A Plain Circle: Imagining Amish and Mennonite Community Through the National Edition of The Budget

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This thesis titled
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ABSTRACT

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A Plain Circle: Imagining Amish and Mennonite Community Through the National Edition of The Budget

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This thesis describes the ways in which one community newspaper attempts to connect a broad, diverse population bound by a common ideal, in this case religious faith. The subject of the research is the national edition of The Budget, a weekly newspaper mailed to Amish and Mennonite readers all over the world. Writers for the national edition are largely free to write about whatever they like. They pass along local information about the weather, church visits, people who have fallen ill, marriages, and other aspects of community life.

This qualitative study of The Budget explores the portrayals of Anabaptist life in those dispatches and how those portrayals unite readers. Using textual analysis, it explores common themes, ideals, and values expressed in letters, and how those expressions help create an “imagined community” among Budget readers. It builds upon past research that examines the ways in which niche publications with national followings connect with readers.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In late April, 2011, an Amish woman in Canton, Missouri, took a horse and cart to visit her sister. After a short visit, the two women looked out and saw that the horse had freed itself from the hitch rack and disappeared with its cart. After searching all over the neighborhood for the horse and cart, the Amish visitor got a ride home from her son, who happened to be working at a nearby sawmill. Not long after they left, the visitor’s brother-in-law came home and discovered the missing horse had been behind the barn the whole time.

The story of the “missing” horse brought a smile to Henry Schwartz’s face, so he shared it with the readers of The Budget, a community newspaper with an international following. Every week, Schwartz and hundreds more Budget writers – all of them Amish or Mennonite – share stories of humor, inspiration, sadness, and, most often, regular life, all from their own Anabaptist communities. On April 27, 2011, the day Schwartz’s piece about the missing horse appeared, the Budget’s correspondents filled 40 broadsheet newspaper pages with accounts of car crashes, farm accidents, weddings, births, illnesses, deaths, the weather, and the relationships on which their communities are built. That issue also included some unusual events, such as news about the creation of a new Anabaptist settlement and a story about an encounter with a non-Amish man who questioned an Amish practice. In The Budget, atypical events are considered newsworthy, to be sure, but so are happenings that many might consider routine, even mundane – listings of who (and who hasn’t) attended local worship services, stories of locals who returned from vacation, and mentions of whether it rained the previous week, for example.
The 121-year-old Budget is unusual for a U.S. community newspaper in that it publishes two editions that serve two distinct (although sometimes overlapping) audiences. Its local edition covers the town of Sugarcreek and nearby communities in northeastern Ohio, which has one of the largest concentrations of Amish communities in the nation. That local edition is a typical community newspaper, and is produced for the broader community rather than just for the Anabaptist subculture. The Budget also produces a separate national edition produced for and mailed to Amish and Mennonite readers across North America. As such, the national edition of The Budget is an atypical community newspaper in that it serves not a geographic community, but a dispersed community of shared interests. The two editions are fundamentally different in terms of appearance, content, and production procedures. The local edition is created by newspaper workers in the traditional fashion of many community newspapers — a professional journalist covers local news, community members contribute news items, and editors rigorously proofread and package that content. The national edition, on the other hand, is written exclusively by Amish and Mennonite “scribes”– volunteer writers who send in dispatches (often handwritten accounts sent through the mail) about life and happenings in Anabaptist communities all over the world. Those scribes face a few editorial constraints – overtly evangelistic writing is prohibited, for example – but by and large, they are free to write about whatever they like. Most pass along local information about the weather, church visits, people who have fallen ill, marriages, and other routine aspects of community life. Some pen longer dispatches that include colorful anecdotes about goings-on in their communities or reports of serious farm accidents. Photographs
are rare, and compared with other newspapers, there is little space for advertisements. In the words of the newspaper’s publisher, “the letters are what we’re selling” (K. Rathbun, personal communication, March 30, 2012).

At a time when many newspaper publishers are dealing with falling circulation numbers, many readers are still interested in buying those letters. In early 2012, The Budget’s national edition circulation was about 18,000, a number that has changed very little over the past three decades. Because of the culture and routines of Amish and Mennonite households and communities, it is expected that single issues are often shared among families and neighbors, although such sharing would be difficult to quantify.

A study of The Budget could be of interest to executives in the newspaper industry in that it provides an example of the ways media can be used to reach out to extended communities of former residents or residents who are compelled to leave the immediate geographic community for long periods of time (college students or military members, for example). Every small town has a diaspora of sorts – a dispersed group of people who still have personal ties to their old community. This study explores the ways in which one unusual community newspaper reaches its dispersed audience, and how it became the medium of choice for its audience.

This thesis explores the common themes of Amish and Mennonite life that appear in the hundreds of scribe letters published weekly in The Budget. It examines the variations in themes among letters from different sects and orders. It also compares The Budget’s scribe letters to other forms of Amish communication, such as church sermons and circle letters. The study is grounded in Benedict Anderson’s concept of “imagined
communities,” which supposed that communities are imagined because “the members of
even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or
even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (1983,
p. 6). Anderson’s study of national identity formation theorized that the idea of
“community” is based not on arbitrary geographic boundaries or personal relationships
with all other members, but instead on shared experiences or ideals. As is the case in a
nation, it would be impossible for all the members of an “Amish community” to
personally know each other. Instead, they come to identify their community and build
familiarity with each other through perceptions based on traits they imagine fellow
community members to have. Mass media, including niche publications such as the
national edition of *The Budget*, are important contributors to the formation and
maintenance of those perceptions and to the collective-mindedness that accompanies
them. Other scholarly works have viewed diaspora through Anderson’s lens, such as
Malkki’s 1992 study of Burundi refugees and Webb’s 2006 research on the formation of
an “imagined community” among rural, white, middle-class women who read Reiman
magazines such as *Taste of Home* and *Quick Cooking*. In examining *The Budget*, and the
history, values, and belief structures of Amish and Mennonite life, complex historical and
cultural issues arise that complicate the construction of imagined communities and raise
interesting questions about the roles the niche national newspaper plays in the lives of its
Amish and Mennonite readers.

By creating a place where hundreds of Amish and Mennonite writers can share
personal stories, seek out and give advice, and coalesce around certain beliefs, traditions,
and ideals, *The Budget* serves to maintain personal networks among an ever-growing Anabaptist diaspora. In the process of creating and maintaining those relationships, the newspaper establishes broader “imagined community” among a group of people who, paradoxically, place high premiums on personal familiarity and geographic proximity.

That is certainly the case with the Anabaptist faith: Since their inception, both the Amish and Mennonite belief systems have resisted any centralization, and instead encourage a great deal of autonomy for local sects (Kraybill, 2003a). Although there are some commonalities inspired by the central tenets of the faith, Amish church districts operate independently and each has its own *Ordnung*, or set of rules (Kraybill, 2003a). All faithful Amish men and women profess allegiances to God and place a heavy emphasis on family and neighbors, but are generally less inclined to identify with larger “communities” (such as states, provinces, or nations) for fear of tying themselves to worldly concerns (Smith, 1958). Given that Anabaptist community emphases are insular, one could surmise that the idea of a broader imagined Amish community would hold little appeal. However, the content and popularity of *The Budget*’s national edition seems to indicate otherwise. The newspaper serves as a virtual space where “over-the-back-fence” conversations take place among family members and former neighbors separated by hundreds of miles. *Budget* scribes facilitate that communion by sharing information and anecdotes that reinforce the central aspects of the Anabaptist belief system – a faith in God, the importance of family, and a commitment to community – but that also indicate the diversity of practices and rules among the many different sects within the broader community. Those expressions are proffered in a very personal, conversational
style that mirrors interpersonal communication norms among Amish and Mennonite people, and serves to reinforce a perceived familiarity among readers.

There is little research about Anabaptist media in general and about *The Budget* in particular. Three decades ago, Hostetler (1980) suggested that the newspaper existed to reflect Amish values and connect readers within Amish communities. More recently, Nolt (2008) wrote that they do more, serving “in fact [as] agents in the creation of that community” (p. 183). Neither Hostetler nor Nolt offered detailed descriptions of the rhetoric and semiotics of messages within the newspaper to create or maintain community, nor did their research explore how scribe letters communicate differences among the various sects.

This qualitative study of *The Budget* offers a glimpse of how Anabaptist life is portrayed in reader-submitted letters published in the national edition of *The Budget* and how an imagined community is formed. Using textual analysis informed by McKee (2003) and Fairclough (2003), and guided by the “imagined community” theoretical framework, this study explores common themes, ideals, and values expressed in scribes’ letters.

*The Budget* may not cause readers to unite in the same way Anderson envisioned in his research on the origins of nationalism. In fact, the notion of a broader “Amish nation” would run counter to the central tenets of the Anabaptist faith. However, through the reinforcement of a central belief system and the “mass ceremony” of reading (Anderson, 1983, p. 35), the newspaper does encourage a sense of familiarity among strangers, and that imagined familiarity is key to Anderson’s theory. As this research will
suggest, a number of contemporary societal developments have led to the widespread geographic distribution of Amish and Mennonite communities. Despite the geographic distances between various Anabaptist enclaves, readers of *The Budget* may, by their readership, express that they wish to maintain (or in many cases create) levels of familiarity that are fundamental to their value system. That sense of familiarity is further reinforced via the writings of the scribes, who are *de facto* representatives of each enclave. A deeper examination of the narratives within the texts of *The Budget* can add to the understanding of how community journalism can tie together people in a diaspora, and its findings can inform studies of other diasporas that use various media (online-only, print-only, or multimedia) to express and maintain community cohesion.
CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL GROUNDING

The analysis in this thesis will be primarily concerned with the construction of community identity by community members, primarily the concept of “imagined community.” In his study of nationalism, Benedict Anderson (1983) theorized that citizens of a country establish national identities based not on geographic boundaries but rather on shared cultural norms and ideals. Nations are imagined out of necessity “because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson, 1983, p. 6). Those socially constructed communions – based on perception of commonality, not arbitrary political boundaries – maintain the sense of belonging that individuals have to their states. Anderson described those collectives as “imagined communities.” This thesis focuses on the communion among the Anabaptist diaspora – Amish and Mennonite families bound together by common ideals but dispersed geographically due to economic and social factors. Diasporas in general, and the Anabaptist diaspora specifically, are discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

Anderson argued that any community larger than a tiny village (and perhaps even social collectives that small) was in fact imagined, because community members develop a kinship with one another through shared ideals, experiences, or beliefs – a “deep, horizontal comradeship” that forms regardless of actual inequalities or stark cultural differences that may exist within the group (Anderson, 1983, p. 7). Although Anderson’s research focused on national identities, the concept can and often is applied to other types of collectives in which most members of the community do not have direct contact with
one another. As Jenkins (2004) observed in his criticism of Anthony Cohen’s *The Symbolic Construction of Community*, “(t)he ‘community’ of locality and settlement is no less imagined than the ‘community’ of the *nation*, and no less symbolically constructed” (p. 114).

In one example of the use of Anderson’s theory, Malkki’s 1992 study of the way refugees think about national identity, refugees from the African Republic of Burundi were said to identify their “true nation” as “a ‘moral community’ being formed centrally by the ‘natives’ in exile.” The land of Burundi itself “was a mere state.” (p. 35). Their homeland, or community, was based on moral beliefs, not territorial lines. The refugees from Burundi in that study can be compared to Anabaptists in North America. The Amish, for example, strive to be “in the world, but not of the world” (Hostetler, 1980, p. 93), identifying not with man-made nations but instead with the kingdom of God.

Anderson (1983) suggested that the media – books and newspapers – can act as conduits for the creation of “national imagination” (p. 30). Print-capitalism, Anderson wrote, “made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways” (p. 36). His argument was similar to the one put forth by Berger and Luckmann, who suggested that newspaper reading “reaffirms the widest co-ordinates of the individual’s reality . . . . [I]t assures him that he is, indeed, in the most real world possible.” (1966, pp. 149-150).

Anderson made this argument about newspaper reading specifically:

> We know that particular morning and evening editions will overwhelmingly be consumed between this hour and that, only on this day, not that. . . . The significance of this mass ceremony . . . is paradoxical. It is performed in silent privacy, in the lair of the skull. Yet
each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion. Furthermore, this ceremony is incessantly repeated at daily or half-daily intervals throughout the calendar. What more vivid figure for the secular, historically clocked, imagined community can be envisioned? (1983, p. 35)

The idea of “imagining community” through the media has been well studied. For example, Johanningsmeier (2004) used the theory to suggest that debates over fiction in Sunday newspapers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries contributed to the creation of an “‘imagined political community’ bound together by common print experiences” (p. 110). During the time period covered in his study (1870-1910), clergy members and others criticized Sunday newspapers for including fictional stories that contributed to “the breakdown of the country’s moral and social order” (p. 92). By the 1890s, reading the Sunday newspaper had become “somewhat of a societal obsession” in New York City (p. 94), and given their large audiences, “Sunday newspapers undoubtedly had great cultural influence” (p. 94). Johanningsmeier suggested the fiction included in the newspapers and the controversy over it “undoubtedly influenced what [readers] made of the fiction texts printed in the pages of such newspapers” and he called for more research on the ways the mass-marketed newspaper fiction fostered imagined communities among readers (p. 110).

In another example, Webb (2006) studied magazines published by the Reiman company and concluded that the publishing company created an “imagined community” among its widely spread readership of rural, white middle-class women based on “traditional values, religion, and a valorization of country taste as ‘authentic’ expression”
As well as “a country aesthetic” (p. 872). At the time of Webb’s study, Reiman published sixteen magazines, including *Taste of Home* (with a circulation of 3.5 million), *Quick Cooking* (with a circulation of 2.8 million), and *Birds & Blooms* (with a circulation of 1.8 million) (Webb, 2006, p. 876). Like *The Budget*, Reiman magazines rely heavily on content submitted by readers. Through those letters, the magazines validate readers’ choices by “valorizing the ‘everyday’” and encouraging subscribers “to join a community that shares values and beliefs and that places the past and the future within the context of family and religion” (p. 875).

Advances in communication and transportation technologies have created “an altogether new condition of neighborliness, even with those most distant from ourselves” (Appadurai, 2003, p. 27). Appadurai argued that “the revolutions of print capitalism” Anderson wrote about were “only modest precursors to the world we live in now” (2003, p. 27). Building off of Anderson’s theory, Appadurai proposed a set of five different “imagined worlds” – “ethnoscapes” built on tourism, immigration, and other social movements; “technoscape” worlds built on technology; “financescapes” built on transnational business interests; “mediascapes” that are image-centered, narrative-based worlds developed through television, print, and electronic communication; and “ideoscapes” built on political or ideological concepts (2003, pp. 31-34). Appadurai argued that globalization occurs through those five paradigms, and that their perpetuation challenges the power of traditional nation states.

One might reasonably surmise that Amish and Mennonite readers of *The Budget* would fit into Appadurai’s ideoscape classification. Perhaps it could be argued that,
although the fundamental tenets of their faith are the same, different sects of Amish and Mennonite believers are too diverse to be considered members of a single ideoscape. If that is indeed the case, the logical extension of that argument is that *The Budget* and similar publications create a mediascape that encompasses the broader Anabaptist community.

**Individual Aspects of Imagined Communities**

In his book *Imagined Communities*, Anderson (1983) suggested that the idea of stable, firm (albeit imagined) social entities helps individuals cope with the uncertainty of life and death by allowing them to develop connections to a broader social being. Anderson put it this way: “An American will never meet, or even know the names of more than a handful of his 240,000,000-odd fellow-Americans. He has no idea of what they are up to at any one time. But he has complete confidence in their steady, anonymous, simultaneous activity” (1983, p. 26). Anderson’s sense of a “sociological organism moving calendrically through homogeneous, empty time” (p. 26) provides a sense of assured stability, a “national narrative” to be “invoked in moments of social contradiction and crisis” (Silberstein, 2003, p. 322).

Though a broader imagined identity, “the individual is liberated from solely local affiliations and promised an almost limitless collective identity” (Silberstein, 2003, p. 323). In a study of “imagined community” in gender-specific media, Dollase (2003) suggested that fantasy stories published in “Shojo Gaho” magazine in the early twentieth century used the “code of sentimental emotion” to foster an imagined community among otherwise unacquainted Japanese girls (p. 731). The study analyzed the fantasy text
Hanamonogatari, which appeared in the magazine. The stories were short and had no distinct plot developments. They were more like fairy tales, Dollase wrote, dominated by “excessive emotionalism and romanticism . . . . Through sadness and sentimentalism, the readers receive a positive interpretation of sophisticated beauty and purity of mind” (p. 729). Girls who read the stories “indulge in their fantasy world and create a pseudo-reality by performing a reconstructed identity, that of Shojo” (p. 732).

