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1994), 215–29; Karen Johnson-Weiner, "The Role of Women in Old Order Amish, Beachy Amish and Fellowship Churches," in *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 75, no. 2 (Apr. 2001): 231–56; Kimberly D. Schmidt, Diane Zimmerman Umble, and Steven D. Reschly, eds., *Strangers at Home: Amish and Mennonite Women in History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002); Donald B. Kraybill, Karen M. Johnson-Weiner, and Steven M. Nolt, *The Amish* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 193–211; James P. Hurd, "The Amish *Gemeinschaft* Community: Pro-Woman?," in *Religion and Men's Violence against Women*, ed. Andy J. Johnson (New York, NY: Springer, 2015), 239–49; James A. Cates, *Serpent in the Garden: Amish Sexuality in a Changing World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2020), 106–22; Karen M. Johnson-Weiner, *The Lives of Amish Women*; Natalie Jolly, "Hemmed In? Considering the Complexities of Amish Womanhood," *Journal of Amish and Plain Anabaptist Studies* 8, no. 2 (Autumn 2020): 159–68; and Robert Strikwerda, "Masculinity among the Amish: Characteristics, Hegemony, and 'Soft Patriarchy," *Journal of Amish and Plain Anabaptist Studies* 8, no. 2 (2020): 169–84. This list does not propose to be exhaustive.

[34] Cates, *Serpent in the Garden*, 106–22.

[35] Donald B. Kraybill, Steven M. Nolt, and David L. Weaver-Zercher. *Amish Grace: How Forgiveness Transcended Tragedy* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 138; Charles E. Hurst and David L. McConnell, *An Amish Paradox: Diversity and Change in the World's Largest Amish Community* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2010), 127; and Steven M. Nolt, *The Amish: A Concise Introduction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2016), 102.

[36] James A. Cates, *Serving the Amish: A Cultural Guide for Professionals* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 77, 84–85, 91, 182–86, 205–6,

182–83; Hurd, "Amish *Gemeinschaft* Community, 243–48; Voelz, "Writing Life," 208–12; Jolly, "Complexities of Amish Womanhood," 162–63; Strikwerda, "Masculinity among the Amish," 177–78; and Jeanette Harder, "Understanding and Partnering with Amish Communities to Keep Children Safe," *Child Welfare* 99, no. 1 (2021): 78–80.

[37] William M. McGuigan and Sarah J. Stephenson, "A Single-Case Study of Resiliency after Extreme Incest in an Old Order Amish Family," *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse* 24, no. 5 (2015): 526–37.

[38] Nadya Labi, "The Gentle People," *Legal Affairs*, Jan./Feb. 2005, 24–32, https://collections.library.yale.edu/catalog/32593272; and Harder, "Keeping Amish Children Safe."

[39] Voelz, "Writing Life"; and Voelz, "Exposing Sexual Abuse."

[40] Donald B. Kraybill, *Concise Encyclopedia of Amish, Brethren, Hutterites, and Mennonites* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 1, s.v. "Abuse, Domestic."

[41] "Statement from the Panel on Sexual Abuse Prevention," Mennonite Church USA.

[42] Rolf O. Kroger and Linda A. Wood, *Doing Discourse Analysis: Methods for Studying Action in Talk and Text* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000), 49.

[43] Amy C. Tishelman and Lisa A. Fontes, "Religion in Child Sexual Abuse Forensic Interviews," *Child Abuse & Neglect* 63 (2017): 122. This study was based on interviews with 39 child forensic interviewers and directors of child advocacy centres, who reported having conducted a total of 42,000 forensic interviews.

[44] Roxanne Gay, "The Careless Language of Sexual Violence," in *Bad Feminist: Essays* (New York: Corsair, 2014), 135.

[45] Kraybill, Johnson-Weiner, and Nolt, *The Amish*, 206–8.

[46] Kraybill, Johnson-Weiner, and Nolt, *The Amish*, 206–7. Kraybill et al. are not the only scholars who have come to such conclusions. See also Hurst and McConnell, *Amish Paradox*, 127.

[47] Anderson, "Seventy-Five Years of Amish Studies," 33.

[48] Cates writes that "child sexual abuse among the Amish is a significant concern," *Serving the Amish*, 182.

[49] Anderson, "Seventy-Five Years of Amish Studies," 33.

[50] Kraybill, Johnson-Weiner, and Nolt, *The Amish*, x. For more information on the cultural analytic paradigm used in Kraybill's work, see Donald B. Kraybill, "Response: How Do We Know What We Know About the Amish and Other Minorities?," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 58, no. 3 (Sept. 2019): 1–10.