Webb (2006) recognized the individual-level aspects of imagined community – the ways in which individuals build and modify collective identities – when she suggested that Reiman’s niche magazines can “nurture a particular orientation toward the world and function as a guide for living. The magazines combine taste, beliefs, and values in a seamless package that valorizes the life the subscriber lives” (p. 876). Membership in Reiman’s faith- and family-based imagined community “eases tensions between the ideal and the real” and allows the reader to make sense of the world “by making the world feel comfortable and seemingly familiar” (Webb, 2006, p. 876). In the magazines, “readers validate their life choices and gain comfort in a world that presents threatening options” (p. 872).

In their exploration of the ways in which readers of two North American alternative magazines constructed and maintained imagined communities via letters to the editor, Reader and Moist (2008) suggested that “a close reading of magazine [letters to the editor] can do more than reveal a collective sense of identity or of ‘core’ values. It can also demonstrate how individuals within the collective participate in the construction and modification of shared values in a much more nuanced way” (p. 827). Their analysis of
Small Farmer’s Journal, a magazine focusing on small-scale, sustainable agriculture, and Shambhala Sun, which focuses on the “engaged Buddhism” movement, suggested that letter writers used the forum to establish unique identities or roles within the broader “community” of readers. “The act of writing [a letter] itself elevates the writer from being merely part of an aggregate (the “audience”) to being an active participant” (Reader & Moist, 2008, p. 834).

It is important to note that imagined communities are continuously made and remade, so what it means to be an American, a New Yorker, a member of the Amish community, or part of any other imagined community is in a relatively constant state of flux. As Berlant (1991) observed, “people are not naturally ‘the people’ in their local affiliations” (cited in Silberstein, 2003, p. 323). A community’s continued existence is dependent on the active involvement of its members, and attempts to create community through the media fail if potential members are not willing, active participants (Reader & Moist, 2008). The development of kinship, a sense of home, and other “natural ties” are vital to the creation of imagined community (Anderson, 1983, p. 143), and individual interpretations of those factors can change over time.

One exploration of an evolving imagined community, Silberstein’s (2003) research on media coverage of American football star O.J. Simpson’s murder trial, suggested that the transformation of Simpson from beloved public figure to reviled murder defendant likewise transformed the way Americans thought about race and threatened “the utopian image of national [American] identity” (p. 325). Threatened, but not deconstructed; in the end, Silberstein wrote, “[i]n the popular press, individual and
community countermemory gives way to the (re)construction of the national identity. The narrativized national person is restored” (p. 327). When Vukov (2003) examined the ways in which individual imagined perceptions of desirable and undesirable immigrants served to structure Canadian immigration policies, he noted that media spectacles around immigration issues show “the ways in which immigration evokes strong political affect around commonsense imaginings of national belonging, of who should be included and excluded in the national community” (Vukov, 2003, p. 340).

That interplay among media, individuals, and a broader imagined community brings us back to a consideration of The Budget’s position in the Anabaptist world. John A. Hostetler, Donald Kraybill, and other scholars with expertise on Anabaptist culture have written that The Budget and Amish correspondent newspapers reflect Amish values and connect readers within an Amish community. Nolt (2008) argued that the newspapers do more, serving “in fact [as] agents in the creation of that community” (p. 183). Relying on Anderson’s concept of imagined communities, Nolt wrote that The Budget and Die Botschaft, another broadly distributed Amish correspondent newspaper, turn people in unfamiliar places into neighbors based on a shared set of values. The newspapers write about topics that normalize traditional aspects of Old Order Amish life (such as the use of horse-drawn buggies) and avoid notions that do not (such as shifts from agricultural economies to manufacturing and trade economies). That approach allows the newspapers to normalize traditional Old Order ways of living, Nolt wrote (2008, pp. 183-185).

Although Nolt’s observations are insightful, he offers little explanation of just how The Budget and Die Botschaft go about establishing the social norms that promote
Old Order life over more liberal ideals. Other scholars who use Anderson’s work have been similarly criticized; although imagined communities are frequently discussed in academic literature, comparatively little attention is paid to how they are formed (Webb, 2006). By exploring the text of *The Budget*, this thesis will contribute to a greater understanding of how media contribute to the formation, maintenance, and evolution of imagined communities at the individual and group levels.
CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

Niche Media

Niche publications and the ethnic press provide glimpses of life within a community (either geographic or experience-based) as seen through the eyes of members of that community (Galindo, 1994). As such, they are not dissimilar from the mainstream community press, which practices “specialization within generalization” (Janowitz, 1967, p. 5) by writing for specialized groups instead of the more generalized audiences pursued by mass media. The role of the community press in society has been well studied. Essentially, the community press serves to chronicle “the everyday lives of ordinary people,” as Pulitzer Prize-winning weekly newspaper editor and co-publisher Bernard L. Stein observed (Lauterer, 2006, p. 3). Community media practice the “‘reproduction and representation of common (shared) interests’ and ‘the community serves as a frame of reference for a shared interpretation’” (Milan, 2008, p. 25). The community press serves as a “guard dog” for the local societal structure (Tichenor, Donohue, & Olien, 1980). Community media serve to maintain the current social structure by “drawing attention to what is acceptable and not acceptable within the dominant norms and values of the community” (Viswanath & Arora, 2000, pp. 41-42; see also Tichenor, Donohue, & Olien, 1980). They reinforce the rights and values of those people who make up the communities they serve (Janowitz, 1967).

Niche publications such as the national edition of The Budget speak to communities built around shared values and lifestyles, not necessarily shared geography. In her study of magazines focused on rural American women, Webb observed that niche
publications are able to build communities based on common interests “through narrative structures and rhetorical strategies” (2006, p. 875). Like *The Budget*, the Reiman company magazines studied by Webb relied heavily on reader-submitted materials; Webb found the model to reinforce common beliefs centered on the positive aspects of rural living. By illustrating a world that was “comfortable and seemingly familiar” (p. 876), the magazines helped readers make sense of their world. Delgado (1998) observed that letters to the editor published in *Low Rider Magazine*, a monthly publication for people who are interested in modified automobiles and car shows, served as expressions of personal and ethnic identity among Latino writers. “Arguably, few things are more personal than ethnic identity or cultural pride. . . . The magazine thus serves as a place where the social, cultural, and technical discourses associated with lowriding can find their way into print” (Delgado, 1998, p. 425).

The accommodation of individuality plays a key role in the construction and maintenance of community, and in the media’s role in those processes. In *The Division of Labor in Society*, Durkheim ([1893] 1984) suggested two distinct types of social solidarity: a “mechanical solidarity,” which structures society around commonalities, or a “collective or common consciousness” (pp. 38-39); and a more individualistic “organic solidarity” in which the collective is united by individual relationships. The “mechanical society” is homogeneous, the “organic society” is heterogeneous, and as individuality develops and communities become more complex, inclinations move away from the former and toward the latter. The concept of “structural pluralism” also speaks to the expression of individuality in homogenous and heterogeneous communities. It suggests
that the more diverse a community is, the more likely it becomes that disagreements will
be debated publicly, such as in letters to the editor in local newspapers and similar forums
or in news articles that focus on conflicts. In smaller, more homogeneous communities,
where newspapers often are viewed as larger parts of the community social structure,
journalists may tend to be more focused on reporting consensus, shying away from
stories that could cause or aggravate conflict (Tichenor, Olien, & Donohue, 1980; see
also Donohue, Olien, & Tichenor, 1989; Harry, 2001; and Viswanath & Arora, 2000).
Janowitz (1967) suggested that local “community press” outlets serve primarily to
promote consensus and “reinforce commonality rather than emphasize differences,” a
notion emphasized by a number of more recent researchers (for an analysis, see Lowrey
et al., 2008). Ellis (2006) argued that people in tight-knit communities bound by interest
or experience are more inclined to communicate and thus bond with others who have
similar opinions and views: “The organization of diaspora is constructed by a stable
pattern of associations, beliefs, and feelings. . . . The more diasporas are homophilous,
the more they are organized” (p. 83). As a community grows more heterogeneous, the
demand for that consensus is believed to lessen and the effects of structural pluralism are
expected to ebb. In their study of the ethnic press in America, Viswanath and Arora
(2000) suggested that increasing immigration results in growingly complex, diverse
ethnic communities that rely less on traditional community media that focus on broad
commonality (p. 43). They elaborated:

If the ethnic community is relatively small and homogeneous, it is likely
that the community elite are likely to be reluctant to wash their dirty
laundry in the press. They may want to maintain their image as hard-
working ethnics who are trying to succeed in the “new world” and may
see any coverage of internal conflict as harmful to the long-term interests and stability of the community. On the other hand, if the ethnic community is pluralistic, its role may be analogous to that of news medium in a more heterogeneous system. . . . This puts the medium in an ambiguous, if not countervailing pluralistic condition. Given this dual role of social control and strengthening of ethnic identity, and the reporting on and in a pluralistic system, one might expect the ethnic newspaper to give high attention to conflict. At the same time, it might pay attention to conflicts that do not threaten the fundamental stability of the system in which it operates. (Viswanath & Arora, 2000, p. 46)

Researchers in Australia have established a line of work examining the roles of indigenous niche publications from several perspectives. Studies have explored overall examinations of indigenous media (Hartley & McKee, 2000), the ways in which indigenous media counteract overly simple portrayals of indigenous people in Australia’s mainstream press (see Rose, 1996; Meadows, 1998, cited in Budarick & King, 2008), and the ways in which an indigenous newspaper can challenge ideological constructions (Budarick & King, 2008). In their study of the Koori Mail, a newspaper for indigenous Australians, Budarick and King observed that the Mail could lobby to challenge “ideological positions regarding racial identity and imagined racial communities” to create a view of social and racial issues that differed from that offered by Australia’s mainstream press (2008, p. 356). The Mail is run by a cooperative of five Aboriginal communities and was the first Aboriginal paper to attempt to cover Aboriginal matters from a national perspective (Rose, 1996, p. xxxi). In its first issue, the newspaper pledged to be “a voice for Kooris everywhere” and to provide “information on issues important to Kooris,” and “a Koori perspective and greater detail that is generally available in the media” (Rose, 1996, p. 165).
The Aboriginal people in Australia have gravitated toward television and radio because those forms of communication more closely reflect their oral traditions (Rose, 1996, p. xx). Many Aboriginal people are suspicious of print journalism because of its lack of face-to-face exchange and because of the potential filtering influence of white editors and publishers. Still, several indigenous newspapers have flourished in Australia. News in nineteenth century indigenous publications was often transmitted through letter writing or petition papers (Rose, 1996, p. xxvii). The voice of those newspapers was typically more like that of a local storyteller than the “terse, impersonal, inverted pyramid style of print news writing that is generally seen in most mainstream papers and many of the community or ethnic newspapers which try to emulate them” (Rose, 1996, p. xxxiii).

Although (and perhaps because) much of the non-indigenous population is unaware of its existence, the indigenous press in Australia is “an influential cultural resource” (Meadows, cited in Hartley and McKee, 2000, p. 166). It serves to defend against misrepresentations from outside media, educate outsiders about Aboriginal ways, and advocate for indigenous people. Just as importantly, it exists to develop a kinship among readers and listeners, and to maintain Aboriginese traditions and language. In any pluralistic society, the maintenance of distinct community identities is vital to the social structure’s stability and sustainability (Verhelst, 1990). Nooley Preston, a broadcaster with Wangki Yupurnanapurru Radio, described the role of indigenous media this way:

We speak about everyday stories, but we don’t want to lose our language. We’re going to keep our language strong in the radio so we can teach the new generation . . . . If I passed away, who’s going to teach our young children? Nobody. But we’re going to teach our children. We’re going to put this story in the cassette or in the paper written down, that the new generation can read it when we’ve passed away . . . . A new generation will
come up, look at these words, and say, “Oh, it’s a story from that old man”. They will come up and write them down in the paper. That’s how we have to keep our culture strong and the language today. (Hartley & McKee, 2000, pp. 172-173)

Many scholars have explored the development of identity in diasporic communities — communities that are bound by common culture but whose members have become dispersed geographically. Examples of diasporas include the Jewish diaspora outside of Israel (see DellaPergola et al., 2005; Sheffer, 2005) and the large Chinese diaspora in the United States (Shi, 2005). In most diasporas, members hold the belief . . .

that the expression of their own sense of uniqueness, and consequently the image they want to project, are critical for maintaining their ethno-national identities, as well as for stressing the more essential . . . features of their national entities in a world that demonstrates antagonism toward “others,” including ethnic minorities, migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and ethno-national diasporas. (Sheffer, 2005, p. 3)

Although its European roots can be seen in facets of Anabaptist life (such as language), the Anabaptist diaspora does not coalesce around a national identity. It is instead united by a spiritual identity. Identity, as Hall (1996) observed, is always under construction, and that applies to collective identity as well as individual identity. It hinges largely on “what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves . . . [T]he belongingness, the ‘suturing into the story’ through which identities arise is, partly, in the imaginary (as well as the symbolic) and therefore, always, partly constructed in fantasy, or at least within a fantasmatic field” (Hall, 1996, p. 4). For diasporas, the realization of an ever-evolving identity – a “diaspora aesthetic” – requires a mediator “to constitute us as new kinds of subjects, and thereby enable us to
discover places from which to speak” (Hall, 1990, pp. 236-237, see also Shi, 2005). Media are key to the dissemination of what Georgiou (2006) called “an ideology of singular and common identity shared globally . . . . This ideology is rarely developed as a distinct political project; rather, it is reproduced in essentializing assumptions within the media about a sharing of common language, morality, interests and cultural capital across dispersed audiences” (p. 73). Knowledge of the sameness is importance to identity, but so too is knowledge of differences: “You know that you are what everybody else on the globe is not,” and that knowledge helps the individual place outsiders as well as him/herself (Hall, 1997, p. 174; see also Hall, 1990).

The Media’s Role in a Diaspora

By their very nature, diasporas require various forms of mediated communication so that dispersed individuals or enclaves can remain connected. Globalization, mobility, and deterritorialization have complicated the tasks of identity maintenance and of constructing and maintaining communities in the traditional geographic sense, and a number of scholars have studied and theorized about the media’s role in the mediation of identity in a globalized world. The idea of diasporization – “the relocation of people in space and their ability, desire and persistence to sustain connections and commonality” (Georgiou, 2006, p. 2) – forces society to rethink what is meant by “nation” and “nationalism” and realigns the relationship between citizens and their nations (Braziel & Mannur, 2003). Diasporic populations worldwide – Sudanese, Chinese, Jewish, Iranian, and others – wrestle to achieve inclusion in new home countries and to maintain a sense
of connection to the motherland, creating a sort of “schizophrenic” existence (Bernal, 2006, p. 161).

Anderson (1983) observed that the sharing of common media is key to the maintenance of national identities, or what he termed “imagined community” (p. 35). Media (that is, forms of communication that transcend interpersonal communication) “have become institutions and organized mechanisms of great significance for constructing identities in local, national and transnational contexts within modernity” that play “a growing role in defining the meanings, uses and appropriations of cultural and social space” (Georgiou, 2006, p. 11-12). When media become grounded in particular social settings (as appears to be the case with *The Budget* among Amish readers), then media come to be intertwined with group identities, and changes in the media can serve to alter the dynamic of the diaspora (Georgiou, 2006). Media and other cultural products produced by and for diasporic peoples serve to combat globalized homogeneity: They promote “the (re-) creation of alternative imaginative space alongside existing mappings” that offer diasporas an avenue for “‘reterritorialising’ and ‘re-embedding’ their identities in other imaginings of space” (Karim, 2003, p. 9), “enhancing a sense of diaspora consciousness” while at the same time “catalyzing and accelerating processes of cultural change . . . hardening some boundaries while opening up others (Gillespie, 2000, p. 166, see also Durham, 2004). Media such as radio also can help establish a sort of mediated local space for diasporic listeners, grounding listeners’ imagination in familiar places. They “allow audiences to imagine the media as their own and the mediated local space as
starting in the local radio headquarters and including their home and the local community center” (Georgiou, 2006, p. 76; see also Shi, 2005).

The diasporic media exists as a valuable cultural reference, creating cultural symbols that can reinforce ideals and emphasize the similarities and differences that bind diasporas together (Georgiou, 2006). The ties need not be based on geography – generational or genealogical links, shared memory, common history, and cultural traditions can be equally as vital to maintenance of diasporas (Boyarin & Boyarin, 2003). By establishing a set of “common reference points,” (Shi, 2005, p. 66), diasporic media facilitate socialization among consumers in the diaspora, and between those consumers and the homeland, creating “placeless cultures” (Shi, 2005, p. 56) around which individual identities and imagined communities can be built.

Along with the establishment of social and business networks and the retention of the native language, scholars have placed the existence of native-language media among the entities vital to the sustenance of diasporic collectives (Sun, 2006; Suryadinata, 1997). Through its role as a negotiator and presenter of identity and commonality in a diaspora, media allow communities to free themselves from spatial constraints. At the same time, the inclusion of geographically local news in ethnic media can allow individuals “regularly and even predictably” to imagine themselves to be members of broader diasporic communities (Sun, 2006, p. 1). They offer a cultural space in which familiar ideas and values can be found in an otherwise unfamiliar place (Zhou et al., 2006). Expression of identity necessitates “a place where I can speak my language, buy my foodstuffs and my music, and express my faith with others . . .” (Husband, 2000, p.
The media can “serve to affirm social and cultural diversity and, moreover, provide crucial spaces in and through which imposed identities or the interests of others can be resisted, challenged and changed” (Cottle, 2000, p. 2).

Refugees or newcomers to a host country can use the host country’s media to assimilate into the society and become acquainted to a new culture – for example, children’s programming and soap operas can help a newcomer become familiar with a country’s language (Elias, 2008). Diasporic media also exist to defend the sense of “home” and its traditions from the encroachments of outsiders. As it is for the Amish, communication among Australia’s Aboriginal population has historically centered on oral traditions. Aboriginal people, historically, “were intimately and inextricably linked to the land. Tied to this notion of ‘belonging to country’ or ‘owning country’ are the knowledge about particular aspects of the land – its form, wildlife, plants, people, tribes and their collective experience – and the stories which describe these and value and make sense of them” (Rose, 1996, p. xix). To transmit that all-important knowledge, some Aboriginal people in contemporary Australia have turned to modern media – television, video, and radio – in part to counteract “the devastating effect which the European invasion and subsequent social upheaval had on traditional Aboriginal communication methods and networks,” namely Aboriginal “songlines” (Rose, 1996, pp. xix-xx). Ethnic groups often shy away from dominant “mainstream” media in their locales because they doubt their ability to cover ethnic issues fairly and without stereotyping (Ogan, 2001). In the case of the indigenous people of Australia, European-style media have historically done a poor job of representing Aboriginal people, perpetuating “racist and erroneous stereotypes . . .
More and more Aboriginal people have come to the conclusion that an indigenous media network, which they control and produce, is an important way of rectifying these problems” (Rose, 1996, p. xx).

Diasporic media often project senses of sameness and difference that aim to provoke feelings of commonality and community in consumers, constantly defining notions of “Us” and “Other” (Georgiou, 2006). Georgiou (2006) argued that diasporic media compete with mainstream media to construct those notions; others have found diasporic news outlets serve as supplements, not competitors, in the identity formation process (e.g. Zhou & Cai, 2002). The combination of assimilation and preservation provided by the ethnic press helped shape the orientation of home among the Chinese immigrants in North America studied by Zhou and Cai (2002), but it also served to limit their interaction with others by creating such a strong sense of home. Their research found ethnic media “[a]s a social institution . . . reinforce immigrants’ sense of ‘we-ness’ to the exclusion of ‘other-ness’ and lower their incentive to expand their social and personal networks to include members of other racial and ethnic groups” (p. 70).

Even the act of using diasporic media can have meaning. Media use can become a routine act that helps bind members of a community – people consume media together, or they do so separately and then come together to discuss it (Georgiou, 2006). Galindo (1994) observed that writing for the Amish newspaper Die Botschaft signaled an affiliation with one’s local sect, while reading the newspaper signified affiliation with “the larger Amish community” (p. 80). In her study of Germans and Israeli Jews who immigrated back to their native countries during the collapse of the Soviet Union, Elias
(2008) observed negative social consequences associated with the use of native-language media. The Soviet refugees returning to Germany were pressured to avoid Russian-language media to prove their “authenticity” as Germans (p. 144). In contrast, “Israel encourages a more tolerant approach toward the Russian language and culture, liberating the returning immigrants from the need to prove their ‘Jewishness’ by abstaining from media in their mother tongue” (Elias, 2008, p. 144).

In her study of Iranian diasporic media in London, Sreberny (2000) observed that examination of such media should consider the symbiotic relationship between the media and other aspects of diasporic community organizations. “[S]imply locationally, even within the single city of London, it appears that there is no singular Iranian community but a number of more locally based communities which represent different waves of immigration, different political loyalties and class backgrounds . . . such empirical work shows the elusiveness of a singular Iranian community and evidence of many overlapping and not mutually exclusive subcommunities” (pp. 189-190). Diasporic media, Sreberny reasoned, can help readers relocate within their new cultural space, “exacerbate feelings of dislocation” from a homeland, or bind readers and viewers to a transnational community, “the truly diasporic vision” (p. 193).

Electronic media such as the Internet and satellite television are better equipped than print media to unite diasporas; in fact, because of the difficulty often involved in reaching audiences, diasporic media often embrace new technologies quickly (see Georgiou, 2006; Tettey, 2009; Karim, 2003). The emergence of new media focused on developments in countries such as Eritrea have become main sources of information for
far-flung diasporas, creating mediascapes in line with Appadurai’s (1991) model and “helping them to keep abreast with events, issues, and conditions in their home countries at the same time as they provide avenues for civic interaction” (Tettey, 2009, p. 144). In his study of the Eritrean diaspora’s use of electronic media, Bernal (2006) argued that the Internet was much more than a tool for transmission of information. Extending the notion of the “public sphere,” Bernal wrote that, for the Eritrean diaspora, the Internet created an emotion-laden “transnational public sphere where [participants] produce and debate narratives of history, culture, democracy and identity” (2006, p. 161).

The availability of technology also reconstituted a participatory form of journalism that places more of the newsgathering duty in the hands of the news consumer. The growing ubiquity of online communication is often argued to be the impetus for what has come to be called “citizen journalism” – that is, news content being generated by members of the audience rather than by trained professional journalists. While the technology that facilitates it in much contemporary media is new, the concept itself is an old cultural practice. Because the national edition of The Budget relies on “participatory journalism,” and has for more than a century, a consideration of the pertinent literature is appropriate.

Participatory Journalism

Newspapers have a long history of encouraging reader participation. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, newspapers in England and the American colonies sometimes left blank space on one page; the extra room allowed readers to write in their own comments and send the publication on to acquaintances (Hermida, 2011, p. 13). The
professionalization of journalism all but ended this practice in most print newspapers (Stephens, 2008, cited in Hermida, 2011). However, advances in technology and changes in media culture and economics have resulted in an increasing interest in user-generated content through “participatory journalism,” which is also sometimes called “citizen journalism” or “grassroots journalism” (see Glaser, 2006; Gillmor, 2004). Websites such as CNN’s iReport invite citizens to submit video and photographs, and the network then airs some of the content (Briggs, 2010). The “pro-am” journalism outlet NowPublic pays citizens for photographs of breaking news, which NowPublic distributes through the Associated Press (Briggs, 2010). Other examples of the practice include comment sections on online stories, citizen blogs, and the distribution of news through social networking websites (Hermida, 2011) that allow readers to take an active role in the production of news content. Participatory journalism represents an interactive conversation among members of a community, as opposed to the one-way conversation of traditional media (Min, 2005).

Interactivity is key to harnessing a degree of group-level intelligence that creates new “town squares” around shared interests (McCarthy, 2005). Those collaborative efforts give groups of citizens the ability to recast mainstream news coverage in a more human light, as they did following bombings in London in 2005 (Allan, 2007). The changing gatekeeping standards also help construct what Castell (2007) called a system of “mass self-communication,” a communication model that is “self-generated in content, self-directed in emission, and self-selected in reception by the many that communicate with many” (p. 248). In a more small-group or individualist sense, the emergence of mass
self-communication, Castell argued, “offers an extraordinary medium for social movements and rebellious individuals to build their autonomy and confront the institutions of society in their own terms and around their own projects” (p. 249).

Content generated by readers in a participatory journalism environment is “situational and contextual, as it usually brings together groups of people based on interest and opportunity” (Quandt, 2011, p. 164). Readers-as-journalists can be seen as “communities of customers” who will likely remain loyal to the product and advance business interests, and they also can be viewed as a collective peer community developed around horizontal communication rather than traditional top-down media messaging (Heinonen, 2011). Mark Maley, online editor of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel’s MyCommunityNOW project, said citizen journalism gives people “a chance to actively participate in how their community is being covered and to interact with others in their community” (Briggs, 2010, pp. 90-91). MyCommunityNOW is a digital platform that allows audience members to self-publish. Observed Maley: “Sometimes a small . . . user-submitted story about a new business in town can get four or five times as many page views as a staff-written story about the city’s budget crunch or a more ‘serious’ issue. I’ve found that we can learn something about how we cover a community if we pay attention to what kind of news people are submitting to us” (Briggs, 2010, p. 91).

Kenneth Neil Cukier, a technology correspondent for The Economist in London, lauded participatory journalism as a “reformational movement” within the media:

[T]he Internet is affecting journalism just as the printing press affected the Church – people are bypassing the sacrosanct authority of the journalist in the same way as Luther asserted that individuals could have a direct relationship with God without the intermediary of the priest. The Internet
has disintermediated middlemen in other industries, why should journalism be immune? (Glaser, 2006)

Although the national edition of *The Budget* is a print product and not an electronic one, Cukier’s analogy is especially pertinent to this study. Given the history of the Anabaptist movement, particularly its oppositional stance toward active civic involvement, its inclination toward congregational independence, and its arm’s-length approach toward non-Anabaptists (each of which is discussed in more detail later in this chapter), it would stand to reason that consumers of an Anabaptist news product would be more inclined to use a medium that would minimize outside gatekeeping functions. While the newspaper is edited, paginated, and printed by non-Amish newspaper workers, policies at *The Budget* minimize the outside editorial influence of “middlemen” on scribe letters (newspaper policies are discussed in more detail in Chapter 4).

The Anabaptists

McKee (2003) suggests an approach to textual analysis that is based on an “attempt to understand the likely interpretations of texts made by people who consume them” (p. 2). That approach requires the researcher to understand the cultural distinctions of the intended audience. As McKee put it, “you can't do anything with a text until you establish its context . . . . Even within nations, various different identity subcultures can also have distinct enough sense-making strategies to produce quite different definitions of a text” (p. 65). In the case of this thesis, the context for the analysis requires an in-depth understanding of Amish and Mennonite culture.

Amish and Mennonite roots can be traced to earlier times, but the Anabaptist faith was born during the European Protestant Reformation of the 1500s. Over time, the faith
splintered, evolved, and crossed the Atlantic Ocean, settling in southeastern Pennsylvania and spreading across North America. Although often lumped together under the general umbrella of “the Amish,” the groups and subgroups within the Anabaptist faith are distinct, such that different sects may live in relatively close proximity but maintain their differences. In the Americas, the Anabaptists are largely found in four church families (Kraybill, 2003b):

- The Mennonites: The followers of Menno Simons took his name to name their sect in the 1540s and kept the label as they migrated out of Switzerland. Today, Mennonite churches can be found in the United States and many other countries, making up “the largest and most complicated family in the Anabaptist world” (Kraybill, 2003b, 14). Largely, they fall into one of three categories, based on their assimilation into the non-Mennonite world: Old Order Mennonites, Conservative Mennonites, and Assimilated Mennonites.

- The Amish: The Amish division formed nearly 170 years after the Anabaptist movement began. Its founder, Jacob Ammann, sought change and a greater purity in the Swiss Anabaptist church, and clashes with church leaders led to a major split in the Anabaptist movement. There are four general types: Old Order Amish (who in 2003 accounted for about 85 percent of the Amish population), New Order Amish, Beachy Amish, and Amish Mennonites. The Old Order Amish, the most orthodox group, are typically identified by their clothes, beards on men and bonnets on women, and their use of horse-drawn buggies for transportation. Diversity exists even among the Old Order Amish; for example, the “ultra-
traditional” Swartzentruber Amish reject some technology that other Old Order Amish accept, such as indoor bathrooms and natural gas refrigeration (Nolt, 1992, p. 221).

• The Hutterites: This group formed in 1528, early in the Anabaptist movement. After facing bitter persecution, the Hutterites fled to Russia in 1770 and came to the United States in the late 1800s. They live in large, communal, agricultural colonies largely segregated from the outside world.

• The Brethren: The German Baptist Brethren formed in 1708. They embraced many of the religious ideals of the early Anabaptists, such as adult baptism and the separation of church and state, but incorporated religious aspects from Pietism as well.

Smaller Mennonite groups have also historically had presences in North America, including the Reformed Mennonite Church; the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite (also called the Holderman Mennonites); Old Colony Mennonites; and the United Missionary Church (Dyck, 1967).

History

The formal Anabaptist movement dates to the sixteenth century, a time of radical political, economic, and religious unrest in Europe. International commerce brought on economic ills, food supplies dwindled as nations’ populations grew, and the cost of land skyrocketed. Catholicism dominated the continent’s religious and political landscapes, but it was becoming a “scapegoat for the social ills of society” (Hostetler, 1980, p. 26). Reformers such as Martin Luther insisted that the key to salvation was individual faith,
not church sacraments. Luther would become the recognized leader of the Protestant Reformation, which produced new churches that differed from the Catholic Church in varying degrees. Although they differed from the Catholic Church in many regards, some of the new groups held on to aspects of Catholicism. For example, the Lutheran faith retained a modified form of the Catholic mass, and the Reformed church (instituted by Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin) still believed in the concepts of infant baptism and the unity of church and state (see Hostetler, 1980; Smith, 1950; Nolt, 1992; Kraybill, 2003b).

Among those new religious groups, the Anabaptists were “clearly the extreme Left” (Smith, 1950, p. 2). The movement originated in Zurich, Switzerland; its early members belonged to a radical branch of the Zwinglianism religious movement but were unsatisfied with the degree and speed of religious reform. The small group believed salvation could be obtained only through individual faith, which made God’s grace possible. The name “Christian,” they reasoned, only applied to those who made a conscious decision to follow the teachings of Jesus Christ. That belief was firmly at odds with the Catholic practice of entrance into the church through infant baptism, which the Anabaptists staunchly opposed. Because infants did not enter the world with knowledge of good and evil, the Anabaptists reasoned, they could not have sins and did not need baptism. Instead, they argued, the Biblical Gospels taught that adults should be baptized to become Christians, a practice that separated them from the Zwingalian church. The Zwingalian church labeled the group “Anabaptists,” which translates “rebaptizers,” but the separatists rejected that name because they believed their first baptisms (the ones they received as infants) to be invalid. Instead, they called each other “Brethren” (Smith,
The Anabaptists’ first formal baptisms happened at a small service in a Swiss home in 1525, and Anabaptists continued to practice adult re-baptism, although authorities considered it seditious (Hostetler, 1980).

Anabaptists came to be known for their rejection of infant baptism, but other aspects of their faith clashed with Catholicism and the beliefs of other Protestant groups. The deeper issue that separated them involved centralized power. The Anabaptists believed religious activities should be free of government control, and that the Bible should be the sole authority on salvation issues such as baptism. Their churches were self-governing. Because they challenged the unity of church and state, early Anabaptists faced exile, imprisonment, and death. Felix Manz, one of the first Swiss Brethren, was drowned in the Limmat River because he refused to recant his beliefs. Over the next century, more executions would follow (Smith, 1950). The stories of those persecuted for their Anabaptist beliefs were recorded and compiled into a book called *Martyrs Mirror*, which has more than 1,000 pages. The scourge of persecution led many Anabaptists to develop a deep distrust of society, a distain for government, and a tendency toward separation from the outside world (Nolt, 1992).