[51] Anderson, "Seventy-Five Years of Amish Studies," 33.

[52] Kraybill, Johnson-Weiner, and Nolt, *The Amish*, 207.

[53] Richard A. Stevick, *Growing Up Amish: The Rumspringa Years*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2007), 222–24.

[54] Anderson, "Seventy-Five Years of Amish Studies," 34.

[55] Anderson, "Seventy-Five Years of Amish Studies," 34.

[56] "Amish Population Profile, 2022," Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies, Elizabethtown College, http://groups.etown.edu/amishstudies/statistics/amish-population-profile-2022.

[57] See Dachang Cong, "The Roots of Amish Popularity in Contemporary U.S.A.," *Journal of American Culture* 17, no. 1 (Mar. 1994): 63.

[58] Hostetler, *Amish Society*, 343. Strikwerda also questions whether "Amish society is as peaceful as it is often portrayed." Strikwerda, "Masculinity among the Amish," 178.
[59] Cates, *Serving the Amish*, 85.
[60] Bontrager, *Amish Girl in Manhattan*, 10.
[61] McGuigan and Stephenson, "Single-Case Study of Resiliency," 530.
[62] McGuigan and Stephenson,"Single-Case Study of Resiliency," 528.
[63] McGuigan and Stephenson,"Single-Case Study of Resiliency," 529.
[64] Tishelman and Fontes, "Religion in Child Sexual Abuse," 129–30.
[65] "Sexual Assault: Healing after Sexual Abuse," RAINN, July 9, 2021, https://rainn.org/news/healing-after-csa.
[66] Allen Hoover and Jeanette Harder, *For the Sake of a Child: Love, Safety, and Abuse in our Plain Communities* (Stoneboro, PA: Ridgeway, 2019).
[67] See "Jeanette Harder and Dove's Next: Whistleblower Statement," Into Account, Dec. 22, 2022, https://intoaccount.org/2022/12/22/jeanette-harder-doves-nest/.
[68] McClure, "Amish Keep to Themselves."
[69] Harder, "Keeping Amish Children Safe," 47.
[70] Raymond M. Lee, *Doing Research on Sensitive Topics* (London: Sage, 1993), 4.
[71] Lee, *Doing Research on Sensitive Topics*, 4.
[72] Lee, *Doing Research on Sensitive Topics*, 5. See also Martyn Hammersley, *The Politics of Social Research* (London: Sage, 1995); and Virginia Dickson-Swift, Erica L. James, and Pranee Liamputtong, "Doing Sensitive Research: What Challenges Do Qualitative Researchers Face?," *Qualitative Research* 7, no. 3 (Aug. 2007): 327–53.
[73] See Berwood Yost et al., "Among the Amish: Interviewing Unique Populations on Sensitive Topics" (unpublished manuscript, 2004), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265114058. This article offers helpful suggestions to those conducting research in Amish communities.
[74] For example, in their 1993 study, "Pregnancy and Childbirth Among the Amish," Karla Campanella, Jill E. Korbin, and Louise Acheson report that "of the thirty women who initially agreed to participate, half later declined, stating that they were busy or did not wish to discuss pregnancy in the presence of their children." *Social Science & Medicine* 36, no. 3 (Feb. 1993): 334. Of the remaining fifteen, six "women provided no answer [about where they obtained information about pregnancy and childbirth] because they felt that how one knows about pregnancy is obvious and too personal or embarrassing to discuss with an outsider," Campanella et al., 336.
[75] Hurd, "Amish *Gemeinschaft* Community," 248; Nolt, *The Amish*, 102.
[76] Hostetler, *Amish Society*, 388.
[77] See "How to Report Abuse" (2022) at The Misfit Amish LLC, https://www.themisfitamish.com/amishresources. This downloadable brochure was written by Misfit Amish LLC, *The Plain People's Podcast*, and A Better Way (a child abuse prevention forum based in Zanesville, Ohio).
[78] See Lisa Aronson Fontes, *Interviewing Clients across Cultures: A Practitioner's Guide* (New York: Guilford Press, 2008). Although the Amish are mentioned a few times in this publication, its findings would need to be adapted.
[79] Cates, *Serpent in the Garden*, 39. See also Kraybill et al., *The Amish*, 207.
[80] "How to Report Abuse."