During a secret meeting in 1527, Anabaptist leaders chartered a declaration of “Brotherly Union,” which would later come to be known as the Schleitheim Articles. The seven articles embodied the ideals of the faith (Hostetler, 1980, pp. 28-29). Those guidelines, which are still central to the Amish faith today, included:

- An emphasis on adult baptism;

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1 According to Smith, the Swiss Zwinglians used the word “Widertraufer” (“rebaptizers”) to refer to the separatist group. In other parts of Europe, variations of the name became common. “Anabaptist” was the label used in Latin countries and in England.
• The practice of “banning” Christians who fell into sin and would not change their ways;
• The tradition of the “breaking of the bread,” a Christian ritual that honored the death of Christ;
• Separation from the evil of the world that included dedication to nonviolence;
• The establishment of local church leaders, or “shepherds”;
• A firm separation of church and state; and
• A rejection of the practice of swearing oaths.

Although practitioners were persecuted, the Anabaptist faith spread across Europe in the 1520s and 1530s. As it grew, it fractured. In 1534, an Anabaptist movement in Munster rejected the stance on nonviolence and staged a takeover of the German town, persecuting adults who refused baptism until the Anabaptist splinter group lost control of the town in early 1535. The events in Munster had been carried out by a small separatist group that had rejected the central Anabaptist teaching of nonviolence, but their actions led to more severe, widespread persecution of all Anabaptists (Nolt, 1992). During that time of struggle, a former Dutch Catholic priest named Menno Simons became a key figure in the Anabaptist movement. In 1536, Simons denounced the violence at Munster events, renounced the Catholic Church, and joined the Anabaptist movement. He and other Dutch Anabaptist leaders went about rebuilding the Anabaptist church. Simons was especially adamant about the practice of nonviolence, and the need to ban the unfaithful (Smith, 1950). His influence was such that many northern Anabaptists adopted his name, calling themselves “Mennonites” (see Nolt, 1992; Smith, 1950).
Because Switzerland was dominated by the Reformed church, Mennonites there continued to face persecution for centuries. Over time, Swiss Mennonites began to settle into mountain valleys and pursue agrarian, sectarian lifestyles. There, a Swiss Mennonite elder named Jacob Ammann would advocate for reforms in the 1690s that would result in the Amish branch of the Swiss Mennonites. Ammann advocated for the twice-yearly observation of communion (it had been observed only once annually) and pushed for the consistent practices of foot washing and the social avoidance of those who had been excommunicated from the church. He also preached for a more fierce separation from the outside world, for more strict discipline, for the wearing of simpler clothing (he was against the use of buttons, for example), and against the trimming of beards. His followers created a new sect of the Mennonite faith, the Amish Mennonites (Hostetler, 1980).

Persecution continued to plague Swiss Mennonites well into the early 1700s. Although they were no longer executed, many were enslaved, and others were branded on their foreheads. As a result, many fled the country where the Anabaptist movement began. They were more welcome in places such as southern Germany, where their farming skills were valued. Congregations in other parts of Europe faced challenges as well. Between 1648 and 1815, Mennonites enjoyed economic prosperity that made them appealing to governments and caused their neighbors to envy them. After decades of economic prosperity and faith evolutions that included spoken prayers in services rather than traditional silent prayers, Mennonites in the Netherlands struggled with relaxed church discipline, a decline in membership in the late 1700s, and a gradual shift away
from the dedication to nonviolence. The number of Dutch Mennonites fell from 160,000 in 1700 to 26,953 in 1808 (Dyck, 1967). Across Europe, Mennonites faced a general decline in numbers and their churches were battered by “the forces of war, politics, and popular culture” (Nolt, 1992, p. 77). In search of religious freedom and better farmland, many Amish and Mennonites looked toward North America.

Anabaptists in the Americas

About 100 Mennonites from the area around the Lower Rhine moved to North America between 1683 and 1705, settling in the Quaker village of Germantown (which is today inside the city limits of Philadelphia) and creating the first permanent Mennonite settlement in the New World (Dyck, 1967). In the decades that followed, many more Anabaptists left Europe and came to America, drawn by fertile farmland and a place where they could further separate themselves from participation in the military and secular culture (Nolt, 1992).

Early Mennonite settlements were small and isolated, and most of those who came to America had little money. They faced new problems in their new homes: Indian attacks, proselyting from those of other faiths, and locals who would take advantage of their trust (Hostetler, 1980). Still, Anabaptist migration to America would continue in waves during the 1800s as conditions in Europe worsened. Anabaptist migrants quickly moved west, often in search of more fertile farmland. Many of the Mennonites who moved to the continent’s interior were young couples with large families, who were typically no more or less wealthy than their non-Anabaptist neighbors (Nolt, 1980).
Mennonites quickly populated southeastern Pennsylvania in the mid-1700s, setting up congregations in what are now Montgomery, Bucks, Chester, Berks, Lehigh, and Northampton. In 1710, Mennonites started settling in what is now Lancaster County near the present village of Strasburg. Within 20 years, Mennonite settlements could be found all around the settlement of Hickory Town (present-day Lancaster) and in surrounding counties (Dyck, 1967). Amish and Mennonite families spread into southwestern Pennsylvania, Virginia, Maryland, Ontario, Ohio, Illinois, and Indiana, with some moving as far west as Kansas and Missouri in the 1870s (Dyck, 1967, pp. 149-153).

By 2010, there were an estimated 249,495 Old Order and New Order Amish living in the United States, with nearly half of them living in Ohio and Pennsylvania (“Amish Population By State”). In 2010, the Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, area, with 179 churches and an estimated 29,535 residents, was believed to be the largest Amish settlement in the United States. The Holmes County area in Ohio was believed to be the second largest settlement, with 227 church districts and an estimated population of 29,510. The twelve largest Amish settlements in the U.S. were all located in the states of Ohio, Pennsylvania, Indiana, and Illinois (“The Twelve Largest Amish Settlements”).

The number of Amish adults and children in North America grew by 102 percent between 1991 and 2010, with Amish communities established in six new states – Arkansas, Colorado, Maine, Mississippi, Nebraska, South Dakota, and West Virginia – and the lone settlement in Georgia disbanding. Ten states have more than doubled their

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2 The estimates include only “horse-and-buggy” Amish groups, not those who drive cars.
numbers of Amish residents over the last two decades. According to the Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies at Elizabethtown College, population growth can be attributed to large families and average church retention rates of 85% or more. The establishment of new settlements was attributed to fertile farmland, an increase in non-farm work, a search for rural isolation, and efforts to resolve church or leadership conflicts, among other factors (“Amish Population Trends, 1991-2010, 20-Year Highlights”). Among the factors that lead to migration to and from settlements: suburban sprawl, tourism and other obtrusive influences, disputes with local governments, and job losses (“Amish Migration Trends, 2005-2009”).

**Anabaptist Traditions and Lifestyles**

The modern-day beliefs and traditions of the Amish and Mennonites are similar in several ways, but nonetheless distinct. Under the broader umbrellas of “Amish” and “Mennonite,” there are subgroups that hold different beliefs on issues such as transportation and dress. For this analysis, I applied the following aspects of contemporary Amish culture to the interpretation of texts published in *The Budget* newspaper. For the most part, this thesis focuses on the lifestyles and traditions of the Old Order Amish, as they have been the subjects of the most scholarly inquiry. When applicable, it also considers similarities and differences from the beliefs and practices of the Mennonites, and among different Amish orders.

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3 The states and their corresponding Amish population increases over the 20-year period were: Montana (400%), Virginia (300%), Kentucky (226%), New York (207%), Tennessee (183%), Minnesota (178%), Missouri (153%), Wisconsin (150%), Illinois (133%), and Iowa (122%).

4 The estimates include only “horse-and-buggy” Amish groups, not those who drive cars.
An emphasis on community

Noted Amish scholar Donald B. Kraybill (2003) wrote that the church district and immediate and extended families “form the building blocks of Amish society” (p. 8). Because they believe they should be separate from the world, the Old Order Amish are limited in terms of forming social circles, and that element of their society is an important cog in the creation and maintenance of the Amish as a separate social group within a larger community. Elmer Lewis Smith wrote that the Amish are “operating, in effect, a form of voluntary segregation imposed by the religious belief as well as the Amish people’s consciousness of their different way of life” (1958, p. 198). They “attempt to be ‘in the world, but not of the world’” (Hostetler, 1980, p. 93).5

Traditionally the Amish have not taken part in the broader affairs of their non-Amish surroundings. That being said, the Amish neither seek nor desire complete social isolation (Hostetler, 1980, p. 113). The Amish will interact with non-Amish neighbors (universally called “the English”6), help them with farm work, and assist them during emergencies. The outside world provides an important market for Amish products. Although they will be friendly with outsiders, the Amish often keep “the English” at arm’s length. A growing friendship with the outside world, they reason, “will, over time, erode their way of life” (Kraybill, 1990, p. 17). They are forbidden from marrying non-Amish spouses and take a “cautious stance” toward the outside world (Kraybill, 1990, p. 13). By comparison, many Mennonites are more involved in non-Anabaptist society. In

5 Hostetler partially quotes John 17:16, in which Jesus, referring to his disciples, said, “They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world” (New King James Version).
6 The term was coined by Anabaptists who spoke Pennsylvania Dutch. They referred to English-speaking people as “the English.”
2003, about two-thirds of American Mennonites were “Assimilated Mennonites” who were more likely to approve of modern facets of life such as the use of technology, political involvement, the ordination of women, and higher education (Kraybill, 2003b, p. 17).

The local community is central to Amish culture. Large families are common, and Amish children are educated in locally-governed community schools. Although the Amish often visit other churches, communities and church districts do not interact with each other on issues that have broader consequences. “Even in the growing Amish industries, work remains relatively close to home” (Kraybill, 2003a, p. 9). Family connections are important parts of the culture.

Kraybill noted that Amish society is also very informal. There is no central governing body, and “apart from schools a publishing house, and some regional historical libraries, formal bureaucratic institutions do not exist” (Kraybill, 2003a, p. 9). The selection of leaders within an Amish community is a delicate task: leaders “must not seek either authority or power, but in reality [they are] placed in a position where [they] must exercise both” (Hostetler, 1980, p. 108). Evidence of humility and the ability to manage farm and family well are traits desired in Amish leaders. Amish communities are organized around self-governing church districts. A district will typically elect a bishop to serve as its leader, two misters to serve as preachers, and a deacon to help during the worship service.
Worship and the church

Religious meetings “pervade the whole fabric of Amish life. . . . Religion is practiced, not debated” (Kraybill, 2003a, p. 9). Starting at an early age, children are taught the applicable *Ordnung*, or religious guidelines of their order that dictate worship, as well as public and private behavior. The various *Ordnung* dictate what the Amish should do and what they should avoid, although Kraybill noted that “the finer points of the *Ordnung* vary considerably by settlement, affiliation, and church district” (2003, p. 10). Children learn the *Ordnung* by watching their parents.

Simplicity and religious freedom are key to religion for the Amish. They do not emphasize religious creeds or texts other than the Bible. Three-hour worship services are held every other week, and services are followed by large group meals. Worship leaders (who are also community leaders) do not have special teaching – seminary training is seen as a sign of sinful pride. Because of concerns about pride, the Amish disdain outward religious expressions, including the use of church buildings (see Kraybill, 1990; Hostetler, 1980). Worship services are held instead in private homes, a tradition established in Europe when persecution forced early Anabaptists to worship in secret. Home worship is meant to be a simple, intimate experience. If a church district grows large, it will divide itself to maintain that intimacy. Kraybill (1990) noted that in-home worship reinforces the idea that religion permeates all aspects of life:

This routine weaves faith and life into a common fabric of meaning. In this context faith revolves around the corporate life of the congregation, not buildings, salaried staff, or programs. The plain and simple service in a home articulates important values from the Anabaptist past and distinguishes the Amish in the larger religious landscape. (p. 23)

 Unlike the Amish, the Mennonites hold worship services in church buildings.
Most orthodox Amish groups do not actively evangelize, although some Anabaptist groups do support missionary work through charitable agencies such as Christian Aid Ministries (Hostetler, 1980; Christian Aid Ministries, n.d.).

The Amish faith rejects the ideas of individualism and pride. Modesty and humility are vital traits. Common “English” practices such as wearing jewelry, being photographed, or pursuing higher education are seen in Amish culture as prideful acts and, as such, are shunned. The Amish avoid public recognition and believe “attention-seeking leads to self-glory and eventually destroys a community” (Kraybill, 1990, p. 25).

Concerns about individuality are even found in Bible study – the Amish discourage individual study of the Scriptures because individual interpretations could challenge traditional doctrine (Kraybill, 1990).

Transportation

While some Mennonites have adapted to allow the ownership of automobiles, the practice is still frowned upon among the Old Order Amish. The use of horse-drawn carriages serves to establish Amish identity and separate members from the “English” world. More practically, the use of horse-and-buggy transportation holds Amish communities together – homes are established in close enough proximity to accommodate that form of transportation. The ownership of cars and trucks would erode Amish life by making transportation out of the church district more convenient, promoting individualism, and increasing Amish interaction with worldly outsiders (see Kraybill, 1990; Kraybill, 2003a).
Although the Amish banned the ownership of automobiles as they became popular in America, attitudes toward auto transportation have relaxed over time. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, for instance, church leaders in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, agreed to let members hire non-Amish drivers to transport them to and from social functions on the outskirts of the large church district. Car use rose dramatically in the 1970s as more Amish began entering non-farm industries such as construction (Kraybill, 1990, pp. 47-48).

The Amish have different attitudes toward mass transit. Trains, trollies, and buses have been used frequently by the Amish. Those vehicles provide a public service, they reasoned, and could not be used as status symbols. However, air travel is considered too worldly by orthodox sects and is frowned upon except in the cases of funerals or emergencies (Kraybill, 1990).

*Nonresistance*

The Amish faith prohibits acts of violence and resistance. Old Order Amish have traditionally declared themselves conscientious objectors during times of war, quoting Biblical texts such as John 18:36: “My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight” (Hostetler, 1980, p. 78). Their faith requires them not to react when they face hostility; when conflict arises over land, for example, an Amish family may move to a new location without putting up a fight to avoid showdowns with others.
Historian John A. Hostetler wrote that the Amish farmer “is not a manufacturer. He is neither a large-scale producer, nor a single-crop moneymaker. His first ambition is to feed, clothe, and home his family well, then he may market what is left over” (Weaver-Zercher, 2005, p. 168). Farming traditions date back to the European Anabaptists, who relied on it to make a living when they moved to remote areas to flee persecution. Those traditions also reinforce an appreciation of God’s power – as the Amish tend the soil and reap their crops, they are firsthand witnesses to that power (Kraybill, 1990).

An agricultural identity lies at the core of Amish lifestyle, although the economic structures in many Amish communities are changing. In fact, Kraybill observed, the reality behind the “mythic stereotype” of Amish families “living self-sufficiently on pleasant farms . . . has crumbled in the last decades of the twentieth century” (1994, p. 13). He continued:

The rise of cottage industries and small businesses has preserved many of the traditional values of Amish culture. Nevertheless, the exodus from the farm will undoubtedly have an impact on family size, revise child rearing practices, alter attitudes toward both work and leisure, increase interaction with the outside world, and introduce greater variations in wealth and status within the community. It promises, in short, to be one of the most consequential changes that has touched the Amish community in the last half of the twentieth century and will surely shape their destiny in many ways. (p. 13)

New occupations such as cabinetry, manufacturing, crafts, and retailing are becoming more common among the Amish, and farming is becoming less dominant for several reasons. The amount of available farmland has been steadily shrinking due to industrialization and suburban growth. At the same time, as Amish populations have
grown, Amish individuals have found themselves looking for new ways to sustain
themselves and their families. Cottage industries and small-scale manufacturing have
increased to fill that void, and to accommodate the demands of tourists in some heavily
Amish areas (Kraybill, 1990).

*Electricity and telephones*

The Old Order Amish opposition to electricity and telephone use in the home was
traditionally tied to their opposition of outside utility lines. If they accepted electricity or
phone service, it was reasoned, they would accept a facet of the outside world that they
viewed with suspicion. The position was strengthened by the acceptance of phones by
more progressive Amish groups such as the Beachy church, which broke off from the Old
Order Amish in 1910. By rejecting the phone, Old Order Amish further distanced
themselves from more modernized groups. Telephones presented an additional problem
for the Amish: traditional social interactions hinged on face-to-face interaction that could
be eliminated by the use of the telephone (Kraybill, 1990).

However, telephone service and power generation can be found in Amish
communities. While having a phone in one’s home was forbidden, the use of public
phones or phones in the homes of neighbors has always been allowed. But as their non-
Amish neighbors became wealthier, the Amish increasingly found it awkward to walk
into their homes to use the phone. As much as they tried to keep the outside world at bay,
there were times when a telephone was a necessity: farmers needed to be able to call
veterinarians, and doctors and dentists started requiring Amish patients to make
appointments by telephone. Because of these factors, community phones came to be
accepted. The community phones were far enough from the house to deter causal use, but close enough to be used when needed (Kraybill, 1990).

The growth of Amish businesses has complicated the Amish stance on telephones. Telephones are necessary to the operation of those businesses, but Amish communities take different stances on toll-free numbers, answering machines, and the listing of telephone numbers in phone directories, among other issues. Although there is less demand for phone service in some smaller, more rural settlements, many New Order Amish settlements have loosened restrictions on telephones (Umble, 1994, pp. 105-108).

The Amish have allowed the use of batteries to supply power, and Amish leaders eventually allowed gasoline-powered electric generators to power equipment in barns and workshops. As was the case with telephones, the growth of Amish-owned businesses prodded communities to look for new options, such as inverters that can convert 12-volt electricity from batteries into 110-volt current (Kraybill, 1990). Some New Order Amish accept the use of electricity.

Computers and the Internet

When The Budget considered creating a website for its national edition in 2005, scribes strongly opposed the move (Cohen, 2009). The opposition reflects an Old Order view of the Internet as a tool that “will ruin their souls and lead to the demolition of their communities” by dividing and contaminating their culture (Kraybill, 1998, p. 99). Old Order Amish church leaders moved to ban computer ownership altogether in the late 1980s over concerns that they could lead to television, although exceptions were made for members who needed simple computers for business purposes (Kraybill, 1998, p.
Kraybill (1998) outlined five main ethical objects to electronic media, including television and the Internet (pp. 104-105):

- Individualistic notions that can be found in media programming challenge the Old Order communal nature;
- Modern media present secular views that are at odds with Old Order beliefs;
- Issues of sexuality – be it nudity, homosexuality, or divorce – that are viewed as sinful among Old Order believers are sometimes portrayed favorably in electronic media;
- Television, film, and the Internet include depictions of violence that are incompatible with their faith; and
- Electronic media are shaped by other modern values that oppose Amish life. A number of activities considered sinful by the Amish, including gambling, materialism, and commercialized leisure, are painted as normal on the Internet. Those depictions threaten the Amish way of life.

The nuances of Amish life, and the cultural compromises within it, have made computer use acceptable in some instances. For example, teenagers who have not been baptized and, thus, are not truly “members” of the church, sometimes have more ready access to radios, televisions, or computers, although they will typically get rid of those items prior to baptism. Commercial interests forced Old Order leaders to reconsider other aspects of computer use. Amish who work for English employers are allowed to use computers in a job setting, and business owners can lease computers for payroll or inventory management. As is the case with automobiles, the Amish are able to separate
computer use from computer ownership, and justify the former while forbidding the latter. Those compromises are typically accepted as long as they do not lead to misuse of computers or computer ownership (Kraybill, 1998). By 2006, many modernized Mennonite and Brethren congregations allowed members to use at least some forms of electronic media, including televisions and the Internet (Cooper, 2006).

**Communication**

Before examining *what* the Amish say and *how* those thoughts could be interpreted, it is important to briefly consider *when* and *why* they speak, and to consider the roles of silence and symbolic communication in Amish discourse. The theological, denominational, and revivalistic terms common in evangelic Protestant dialog “are conspicuously absent from the Amish vocabulary. . . . Their central beliefs oppose those movements whose military style thrives on conquest” (Hostetler, 1980, p. 373). However, within Amish communities, consensus is vital, and reaching it requires constant discourse. “Thus, the language of consensus is crucial to the maintenance of group harmony, identity, and solidarity. Each community or region has its own discourse, which may vary slightly from the others” (Hostetler, 1980, p. 374).

In *Amish Society*, Hostetler suggested two distinct descriptions of Old Order Amish discourse, examined in the context of the evolving Amish lifestyle:

- Silent discourse suggests a general collective awareness within the community that makes words unnecessary. “By screening the flow of information that comes into the community, and by developing a
sensitivity to signs and symbols, the society expresses its traditions in life rather than in words or written records” (Hostetler, 1980, p. 374).

- Verbal discourse “prevails among those who emphasize literacy, rationality, and individuality. . . . Instead of collective unity there is a multiplicity of thought, which leads to individualistic revelations and knowledge” (Hostetler, 1980, p. 376). Verbal discourse and silent discourse often rise to meet just before church splits (Hostetler, 1980, p. 374).

Silence serves many purposes in Amish life. Silence can be used as a defense against unexpected change or fright or a way to express pacifism, and it is a way to show acceptance and maintain harmony. By remaining silent at a time when others would ask questions, an individual avoids creating social conflict. “In Amish life, silence is an active force, not a sign of introspection . . . . Many noises, including ‘needless words,’ are a displeasure to God, for once they are spoken, words can never be taken back, never stricken from the record” (Hostetler, 1980, p. 375-376).

Hostetler (1980) observed that standard rules for personal appearance served as “a basis for common consciousness and a common course of action,” standing in stark contrast to the worldly values of pride and individualism (p. 223). As such, ways of grooming and manner of dress served as symbols of Amish priorities. Old Order Amish men typically wear beards but no mustaches and plain clothing. In general men from more conservative groups will wear longer beards and darker-colored clothing. Women from more conservative groups wear larger head coverings, and are allowed to wear more
colors than men, although in conservative groups dresses must be solid colors. Old Order Amish also wear wide-brimmed hats and suspenders rather than belts. Clothing rules vary from group to group. For example, some groups will allow buttons to be used on clothing, while others insist on hook-and-eye fasteners (see Hostetler, 1980; Kraybill, 2003b).

Conservative dress is seen as a symbol of obedience to God and as an outward rejection of worldly values. Clothing also serves to clarify an Amish person’s position within society. For example, young men who have recently married wear a hat with a wide seam around the brim and a rounded crown. Most Amish fathers wear hats with flat crowns. Hostetler (1980) noted that, while many outsiders would not notice the differences, to the Amish they “indicate whether people are fulfilling the expectations of the group” (p. 234). Width of hat brims and bands around crowns can also serve to distinguish modernized Amish congregations from those that are more orthodox. Beards serve to show a man’s marital status: married men grow them, but unmarried men do not. Those symbolisms serve as a second language for the Amish and Mennonites, effective in communicating differences to the outside world, but even more effective in communicating differences within Amish communities (Hostetler, 1964).

Amish and Mennonite societies are built around centralized family/community structures that facilitate easy face-to-face contact (see Bryer, 1979; Hostetler, 1980; Good Gingrich & Lightman, 2006). That facet of Anabaptist life coupled with other aspects of their value structure, such as the high priority placed on spirituality and the role of silence in discourse, create the backdrop for a consideration of interpersonal communication. The
following subsection will examine two common traditional outlets: circle letters and church services.

“Circle letters” are a common form of communication in Amish and Mennonite communities, typically circulating among five to twenty individuals or families (Gingrich & Lightman, 1994). Each participating member writes a letter and adds it to a package that includes previously written letters and then sends it on to the next participant. Once the package of letters has been received by everyone in the circle, it begins another round of distribution, with each recipient removing his or her letter from the collection and adding a new one (Gingrich & Lightman, 1994). Gingrich and Lightman (1994) explained their utility this way:

Circle letters may be primarily for exchanging information and ideas in community work, such as those addressing issues for teachers and farming practices, for sharing interests, such as astronomy and philosophy, or for helping people in difficult life circumstances. These letters constitute a system of self-help groups for childless couples, bereaved parents, and single women. (p. 180)

Although little detailed study has been given to the roles circle letters play in Amish and Mennonite communities, existing literature does offer some insight into the use of circle letters. Circle letters circulate among subgroups with some commonality – be it family ties or a shared interest. The letters serve to reinforce that commonality and provide support. Single Amish women may form circle letter groups to share feelings or ideas (Cong, 1998). The letters allow readers and writers to stay in touch when family members travel or leave the community (Weaver-Zercher, 2005). In Bryer’s 1979 study of the way the Amish cope with death, one widow said she and 15 other widows in other states circulated a letter every four months. The letter was “a great source of help to her
in sharing the special problems of the widow” (p. 260). Circle letters can become impractical when the intended audiences become too large. A letter circulated among Amish parochial school teachers in the early 1950s provided an outlet to discuss teaching. By 1957, so many teachers had become part of the circle that the circle letter was no longer adequate, and it evolved into the *Blackboard Bulletin*, a small magazine (Huntington, 1994).

There is even less current scholarship on the discourse that takes place in Amish church services. Hostetler (1980) wrote that the words and, perhaps more importantly, the unspoken signs (such as the uniform bending of the knees at the end of the service) exhibit devotion to God, humility, and group consensus. Enninger and Raith (1982) observed that certain nonverbal acts that accompanied the Old Order Amish worship service but that were perhaps not part of the formal ceremony, such as the separation of sexes and the behavior of young boys prior to worship, signified separation from family and aggregation into social roles. They found church services to be rigid and formulaic, qualities they attributed to factors within the social makeup of the church environment (for example, they argued, a lack of sermon notes, formal training for preachers and flowery language contributed to this “formal simplicity”) (1982, p. 48). Dogmatics are not part of the sermon because “even the unbaptized attendants share the basic views ingrained into them in the family” (Enninger & Raith, 1982, p. 69). Sermons focus on the words of the Bible, not on individual interpretations of what those words mean. Announcements of barn raisings, upcoming marriages, and other community news at the
close of the service reinforce the ties between the congregation and the social community (Enninger & Raith, 1982).

Mid- to late-twentieth century scholarship on worship hymns sung during Amish services identified similar trends, particularly a casual but reverent and reserved, male-led atmosphere in which members seemed to instinctively know their roles and followed set social structures (see Enninger & Raith, 1982; Nettl, 1957; Umble, 1939). Themes central to Amish life – devotion to God, admonitions against spiritual carelessness, freedom of conscience, and sacrifice – were the subjects of hymns (Umble, 1939). Umble observed that “there is freedom in the interpretation of the melody” and that “[o]ne hears passing notes and embellishments in some voices, but not in all” (p. 94). The tempo at which hymns are sung can be a cultural identifier; in orthodox church districts, hymns are sung more slowly (see Hostetler, 1980; Enninger & Raith, 1982).

*The Amish Relationship with the Media*

In large part because their beliefs are so different from the mainstream, the Old Order Amish (and other Anabaptist groups, such as Old Order Mennonites) fascinate many Americans and draw much attention from the American media, not all of it welcome. The Amish typically shun publicity, but because their stories “play well,” they often find themselves portrayed in the media as idyllic slices of American life or, conversely, sensationalized caricatures of wayward saints (Kraybill, 2008). Misrepresentation of Amish life and values is a common criticism the Amish levy toward the English press. Furthermore, Kraybill (2008) argues, the media’s fundamental practice
of decontextualizing life by separating voices from their “real-life contexts” is at odds with the Amish emphases on humility and intimacy within social settings.

It should be noted, however, that the Amish are active participants in the mediation of their lives. “They speak, write, publish, and read. Although they do not make movies or engage public relations firms to communicate their messages, they participate in mediation processes on their own terms, for their own purposes, using their own means” (Umble & Weaver Zercher, 2008, p. 15). Although local news is often seen as overly sensational and violent, local newspapers are popular in Amish communities (Cooper, 2006). Old Order Amish are heavy users of books, newspapers, and magazines, and some Amish people have embraced mass media means to share their views. Typically, those mass media messages assume other Amish people to be the target audience; Amish correspondence aimed at primarily English audiences (such as newspaper letters to the editors) occurs less frequently (Umble & Weaver-Zercher, 2008). Still, Umble and Weaver-Zercher (2008) observed, “it is important to remember that the Amish are not just virtual images created and circulated by English mediators. They are also actors who create their own images of Amish life and, in various ways, respond to the images they encounter” (p. 11).

Two weekly newspapers, The Budget and Die Botschaft, serve as important conduits for the presentation of those images in Amish communities across North America. At both newspapers, volunteer correspondents submit accounts of happenings in their communities. Their dispatches typically cover topics such as the weather, crop yields, visiting preachers, farm accidents, and other intensely local items of interest.
Those accounts are compiled, published and mailed to subscribers. *The Budget* (the larger newspaper and the focus on this thesis), the offshoot *Die Botschaft*, and other Amish publications are the focus of the following chapter.
CHAPTER 4: THE BUDGET

The first issue of *The Budget* (then called *The Sugar Creek Budget*) was published May 15, 1890, in what is now Sugarcreek, Ohio.\(^8\) The newspaper was founded by John C. Miller, a commercial printer who lived in nearby Walnut Creek. Miller had moved his printing business to Sugarcreek, and he felt the town needed a local newspaper. Miller originally envisioned *The Budget* as nothing more than a community newspaper that would cover the town and surrounding communities. In the newspaper’s centennial edition, former *Budget* managing editor George R. Smith described the evolution of the national edition:

> [Miller] began mailing some copies of his paper to Amish friends who had moved farther west. Some of these friends began to write letters for *The Budget*, telling of farming conditions and opportunities in their part of the country. These letters proved so popular that Mr. Miller encouraged other writers and by the second year the letters began to take up much of the space in *The Budget*. (Smith, 1990).

By December 1892, *The Budget* was being mailed to 463 post offices in 18 states; by 1906, the newspaper’s circulation had passed 5,000 and it “became known as the Amish newspaper” (Smith, 1990). Because of ailing health, Miller sold *The Budget* in 1910 to a group of Mennonite churchmen led by the Rev. Samuel H. Miller (Smith, 1990). Miller was a prominent Mennonite church worker and a popular public speaker in the early 1900s. Because the newspaper placed so many additional demands on his already busy schedule, he sold *The Budget* to S.A. Smith in 1920. Smith ran the newspaper until 1936, when he became Sugarcreek’s postmaster and turned operation of the newspaper over to

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\(^8\) The town that is now called Sugarcreek was originally two towns – Shanesville and East Shanesville. East Shanesville later changed its name to Sugar Creek (a nod to a nearby creek by the same name). The two towns merged in 1969 and took the name Sugarcreek (one word).
his son, George R. Smith (Smith, 1990). The Smiths were Lutheran, but they kept *The Budget*’s pages open to a wide variety of Amish and Mennonite news (Nolt, 2000).

George Smith bought the newspaper from his father in 1950 and worked as publisher until 1969, when he leased the business to two employees, Sylvester R. Miller and Don E. Sprankle. Smith sold the two men the business in 1974, but stayed on and worked on *The Budget*’s editorial staff until 2000 (Nolt, 2000). Sylvester Miller sold his portion of the newspaper to Sprankle in 1974, and the next year, Sprankle sold the newspaper to a group of *Budget* employees that included Sylvester Miller (Smith, 1990).

When Miller, who held the controlling interest in the newspaper, retired in 1980, *The Budget* was sold to Albert Spector. Spector, who is *The Budget*’s publisher emeritus, had no newspaper experience, and he is Jewish, not Amish. However, he did have a personal interest in *The Budget* – his family’s fabric stores were one of the newspaper’s largest advertisers (Hilliard, 2002). Spector’s daughter, Sonia Spector-Cohen, is the newspaper’s president. Publisher Keith A. Rathbun runs the day-to-day operation. In addition to the national edition, the newspaper publishes a local edition that covers Sugarcreek and nearby communities. The local and national editions of the newspaper have separate editors. In the spring of 2012, four of the *Budget*’s sixteen employees were Mennonite, including the editor of the national edition.

*The Budget*’s national edition circulation has remained relatively stable over the last 40 years. An expansion in Amish settlements in the late 1960s and early 1970s pushed the newspaper’s circulation up to 18,000 in 1971 (Smith, 1990). *The Budget* had a circulation of 19,000 in 2010 (Rabinowitz, 2010), although by the spring of 2012 that had
number had fallen to about 18,000 (K. Rathbun, personal communication, March 30, 2012). Roughly half of The Budget’s subscribers live outside of Ohio and of those, approximately 85% are Amish or Mennonite; the rest are English readers who have friends in the Amish community or are interested in the Amish lifestyle (K. Rathbun, personal communication, March 30, 2012). The newspaper is delivered by mail.

Typically, the national edition of The Budget consists of about 44 broadsheet news pages. Photographs appeared in a few paid anniversary announcements and advertisements, but the overwhelming majority of the national edition’s news content is text. The newspaper carries far fewer ads than the average community newspaper; classified and display advertising makes up on average about 17% of the national edition (K. Rathbun, personal communication, March 30, 2012).