[81] Hershberger, *Behind Blue Curtains*, 67.
[82] Furlong, *Why I Left the Amish*, 86.
[83] "Mary B," quoted in McGuigan and Stephenson, "Single-Case Study of Resiliency," 529.
[84] Byler et al., "Child Sexual Abuse," 14.
[85] Diane Zimmerman Umble reports that while doing research on the emergence of the telephone in Lancaster County, she was asked numerous times who she was and which community she was affiliated with: "This emphasis on my family tree continues to be common to my initial encounters with Old Order Mennonite and Amish people, especially men. They actively construct my identity in terms of patrilineal lines." Diane Zimmerman Umble, "Who Are You? The Identity of the Outsider Within" in Schmidt, Umble, and Reschly, *Strangers at Home*, 45. Questions also centred on Umble's family and role as a mother, whereas little interest was paid to her research identity. Umble, "Who Are You?," 46–47.
[86] Umble, "Who Are You?," 46. For a detailed description of steps to improve child welfare strategies by working with the Amish, see also Harder, "Understanding and Partnering."
[87] Lindsay Ems, *Virtually Amish: Preserving Community at the Internet's Margins* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2022).
[88] Donald B. Kraybill, "Amish Informants: Mediating Humility and Publicity," in *The Amish and the Media*, ed. Diane Zimmerman and David L. Weaver-Zercher (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 175.
[89] Virginia Dickson-Swift, James, and Liamputtong, "Doing Sensitive Research," 344.
[90] Virginia Dickson-Swift, James, and Liamputtong, "Doing Sensitive Research," 344.
[91] Cates, *Serpent in the Garden*, xv.
[92] Cates, *Serving the Amish*, 87.
[93] Rebecca Campbell, Rachael Goodman-Williams, and McKenzie Javorka, "A Trauma-Informed Approach to Sexual Violence Research Ethics and Open Science," in *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 24, no. 23–24 (2019): 4771.
[94] Campbell et al., "Trauma-Informed Approach," 4769.
[95] Campbell et al., "Trauma-Informed Approach," 4772.
[96] Caroline L. Faulkner, "Gendered Motivations for Religious Exit among the Former Amish," *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion* 14 (2018): 20, art. 4. The hedging language "appears to have experienced" could be replaced with "disclosed".
[97] Cates, *Serpent in the Garden*; Cates, *Serving the Amish*; Harder, "Keeping Amish Children Safe"; Jolly, "Hemmed In?"; and Strikwerda, "Masculinity among the Amish."
[98] Chris Rush Burkey, Michael C. Braswell, and John T. Whitehead, *Sexual Abuse within the Church: Assessment, Intervention, and Prevention* (New York: Routledge, 2022).
[99] See also "Statement from the Panel on Sexual Abuse Prevention," Mennonite Church USA.
[100] See, e.g., Rachel Waltner Goossen, "Mennonite Bodies, Sexual Ethics: Women Challenge John Howard Yoder," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 34 (2016): 247–59.

[101] Rachel Waltner Goossen, "The Failure to Bind and Loose: Responses to Yoder's Sexual Abuse," *The Mennonite*, Jan. 2, 2015, https://anabaptistworld.org/failure-bind-loose-responses-john-howard-yoders-sexual-abuse/

[102] Byler et al., "Child Sexual Abuse."

[103] Harder, "Keeping Amish Children Safe," 48–49.

[104] Byler et al., 20–22.

[105] Claire Renzetti provides suggestions on how to include victims and survivors of sexual violence in research. Claire M. Renzetti, "Confessions of a Reformed Positivist: Feminist Participatory Research as Good Social Science," in *Researching Sexual Violence Against Women: Methodological and Personal Perspectives*, ed. Martin D. Schwartz (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1997), 131–43.

[106] Harder, "Keeping Amish Children Safe," 48.

[107] Harder, "Keeping Amish Children Safe," 48.

[108] McClure, "Amish Keep to Themselves."

[109] The original taskforce was founded in 2011 and later disbanded in 2013, "due to concerns that its Amish partners were not making good-faith efforts to combat sexual abuse, instead seeking to downplay and dismiss the problem." Tim Stuhldreher, "Revived Plain Communities Task Force Targets Sexual Abuse," *One United Lancaster*, May 9, 2022, https://oneunitedlancaster.com/nonprofits/revived-Plain-community-task-force-targets-sexual-abuse/.

[110] Stuhldreher, "Revived Plain Communities Task Force."

[111] "Plain Communities Task Force (PCTF)," Safe Communities, https://www.safecommunitiespa.org/pctf.html.

[112] Harder, "Keeping Amish Children Safe," 50.