The correspondents who provide the bulk of the content are called “scribes.” Scribes range in age from their teens to their 90s. They are not paid for their work; they become scribes by volunteering to write for their communities. When a person volunteers to be a scribe, he or she gets an application, and the prospective scribe is asked to submit a writing sample. In order to qualify to have a scribe, a settlement must have at least six families and a minister, and the newspaper allows only one scribe per settlement or church district (F. Erb-Miller, personal correspondence, March 30, 2012). Many, but not all, scribes write letters every week. The Budget has a roster of about 840 scribes and typically publishes between 450 and 500 letters a week (K. Rathbun, personal correspondence, March 30, 2012). There is typically little scribe turnover, according to the publisher: “We have a lot of scribes that have been doing it for decades. It seems like
it runs in the family sometimes – the daughter or son of a mother or father that had been a scribe sees that in their family and just kind of takes over the writing over time.” (K. Rathbun, personal communication, March 30, 2012).

A scribe may have a level of prominence in her or his local community, and several Budget scribes wrote about that prominence in the sample reviewed for this study. One could draw comparisons between scribes and the “opinion leaders” discussed by Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955). Scribes are recognized in their communities as information mediators of sorts, as are “opinion leaders.” However, Katz and Lazarsfeld’s two-step flow model observed information flowing from media to opinion leaders, and then to community members. The flow of information through Budget scribes runs in the opposite direction: from community member to the scribe and then from scribe to the newspaper. Though the community engagement seemingly required to write for the newspaper, scribes could accumulate a great deal of “social capital” of the type described by Putnam (2000). The publisher of the newspaper recalled one particularly eloquent scribe who drew such a following that he had to stop writing because readers visited his shop so frequently that he was unable to get work done. “It’s kind of funny because the Amish don’t look for that – they don’t look for prestige or pride,” the publisher said. “But they do take pride [in their work for The Budget]; they feel very honored to be a scribe because they’re recording the history of their community” (K. Rathbun, personal correspondence, March 30, 2012).

Generally, scribes seem to identify certain topics, such as births, deaths, and visitation at worship services, as being newsworthy. Much of the information in scribe
letters is gathered as scribes go about their daily lives; scribes often provide accounts of places they go and things they personally see and do. Accounts of community events are often given firsthand, and if a scribe misses a local event for some reason, he or she will often acknowledge that the event took place, and that he or she was not present. Letters reflect that fact that community members contact scribes and ask them to include certain pieces of information in their letters.

The majority of scribe letters are sent to the newspaper through the U.S. Postal Service, although some come by fax and about 50 or 60 a week are submitted by email (F. Erb-Miller, personal correspondence, March 30, 2012). Most letters get to the newspaper’s office on Saturday or Monday prior to the Wednesday publication “because everybody wants the news to be as current as possible,” the national edition editor said (F. Erb-Miller, personal correspondence, March 30, 2012). The national editor of The Budget said that, for many scribes, the reporting process does not end when the letter is submitted: “I’ll get calls on a Tuesday saying, ‘Oh, I got the wrong name, can you change it?’ or “Can you take this out, because it’s not quite right and I really don’t want it printed” (F. Erb-Miller, personal correspondence, March 30, 2012). Several scribe letters in the sample for this study also acknowledged and corrected factual errors in previous letters. The publisher of The Budget said readers rarely complain about scribes; “the scribes ‘police’ themselves for the most part” (K. Rathbun, personal communication, May 14, 2012). The publisher and the national editor could recall only one instance in 12 years in which a scribe’s coverage was criticized. It involved a scribe who was criticized for reporting too much news from other scribes’ church districts. The scribes involved
Editorial Guidelines and Editing

When scribes begin writing for The Budget, they are given a set of guidelines that explain what types of information are and are not allowed in scribe letters. Even the formatting of submissions is discussed -- for example, because many submissions are still hand-written, the guidelines instruct scribes to write letters “large enough that it can be read easily, and plainly enough that we do not have to wonder what it says” (“Guidelines for writing your letters,” n.d.). The guidelines also instruct writers to omit information about, among other things, unremarkable local visits, “stories of bygone years,” “stories you read in other magazines, newspapers, etc., that have nothing to do or relate with the group you report for,” and “items that could be considered ‘preaching’” (“Guidelines for writing your letters,” n.d.). While some letters from Anabaptist missionaries do describe religious activities in which not all Anabaptists would take part, the letters do so in a way that does not challenge the beliefs of others. The guidelines are present in large part to keep letters as short as possible (F. Erb-Miller, personal correspondence, March 30, 2012). The rules regarding religious content are also meant to keep disputes over dogma from appearing in the newspaper, the national editor said:

I know at one time there were articles in [the newspaper] that were that kind of thing, more preachy. And it got to be kind of an issue, where the editor at the time said, “we’re just not going to do it anymore” because in the letters there was back and forth. We’re a community newspaper for news. We’re not a religious newspaper. Our readers are Amish and Mennonite groups that are religious, but it’s not like our paper is a religious newspaper. . . . It can really be a sticky thing between the groups, because they have so many little, “my hat is this big,” and “my dress is

were encouraged “to get together and work it out among themselves, and [the] problem was soon solved” (K. Rathbun, personal communication, May 14, 2012).
this long,” and “my colors are this, I don’t wear this color.” And from community to community and district to district, it varies. So why go there? It’s not what we’re doing. We’re not trying to convert you to “my hat is this big.” It’s community news. (F. Erb-Miller, personal correspondence, March 30, 2012)

Letters reviewed for this study demonstrated great variation in content and style. Some letters were direct and to the point, containing little personal information from the scribe. Others included personal stories, long anecdotes, and descriptive language. Some letters were as short as three simple paragraphs, while others took up 20 column inches or more. The Budget’s editorial guidelines instruct scribes to keep letters to 12 column inches, but “part of our unwritten agreement is if they write it, we’ll get it into the paper,” the publisher said (K. Rathbun, personal correspondence, March 30, 2012).

Newspaper employees who work with scribe letters try to keep editing to a minimum. For example, the letters are not edited much for style, such as consistent use of numerals or abbreviations for state names. In addition, only severe errors in spelling and grammar are sometimes fixed by the newspaper’s staff, but more minor errors are often left in because the newspaper’s staff wants The Budget “to be real and be conversational, because that’s what Pennsylvania Dutch is,” the publisher said. He continued: “For the target readers, they are very comfortable with that. And for the English who pick it up and read it, they find that’s part of the charm in it. They know it’s conversational” (K. Rathbun, personal correspondence, March 30, 2012). The national edition editor said scribes typically “know what we do or do not leave in. So actually a lot of them [letters] are pretty much processed and left the way they come in as far as their style of writing
and the way they write it, and it’s not edited except for certain things we don’t put in.” (F. Erb-Miller, personal correspondence, March 30, 2012).

The influences of the Pennsylvania Dutch dialect – which is based on German and is sometimes called “Pennsylvania German” — can be seen in many letters. Pennsylvania Dutch words and phrases are sometimes used in scribe letters, and scribes sometimes spell Pennsylvania Dutch words and phrases differently – for example, the Pennsylvania Dutch word for worship service appears as both “gma” and “gmay” and a word used to describe church visitors appears as both “fremde” and “fremte.” Such spelling inconsistencies are common because Pennsylvania Dutch is primarily a spoken language, not a written one, the national editor said. As such, phonetic spelling is common. The words “mean the same thing, but there’s no way [of spelling] that’s right or wrong,” said the national editor, who is Mennonite and speaks Pennsylvania Dutch (F. Erb-Miller, personal correspondence, March 30, 2012).

Finally, the letters also include jargon related to farming and Anabaptist lifestyle. Many of those references would be unfamiliar to “English” readers who have little or no background in agriculture. For example, a New York scribe included this passage: “Spelts is being cut and oats are turning yellow. Early field corn is coming in tassel” (D.A. Miller, 2010). A Kentucky scribe who wrote about the struggles of a large-scale tobacco farmer in his area made this observation: “Since the government bought up all the base 2 years ago it is now more of a risk to plant [tobacco] and have a market without a contract” (D.V. Miller, 2010). Readers unfamiliar with spelt wheat, the harvest of corn, or the process of selling tobacco might find it difficult to understand those passages.
However, readers rooted in the traditional Anabaptist farming tradition would be more likely to comprehend the jargon.

Other Anabaptist Media

Another correspondent newspaper, Die Botschaft, based in Millersburg, Pennsylvania, began publication in 1975 (Nolt, 2008, p. 185) and had about 11,000 subscribers and 600 scribes in 2006 (Barry, 2006). It was founded by a group of conservative Amish who believed The Budget’s columns were straying too far from Old Order beliefs. Although a number of scribes write for both The Budget and Die Botschaft, readings of the two newspapers reflect different views of the Amish experience, Nolt (2008) wrote. In The Budget, Old Order beliefs are represented, but they appear as part of a larger body of Amish and Mennonite existence. Correspondence from very conservative Amish writers who write about religious observances will appear alongside letters from scribes who write about more “modern” activities rejected by Old Order Amish, including “airplane travel, verbal proselytism, or their children’s high school studies” (Nolt, 2008, p. 194). That brand of Amish identity, Nolt wrote, “has fostered the more irenic Amish identity characteristic of many Midwestern settlements” (p. 194). By comparison, Die Botschaft presents a more Old Order-centric view of the broader Amish and Mennonite community, “rewriting community along Old Order lines that transcend denominational traditions and form another viable version of Amish identity” (Nolt, 2008, p. 194).

The work of Amish and Mennonite writers also appears in magazines, including The Blackboard Bulletin, the first magazine produced for the national Amish community
Roles of the Correspondent Newspaper

*The Budget* and *Die Botschaft* serve as “collective diaries, spaces in which order is brought to bear on group life, highlighting particular commonality and suppressing certain types of diversity” (Nolt, 2008, p. 184). Galindo’s research portrays *Budget* scribes as reporters who deliver news their readers want to consume, an act that in turn lays the groundwork for community development: “In Amish society, interpersonal relations are the basis of community life, and newsletter reports of social events contribute to the interpersonal focus of community life by making known to the readership the occurrence of those events” (Galindo, 1994, p. 100). *Budget* newsletters, Galindo reasoned, could “lessen the effects of distance between settlements created by geographic space and the absence of telephones in Amish homes” (Galindo, 1994, p. 101). Galindo wrote that Amish publications such as *The Budget* represented “efforts to control socialization process” by providing narrowly Anabaptist viewpoints on topics of
interest (1994, p. 80). She interviewed scribes for The Budget, who told her the newspaper was “a means to keep informed regarding friends and relatives” and was widely read (p. 83). Galindo’s research found a perhaps more targeted, individualistic use of The Budget; interviewees told her the first thing they did with the paper was seek out columns by people they know. Once those columns were read, they then searched the newspaper for longer paragraphs, which are typically narrative accounts of personal stories (1994, pp. 83-84).

Newspaper executives interviewed for this project said they viewed The Budget as a sort of communication middleman that received information from communities, packaged that information, and redistributed it to those same communities. Editors and typists place a high priority on maintaining the conversational tone of letters and preserving scribes’ original phrasing whenever possible. The national editor said The Budget serves as “a connection” for readers who already know each other, as well as those who have no personal relationship:

It’s a communication with many of their friends, their relatives, and people they don’t even know across the United States or wherever. Every week, they read about their lives and it’s a great way of connection. I think they feel that connection even if they personally don’t know them. . . . The Amish people are very community-minded. And I think even if they’re not local, they’re still part of my community. (F. Erb-Miller, personal communication, March 30, 2012)

The publisher of The Budget expressed a similar notion that, through the statement of shared values and the sharing of personal information, the newspaper tied readers in different parts of the world together. He described the process of reading The Budget as
one in which readers first seek out information about people they know, and then proceed
to read about (and build familiarity with) those they do not know:

The first thing they do is they go to the index and they read the letters
from all of the communities where they have family or friends. And then
they sit down and go through the rest of the paper and read the whole
paper, and it amazes me how many people read the whole paper. I think
they just scan the page and if there’s a community that they know anybody
in, and some of them have just gotten to know people through their
writing, and like their writing style, and feel like they know the family just
because maybe they’ve been a scribe for 20 or 30 or 40 years. They’ve
watched their family grow up. (K. Rathbun, personal communication,
March 30, 2012)

The chapters that follow will more closely examine the ways in which *The Budget* fosters
an intimacy among diasporic readers, thus maintaining an “imagined community” based
on traditional values and beliefs.
CHAPTER 5: DESIGN

The textual analysis employed in this thesis uses McKee’s (2003) overarching concept of using cultural context to guide analysis and also applies Fairclough’s (2003) more systematic approach to consider “equivalences and differences” (pp. 100-101). Fairclough suggests that the practice of sense-making involves the “simultaneous working of two different ‘logics,’ a logic of ‘difference’ which creates differences and divisions, and a logic of ‘equivalence’ which subverts existing differences and divisions” (p. 100). At the instant of interpretation — what Fairclough calls the “textual moment” — the intermixing of differences and equivalencies can provide evidence of themes of identity: In this thesis, themes relate to what makes Anabaptist readers of The Budget the same and what makes various orders/sects different within the broader Anabaptist culture. By focusing just on the rhetoric of differences and equivalencies, the study focuses on the themes that relate most directly to the concept of “imagined community.”

The method involved a series of readings and re-readings of the texts, starting with what critical-studies scholar Stuart Hall referred to as “a long preliminary soak” (Worthington, 2001, p. 172), which has the primary goal of familiarizing the researcher with the texts and to conceptualize broad, superficial themes. During the second reading, the researcher applied the cultural-context lens; that stage also involved categorizing individual texts (hereafter “scribe letters” or simply “letters”) into those broad themes, and also identifying additional themes that likely would be evident to Amish and Mennonite readers of The Budget. A third reading was used to evaluate the credibility of the analysis – to refine logical interpretations and reject initial interpretations that on
second thought might have been unreasonable. A fourth and final reading used the theoretical framework of “imagined community” to provide an overall analysis and discussion of the findings within that theoretical framework.

A random sample of national editions of The Budget published between January 2010 and June 2011 (18 months) was analyzed. The analysis covered 9,261 scribe letters published in the eighteen issues chosen for the sample. Each letter in each of the selected issues was analyzed. The sample was constructed by selecting the first issue of the first month, the second issue of the second month, the third issue of the third month, the fourth issue of the fourth month, then the first issue of the fifth month, the second issue of the sixth month, and so on. An average national edition includes approximately 500 scribe letters. An analysis of all 78 issues of the newspaper published during the eighteen-month time period would have required the reading of approximately 39,000 letters – a collection of texts too large for a feasible project. The researcher would have considered a larger sample had the point of “theoretical saturation” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 65) not been reached — that is, if analysis of the sample had not ceased to reveal substantial new information.

Textual Analysis as a Media Research Method

Essentially, a textual analysis is an “educated guess” (McKee, 2001, p. 9) at some of the ways in which a particular text – perhaps a newspaper article, a soap opera, or a poem – will probably be interpreted by the intended audience. The poststructuralist approach of textual analysis that informs this thesis does not assume any singular “right” way of interpreting the text at hand. As McKee observed, “we make sense of the reality
that we live in through our cultures, and . . . different cultures can have very different experiences of reality” (2003, p. 10). No one representation of reality can be the single accurate representation – “other cultures will always have alternative, and equally valid, ways of representing and making sense of that part of reality” (McKee, 2003, p. 11). The goal of poststructuralist textual analysis is to broaden the understanding of how certain groups perceive texts at certain times. Unlike content analysis, its quantitative cousin, textual analysis does not produce numeric results. Although textual analyses can produce rich descriptions, the methodology has been criticized for lacking precision and inferential strength (Carley, 1993), because it does not produce scientific statistical results, and because it cannot be replicated in a scientific sense (McKee, 2003). But as a research method, textual analysis is able to explain the ways individuals may make sense of texts in a cultural setting in a way that content analysis cannot (Carley, 1994; McKee, 2003).

McKee (2003) made several arguments for the importance of understanding the ways people make sense of the worlds in which they live. How individuals understand the happenings in their lives is important for their own survival – people “must learn to interpret their own experiences and qualities as being valuable and worthwhile in the culture in which they live” (McKee, 2003, p. 34). Furthermore, the way we understand other people is an important factor in how we treat them:

As John Hartly puts it, Western cultures are involved in an ongoing process of creating “wedom” and “theydom” (1992:206): describing the people who are like us, and excluding the people who are not like us. And we tend to interpret the behavior of “us” very differently from how we interpret the behavior of “them,” even if they do exactly the same things. We’re much more forgiving and empathetic towards people that we think
are in our own community, and far less tolerant, and more punitive,
towards people that we think are “them.” (McKee, 2003, p. 43)

By recognizing the “wedoms” and “theydoms” that come to exist on the pages of *The Budget*, researchers can further understand the dynamics that exist among Anabaptist sects and church districts.

The approach used in the present study is similar to, although methodologically distinct from, the concept of grounded theory, which is used to develop theory that is “generated and developed through interplay with data collected during research projects” (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p. 275). In *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967), Glaser and Strauss argued that this method of inquiry would help close “the embarrassing gap between theory and empirical research” (p. vii, cited in Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p. 275). Whereas researchers who use other qualitative methods often collect entire data sets before beginning formal analysis, those using grounded theory begin analyzing immediately upon collecting the first piece of data (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The method allows for the generation of theory at the onset of the research, or “if existing (grounded) theories seem appropriate to the area of investigation, then these may be elaborated and modified as incoming data are meticulously played against them” (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p. 273). The grounded theory method advanced by Anseim Strauss uses the concepts identified during the research process as the basic units of analysis; they are categorized, compared, and examined for patterns and variations (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). While I did “ground” myself in the cultural context of Anabaptist communities, the approach used in this study differs from grounded theory in that the theoretical construct (Anderson’s “imagined communities”) was identified at the beginning of the
study, not during the data collection process, and a commitment was made to following that construct through the analytical process. The major themes identified in this research related back to that predetermined theoretical construct.
CHAPTER 6: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Format

It is difficult to define a “typical” scribe letter in *The Budget*. Some letters are as short as three paragraphs, while others take up more than an entire column of space. Some are written using descriptive, verbose language, and others are simple and to the point. Many writers include personal stories, but some do not. In her genre analysis of *The Budget*, Galindo (1994) suggested five common components of scribe letters: weather and seasonal activity; church news; “news items topics” such as life events, health, and visiting; a narrative section; and a closing. Those components can be found in most of the letters reviewed for this analysis. However, there are several other seemingly common themes that are important to understand when considering how *The Budget* lends itself to the creation of an imagined Anabaptist community.

Several scholars who have studied Amish and Mennonite correspondence (e.g. Galindo, 1994; Bryer, 1979) have observed the historical importance of face-to-face interaction and the oral tradition of communication among Plain People. Those values are frequently reflected in scribe letters in *The Budget*. Letters are not written to adhere to particular journalistic standards. Instead, they typically appear as informal streams of consciousness, featuring information organized chronologically, as is the case with the following letter from an Ohio scribe (included here in its entirety):

Dec. 28 – Monday afternoon and a windy, snowy day, so I thought I would start this.

Yesterday church was at Christy E. Zooks’ and is to be at Enos Z. Yoders’ on Jan. 10th. Visitors in church were Stephen Y. Zook family from Homer City, Pa., Joseph Yoder family and Noah Yoders and son from Penns Valley, Pa.
Tuesday morning – It’s 17° and a northwest wind and snow flakes coming down.

Urie H. Yoders had a scare yesterday when Esther opened the door to go upstairs and they found the stairway full of smoke. They called the fire company and soon had it under control, but had a smoked house. One mattress was burned and part of a bed. The neighbors went today to help clean up.

Enos E. Hershberger
(E.E. Hershberger, 2010)

By using first person pronouns in the first sentence, the scribe created a conversational tone for his letter. The example also reflects the chronological format that is common in other letters, such as the following excerpt from a Pennsylvania scribe:

On Sat. a load went to Enon Valley to the benefit auction.

Esther A. Yoder and Mary D. Yoder were in Guys Mills from Tues. to Sat. They stayed at their grandmother’s, Mrs. Milo Mullet.

A week later now – On Fri. evening we were invited to Harvey and Dena Hostetler’s for a corn roast. There were a bunch of others also invited. Earlier in the day Harveys’ Clara wanted to put wood on the fire, tripped and fell onto the hot coals. She got burned pretty badly on her arms. Daniel Sylvia is helping them treat it with the B & W ointment and burdock leaves. Luckily, she didn’t get burned anywhere else that I know.

On Thurs. Levi Lees and Rudy Lees were to Smicksburg to a wedding of Mrs. Sarah Swartzentruber’s daughter. (M.A. Miller, 2010b)

In both cases, the writers used phrases to indicate breaks in the chronology (“Tuesday morning” and “a week later now”). They proceeded to share information that might be of significant interest (news of a house fire and an accident), but did not break up the chronology of the narrative to do so. In a sense, letters come to resemble a transcript of day-to-day conversation items or, as Nolt (2008) suggested, a public diary. Some writers veer from that formula to report from the start important happenings such as deaths or weddings, but they often return to the chronological format later in their letters. The chronological formatting could be a function of the letter submission protocol. When they
become scribes, writers are given notebooks on which they may write and submit letters. Scribes could simply make notes on the form on a given day and return to the same form later in the week to add new information.

An emphasis on oral tradition can also be seen in the way scribes describe the flow of information through their communities. For example: “Joe Hershbergers got word from Brodhead, Wisc. that a cousin passed away” (M.M.S. Yoder, 2010), and “(w)ord passed through the community late last evening of the passing away of Mrs. Rhoda Yoder, 84” (A.A. Mast, 2010). By illustrating how news of those deaths spread in their communities, scribes emphasize the importance of conversation in social settings. Scribes often highlight the fact that news comes from interactions with others in their geographic or networked community. Scribes and others get information through those interactions, and when scribes are absent from those social settings, they portray a sense that news is absent from their letters. In December 2010, a scribe in Nappanee, Indiana, wrote “I was informed that it was too icy for grandmas to be out and about, so that means less news this week” (A.M. Burkholder, 2010). Another writer observed, “(w)e came home from Dela. yesterday where we were visiting several days, so local news is scarce” (T.H. Detweiler, 2010). Writers sometimes prioritize news based on what their communities are talking about. In June 2010, one Ohio scribe began his letter: “The subject of the weather has probably been in the majority of conversations the past week . . .” (Erb & Erb, 2010). By tying the newsworthiness of information to the fact that local people are discussing it, scribes again place value on traditional modes of Anabaptist communication.
Language used in the scribe letters is almost always conversational in style and tone, and the newspaper presents itself as an informal forum for dialogue among writers and readers. Inaccuracies are frequently referenced in letters, and letter writers often point out their own mistakes from previous letters and correct them after the fact. Writers sometimes preemptively point out possible errors, as did one writer from Texas who observed: “(t)oday Robert Kains were our visitors. We also had our regular fellowship meal. I’m not sure if I spelled Robert’s last name correctly” (T. Knepp, 2010). After listing the names of church visitors, a scribe from Missouri wrote: “I hope I have these names straight” (Delagrange, 2010). Other writers share bits and pieces of stories, openly acknowledging the fact that information is missing:

In the evening after the singing Ananias D. Stutzmans’ 3 oldest children had a runaway on their way home when the bit broke and the horse tipped the buggy over and drug it a ways. If reports are right Susie broke her arm but sounded like it was still in place but don’t have more details. (L. Troyer, 2010) [emphasis added]

Later, that scribe wrote “Mrs. Eli J. Hershberger hasn’t been feeling the best lately again but I’m not sure what her problem is” (L. Troyer, 2010). Nolt (2008) suggested that the free admission of errors is a symbol of humility. It also reflects a conversational dialogue that is fundamental to traditional Anabaptist communication. The lack of formality in essence mirrors the tone that readers might experience were they to actually speak to the scribes in person.

As Goffman (1959) pointed out, participants in those face-to-face encounters get information from messengers in different ways. The words that are said are important, but so too are the nonverbal expressions – such as physical appearance, vocal tone, and
body language – given off by participants in social settings. The impressions “given off” may be mitigated in mediated communication. However, Budget scribes often interjected them through the use of punctuation and emotion-themed “symbol words.” By using words that convey emotion, Scribe writers inject irony, disappointment, or humor into statements in ways that are difficult in the absence of face-to-face contact. For example, these Ohio scribes used the word “smile” to poke fun at some of their neighbors in a 2010 letter:

Our school picnic was on April 17 with a cloudy and chilly day but the ball games went on as usual. The boys that are through school and the 7th and 8th grade boys gave the school fathers a real whipping this year. I suppose the men would appreciate it if the final score was not mentioned. Smile! (A. Miller & N. Miller, 2010).

In that case, and in many others like it, “Smile!” is used as a cue to indicate a joke or a subtle, friendly poke at other community members. By adding the additional subtext, the writers move further from a formal style of writing and closer to a conversational tone that is the cornerstone of traditional Anabaptist communication.

Budget editors and individual scribes also encourage dialogues on the pages of the national edition. A weekly feature called “Information Please” serves as a forum where readers can seek out the wisdom of the Anabaptist crowds. Readers write in with questions about home medical remedies, the identification of certain types of wildlife, cooking, and other common topics. Later, other readers answer those questions, either by contacting the original writer directly (if contact information is provided) or by submitting an answer to the “Information Please” column. This entry from the May 4,
2011, “Information Please” section is a typical question (a response was not found within the sample):

What do others do with older black knit coats, mutzas, black Sunday pants that aren’t really good enough to give away (mutzas may be rather purplish and pant seats shiny), so just stay in the closet? Has anyone found a useful way to do something with them? Please reply to: Mrs. Devon Schlabach, . . . . (Information Please, 2011)

A typical reply, from the April 28, 2010, edition, reads: “In answer to a painful bunion. I had good results with celadine extract. Rub in well morning and evening. Go easy to start with. – Moses A. Schlabach, . . .” (Information Please, 2010). In the editions reviewed for this analysis, the number of questions typically outnumbered the number of answers. However, it was clear that questions often draw responses. Scribes also ask questions in letters and respond to previous letters written by other scribes, creating a sort of weekly dialogue that readers may follow.

By emphasizing oral traditions, creating casual dialogue, and citing the sources of information included in letters, Budget scribes help their readers construct imagined communities around traditional Anabaptist modes of communication. Those descriptions also speak to the idea that Anabaptist readers of The Budget build a broader imagined community by emphasizing familiarity with each other, a notion that will be explored in more depth later in this chapter.

Themes

This analysis revealed four primary, often overlapping themes around which Budget readers could build imagined community: an emphasis on community, an emphasis on tradition, an emphasis on worship and one’s relationship with God, and
outward symbols of community that differentiate readers from outsiders, and occasionally from each other. Each theme is discussed below.

*Emphasis on Community*

The social networks that create community lie at the heart of Anabaptist life (Kraybill, 2003; Hostetler, 1980). They are also central to many *Budget* letters, and the newspaper clearly reinforces the importance of an intimate community as one value around which imagined community is constructed. The maintenance of an intimate Anabaptist community stretching beyond the borders of a single settlement or town can be challenging, and recent trends in Mennonite and Amish life such as the increasing mobility of families, economic pressures that have forced shifts in traditional labor practices, and the growing physical distance between settlements have only added to the challenge. The national edition of *The Budget* acknowledges those challenges, and in a sense it attempts to serve as a counterweight to them. The newspaper emphasizes the value of geographic proximity, community intimacy, and personal presence, and it makes those things available in a virtual sense to readers who cannot experience them firsthand. Scribe letters also reinforce the idea that the Anabaptist world is a small one, and by introducing readers to one another and providing detailed descriptions of writers’ surroundings, the scribe letters can create virtual relationships among readers and generate sense of “being there” and knowing people that reinforce imagined communities.

An emphasis on geographic proximity as a vital component of community begins with the construction of the national edition of *The Budget* itself. The newspaper’s index,
which appears on the front page of every national edition, organizes letters based on
geography rather than author, sect, or topic, so readers can seek out letters based only on
their points of origin. Scribe letters are always one column wide and begin with the town
and state designation in bold type (e.g. Adamsville, OH; Loyal, WI) rather than a
headline that indicates the content of the letter. In many cases, the town/state designations
are accompanied by smaller, boldface subhead that provides additional detail – usually
either a more detailed geographic designation (such as an address) or the name of a
congregation or church district. In areas with large concentrations of Amish and/or
Mennonite residents, multiple scribes may be writing from the same locale. The
subheadings can be particularly useful in differentiating those letters. For example, in the
June 9, 2010, edition, there were six letters from Sugarcreek, Ohio. Subheadings serve to
differentiate those letters, making it clear which ones went with which communities —
“Menno Miller Church,” “Agape Christian Fellowship,” “South,” “Troyer Valley East,”
“Cherry Ridge,” and “Troyer Valley Southwest.”

The hometowns of individuals mentioned in letters are also important. When local
residents are traveling, or when they are mentioned in groups that include non-locals,
scribes often take care to identify the local residents as local: “Several from here went out
to the viewing and funeral” (Wagoners, 2010) [emphasis added], “(g)rands are Joe
Stutzman Jr., Colo., and Ray Bylers, locals” (B.A. Detweiler, 2010) [emphasis added].
Letter writers often mention the homes of people who come in to visit church services or
attend weddings:

April 25 -- On Good Friday church services were held at the Willard
Borntrager home in C.L. District where David and Millie Miller of Brown
City, Mich. attended. Then on Sun. they, along with 2 of their children, Joe and Rosemary Miller and 2 children, Paul and Barbara Miller and 2 sons, also the Levi C. Miller family, L.J. Miller and Ervin C. Miller, all of Gibbs, and Mahlon and Lovina Miller of Wilton all attended at the Levi T. Miller home. (Mrs. H. Miller, 2011)

Geographic ties are established in other ways. When a letter writer describes the landscape in his or her locale, it helps readers visualize those particular places. Homesteads are sometimes associated with families who previously lived there, indicating how much families are tied to distinct locations.

In December and January, a number of scribes include end-of-the-year statistics about their communities. The editors of The Budget encourage the inclusion of that information, which typically includes the number of local residents who died, the number of children who were born, how many families moved in or out, and the total number of families in the community. In each case, Budget scribes provide information that reinforces ties to proximate communities. Although Anabaptist readers will establish ties to different communities based on where they live, the emphasis on those ties creates a value around which an imagined community can form.

Scribe letters in The Budget also emphasize the importance of personal presence in the daily lives of Amish and Mennonite readers. Assembly is a dominant theme in scribe letters – most will mention church meetings, family reunions, and other forms of community gatherings. The number of people who attend weddings, family reunions, or funerals is often reported. Poor attendance at such events is sometimes noted – for example, “(i)t seemed somewhat empty in church this morning . . .” (Hostetler & Hostetler, 2010). Scribe letters frequently mention individuals and families who are
missing from church, and readers are usually told where they were. For example: “East church was at Joas Millers’ . . . . The Monroe Miller family was missing, as they went to Kingston to the funeral of Joe Mattie” (Nissley, 2011). One letter writer mentioned the presence of a woman visitor at his church and explained the absence of her husband this way: “Oren was in the area too, but chose to spend the forenoon with Mark Gingerich” (E.D. Stutzman, 2010). When they do not know where absent members are, some writers will expressly say so. Scribes also sometimes use their letters to explain their own absences from church or social events.

Visitation is another important part of Amish life, and it often requires travel. When members of an Anabaptist settlement or town are absent from the proximate community, scribes often explain where the individuals went, why they are traveling, and when they will return. A typical example:

Mark J. Troyers and Roy M. Hershbergers left early Fri. morning for Ill. to visit friends of Marks. Two weeks ago the heavy snow caused them to turn back home in Wooster, and again it snowed, but we assume they drove out of the storm in western Ohio. Plans were to be back Sun. night. (Mrs. W. Mast, 2011)

In scribe letters, travel is seen as a major, often difficult undertaking and it is often worthy of a great deal of discussion. Travel is most often linked with the attendance of important life events, such as weddings or funerals, or with visitation of friends, family, or acquaintances, although scribes do write about traveling for other reasons (such as mission work or honeymoons). Scribes sometimes make subtle or direct suggestions as to when someone might desire to be visited (for example, an individual who is injured and homebound might appreciate company to pass the time). They sometimes suggest
instances where visits might be inappropriate, as did one Delaware scribe who wrote about an ill member of his community: “Andy Miller stays about the same. He gets a lot of visitors, which can also be tiring for him” (R. Miller, 2010). Visiting is important in that it makes possible the face-to-face interactions that have historically been vital to Amish social life.

In the imagined community fostered on the pages of *The Budget*, the traditional importance of going to families’ homes and greeting them in person is emphasized, and the act of visiting is often tied to traditional Anabaptist activities such as knitting or farm work. A visit is often seen as one of the best gifts one can receive, and those gifts are often surprise visits, which are mentioned regularly in *The Budget*. The surprises are sometimes fairly elaborate. A typical example from an Iowa scribe reads:

> And last but not least the big surprise visitors, Melvin and Sadie Troyer (Vernon Kathryn’s parents) of Dela., who very unexpectedly drove in at Vernon’s on Sat. evening around 4:30, sitting in backend of the van. The driver told Vernons to come out as she has someone who wants to look through an Amish house. So Vernons had a total surprise when coming out and looking into the van. (J. Yoder & E. Yoder, 2010)

Letters in the newspaper also occasionally reflect the notion that families should expect company and be prepared to receive visitors at any time: “Many visitors are expected in the area, so we should get it cleaned up around here in case someone stops in (Byler, 2010).

Face-to-face interactions are important in large part because they build more intimate friendships. Scribe letters often depict the history of a proximate community as the history of open, intimate relationships, as is illustrated in this passage written by a Kentucky scribe:
Henry Detweilers were at their son Bishop Lonnie Detweiler’s for a few days. On Mon. forenoon they made a welcome stop here. Sarah and I had been 5th grade classmates at Pleasant Valley School in Geauga Co. the first year it was built, which was the school term of 1952-53. My dad, Uria R. Byler, was the upper grade teacher, and the former Esther J. Miller taught the lower grades. Esther later married Crist E. Fisher, who just recently passed away. Then Sarah’s family, the Menno Hostetlers, moved to Jamesport, Mo. The last time Sarah and I had seen each other was around 1962. Their visit was way too short. We had barely scratched the top of the pile before they had to leave. They wanted to visit Sarah’s cousin Cora, the Joe D.J. Millers, then catch the bus to start their journey for home in Sarasota, Fla. (Mrs. E.L. Yoder, 2010)

Letter writers reinforce the importance of individual connections among Budget readers in a number of ways. Scribes sometimes refer to community members by their first names only. Such references assume that readers of those particular letters will know (or at least know of) those being written about. Local residents are sometimes identified through things that happened to them without the provision of backstories. For example, a scribe in Cochranton, Pennsylvania, relayed the story of a local family who “attended the funeral on Fri. of the Sehlter boy that was accidentally shot in Fredonia” (Marner, 2010). Local landmarks such as old homesteads, farms, and school buildings are sometimes used rather than street names when describing locations. For example, one scribe wrote: “Five miles from here at brother’s house they had rain today at noon so that there was mud! We never quit making hay” (The Troyers, 2010) [emphasis added]. Those examples are illustrative of the Amish culture’s insular nature. They place a high priority on knowing individuals and places discussed in the letters.

Church and community visitors who are not frequent attendees are often identified in scribe letters by their names and by their affiliations with familiar individuals. The common acquaintance provides an outlet by which readers may find a
connection with the visitor. For example, a scribe from Ohio shared this story: “The van drivers were the 2 short in stature (dwarfs) from our area, being friends to Johnny Miller (Josie’s brother), who is on a wheelchair due to a construction accident” (W.D. Miller, 2010). By linking the van drivers to Johnny Miller, and linking Johnny Miller to Josie (a community member), the scribe illustrates the connection that brought the two van drivers into the community. Church visitors are regularly identified in Budget letters, and they are often linked to regular members. For example, an Ohio scribe wrote: “John P. Gingeriches from Tenn. were in church the last time. They were here to visit their daughter, the Emanuel F. Hostetlers. Emanuels now moved to his parents’ in the new building” (Mrs. H. Hostetler, 2011). Some scribes refer to church visitors as “strangers,” even when the visitors have a connection within the community. Community newcomers and new church members also face lower levels of familiarity; several scribes occasionally “introduce” new families to the broader Budget community and sometimes briefly profile families who have lived there for years, as this Mennonite scribe couple did:

I’m finally getting back to my family introductions. Paul Horst is the son of Ralph and Dorcas from Pa. He came here to live with us in 2005. In 2008 he married Ruthanne Byler, (David) and Barbara. Paul works at Rod and Staff. They have 2 little boys. (Weaver & Weaver, 2011)

Familiarity and proximity combine to make one a “member” of the community, as is reflected in one letter from the Shippensburg, Pennsylvania, scribe who was listing church visitors: “It was a pleasant surprise to have Adrian Martin as our chorister. He’s considered a visitor these days since he and Carolyn are residing in the Quakertown area, but it’s always nice to have them back at Rowe” (J. Horst, 2010a). Letters in the
newspaper also encourage people to interact with others, even when they don’t think
they’ll be known:

On Sun. morning we ventured out again, this time to Monterey, Tenn.
where Marsha’s cousin Melody Horst lives. We attended Pilgrim Christian
Fellowship for their worship service. I assumed I’d know absolutely
nobody, so I was totally surprised when a cousin of my brother-in-law,
Tim Rutter, came up to me after the service and told me she knew my
sister Jena and Tim. It’s a small, small world! (J. Horst, 2010b).

The national edition of The Budget does more than simply reinforce the notion
that readers should get to know each other. In some cases, it serves as a catalyst for
unacquainted Anabaptist readers to learn about other enclaves, to make contact with
others, and to have something in common upon which a social relationship can be built.
Scribes seem to serve as connectors in that activity. One Ohio scribe shared the following
story about an encounter at an airport:

   Sitting off to themselves was an Amish couple, obviously waiting for the
   same flight. “Are you from Holmes County,” I asked. “Yes we are,” the
   man replied, “Are you Roy Gingerich?” I was somewhat taken back,
   because I didn’t know them. But, they had just read my most recent
   Budget article mentioning my flight plans and so weren’t terribly surprised
   to “bump” into me. I had an interesting conversation with J.D. Miller and
   his wife Laura from near Walnut Creek, who were on their way to Atlanta
   to set up a display booth for their company. (R. Gingerich, 2010)

The average Amish or Mennonite reader may not have the opportunity to have such
encounters. But by reading the national edition of The Budget, they are able to establish a
sense of familiarity with others that brings to mind Anderson’s description of the roles
newspapers play in the formation of imagined communities, in which “the newspaper
reader, observing exact replicas of his own paper being consumed by his subway,
barbershop, or residential neighbours, is continually reassured that the imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life” (1983, pp. 35-36).

**Emphasis on Tradition**

Much as the hats Amish men wear indicate whether those men are living up to traditional church expectations (Hostetler, 1980), descriptions of family life in *The Budget* can serve as symbols that reflect an adherence to, and reverence for, plain life. As Nolt (2008) observed, scribe letters cover topics that range from ultra-conservative to fairly liberal. In the sample reviewed for this study, many writers made reference to the iconic horse and buggy typically associated with conservative Old Order Amish. Others, however, wrote about their use of email and the Internet, and one even discussed the social-networking website Facebook. However, high values are placed on many of the traditional aspects of Old Order Amish life, and even the more modernized writers pay homage to those notions in their letters. By emphasizing tradition as an important component of life in several different ways, Anabaptist writers create a stable, familiar narrative through which an imagined community can be achieved. Those narratives are reinforced through regular emphasis on facets of life such as patriarchy and family roles, farming and a rural lifestyle, the importance of hard work and being busy, and the value of keeping old ways of life alive.

Scribe letters often refer to family roles and family values and, in the process, to the patriarchal social system that dominates Anabaptist life. “Menfolk” and “womenfolk” have distinct duties, and those duties are often spelled out in scribe letters that reflect traditional gender roles. Men are portrayed as workers and providers and, as one scribe
couple expressly put it “the head of home” (E. Miller & L. Miller, 2011), and it is a women’s job to provide meals and tend the home. The distinctions are often clearly illustrated in descriptions of visits or social events. For example, a Mennonite scribe letter in Missouri offered the following description of a youth work project: “On Sat. the youth boys were on the job early for a work project. They had a hay shed to build and wanted to beat the heat. The youth girls served snack and took lunch to them” (O. Stolzfus & N. Stolzfus, 2010). An Illinois scribe shared the following information with readers: “The ladies had different projects going this week. Some were here to help us quilt a few times. Youth girls helped Emma Yoder quilt Wed. evening. A few of us ladies helped (Marcus) Anna Mary make noodles one day, and girls helped wash off walls in preparation to having service there” (J. Troyers, 2010). The gender roles are sometimes assigned at birth: baby boys may be identified with male duties, such as the “husky little wood chopper” born in Bonaparte, Iowa (Borntrager & Borntrager, 2010), while a baby girl may be recognized as a new “little dishwasher” (M.A. Miller, 2010a). Families are often described as social units by adding an “s” at the end of the patriarch’s last name. For example, the “husky little wood chopper” scribe letter refers to the baby’s grandparents as the “Roy Yoders” and the “LeRoy Millers.” By focusing on the distinct duties of men (e.g. farming, building, hunting, leading the household) and women (cooking, making clothes, taking care of the home), the national edition of The Budget allows readers to reinforce the culture’s strict gender roles, through which members of the same sex can imagine common bonds.
Patriarchy and family structures manifest themselves in other ways as well. Large families are often discussed with pride, particularly in death notices and obituaries. Letter writers also often report on births, and births that result in a couple becoming parents (or grandparents) for the first time are often noted as such. Those reports typically give the names of parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents. However, the names of young brothers and sisters typically aren’t included, even when there are only a few. Young people in the community are often referred to as a group – sometimes called “the youth” or “the youngie” – and their names appear in scribe letters less frequently than do those of older community members. Old age is seen as a virtue in Budget letters, and elderly people who can still work and take care of themselves are often revered, as was the case in this letter from an Ohio scribe:

Last Sun. our ministry Delon Millers and Jr. Beachys along with Leon Millers, Dwight Hershbergers and Lydia Mae Yoder had services with the ladies of Plain City. Those elderly ladies are a plucky bunch attesting to the fact that a 93 year old furnished the church lunch complete with snitz half moon pies, baked fresh Sat. evening to be at their best for Sun. lunch. (Mrs. F.L. Miller, 2010)

Because they have accumulated knowledge over their lifetimes, the elderly are seen as upstanding examples for others, as was illustrated in a letter from an Illinois scribe who wrote, “Recently I heard 2 different sermons that touched on the same subject of what a blessing a sweet old grandmother can be at home, in church, or in the community. And this good virtue does not just start at an old age but when she is a young mother” (Oba, 2010). Scribes occasionally refer to their parents simply as “mom” or “dad” without providing any names, another practice that indicates how ubiquitous older community members are in Amish culture.
The value of hard work and the importance of “staying busy” are also frequent themes in scribe letters. They are important parts of traditional Anabaptist culture and themes around which Budget readers can coalesce. The notion that the routines of everyday life make for a “busy” existence is an important aspect of Anabaptist religious beliefs (the Bible warns against idleness), and by extension the Anabaptist lifestyle. It is also a common theme in scribe letters. Scribes themselves often relate the busy nature of their daily lives to their work for the newspaper. Scribes who do not submit letters regularly will sometimes apologize for being too busy to write. Work obligations are often seen as a way to justify the ending of letters – household work should take priority over writing, as one Pennsylvania scribe wrote after writing six paragraphs (282 words) in her letter: “Well, am kind of news-less and have a pile of ironing to do, and the oil stove smoked in entrance yesterday so should wash off the walls again, which I did just before Christmas. At least it’s just the entrance walls, as the kitchen door, luckily, was closed” (Coblentz, & Coblentz, 2010). Another writer ended her scribe letter with this note: “Take a lesson from the clock, it passes time by keeping its hands busy” (Esh, 2010).

In addition to the value of “busy work,” the importance of sharing hard work also is emphasized in scribe letters. Often, those letters reflect not a single person toiling alone, but a family or community group laboring together, building bonds through shared effort, as did this group from Kentucky:

Monday evening most of the church men got together at Elmer’s to bale hay (some of it being Ike’s, too, I think.) Wow! And bale hay they did! They worked at it till dark and still didn’t get it quite done. They stacked the bales in one of Elmer’s sheds and plan on selling it at Elmer’s sale for
the school fund. Some of us ladies helped Elmer (Rosanna) quickly get some supper on for the hungry crew, afterward! Many hands make light work. (The Yoders, 2010)

In that letter, both the male and female groups found themselves faced with rather large jobs. By banding together to tackle those jobs, they maintain community. The social value of not only working hard, but working together, is a value that is often heralded in scribe letters. The ability of a community to come together to sustain itself – and for individuals to do their part in that work – is a common theme in the national edition of The Budget. Along with one’s ability to attend church, one’s ability to work is often used as a measure of personal health, as was the case in this scribe letter: “A report on Allen Mast, who has cancer. He feels good, uses some natural remedies, and is able to work in his father-in-law’s harness shop (N&A Harness). He is able to come to church regular” (F. Yoder, 2011).

Although other types of work such as day labor, carpentry, and factory jobs are mentioned in scribe letters, farming is typically the central work focus in most scribe accounts. Those accounts emphasize farming and a rural lifestyle that helps national edition readers – even those who may not farm – take part in an imagined Anabaptist community based on traditional values tied to the land and nature. Writers also suggest that the culture exists in harmony with nature. Scribes often discuss songbirds, flowers, weather, gardens, and crops in the context of an idyllic, natural environment. Every national edition includes reproductions of drawings submitted by Amish and Mennonite children. Those drawings frequently depict farm scenes or other rural activities, such as hunting. The traditional horse and buggy is another popular subject for young artists. A
majority of the letters mention specific crops that are being harvested in that community at that time, including strawberries, mushrooms, hay, and garden vegetables. During winter months when there is little to harvest, letters sometimes reference “seed catalogs” as being important — the shared experience of planning for the forthcoming growing seasons. Other aspects of farming discussed, such as the sale of farm land or the local prices of crops, can serve multiple purposes. That information helps reinforce the importance of agrarian life in the imagined Anabaptist community, and it can also provide a competitive edge to the farmers who read the newspaper (although that was never expressly stated in the letters reviewed for this study).

Farming is often portrayed as a family activity. The importance of keeping farms in the family is reflected in a number of letters, including one from Pennsylvania that read in part: “This is the third generation Amish farming on that farm, the only one I can think of in Brush Valley. There are several places in Sugar Valley where the 3rd generation is farming. They had more older people moving, which is a very good idea” (C.J. Stolzfus, 2010). A Tennessee scribe writing about his community’s efforts to buy a large piece of land described the importance of the agricultural lifestyle this way:

Our community has been looking for land to buy to start a new community for several years now without much success, at least in part due to the fact that what we were looking for is rather difficult to find. We are looking for 300 plus acres with good part tillable and of reasonable soil quality, preferably within horse and buggy driving distance from here, and all of that at an affordable price where we can hope to continue sustaining our families in an agricultural based lifestyle. (Martin, 2010)

The importance of finding a place where families can live in “an agricultural based lifestyle” is something that other writers refer to, even when that lifestyle does not
dominate their personal lives. For scribes who find themselves in other settings temporarily, the simple rural lifestyle is missed, as was noted by a couple who were staying in a hospital with a sick child: “A person has a hard time to think anything else besides this hospital life. It is something quite different than a country life!” (J. Schwartz & E. Schwartz, 2011).

As Kraybill (1994) noted, farming is not as pervasive in Amish life as it once was. However, the agrarian lifestyle is still important, even for scribes who do not work the land on the stereotypically cozy Amish farm. One scribe from Michigan began his letter this way: “It is a fall morning of 45˚, though we’ve had temperature in the 70s this week and has been rainy some also. The 2 families that farm have been busy chopping corn and hauling out loads of silage. A lot of this corn was planted on our land” (Wagler, 2010) [emphasis added]. Another writer in Pennsylvania shared this story about farming:

> We are just grateful that the hay is in, since John [the scribe’s husband] doesn’t have a lot of time to do it. I would be ready to call it quits as far as making hay, but he enjoys it and gives him something else to do beside sit in a truck all day! I actually did get out of helping this year since I was at work when he made it home to bale it. (Wengerd, 2011)

Farming is discussed in each of those letters, but the practice is not central to the lives of either scribe. However, the letters suggest that one need not be consumed by farming, or even take part in it, in order to be a part of the imagined community. By recognizing the importance agriculture plays in the historic identity of the Anabaptists, readers build connections.

Scribe letters address the importance of keeping other traditions alive as well. Distinctive dialect and traditional phrases are seen in many scribe letters, allowing
readers to build connections with one another through the use of words such as “gma,” “youngie,” “nava huckers,” “maude,” “bestelt,” and “fremte.” Speaking (and occasionally writing) in Pennsylvania Dutch (a dialect of German) is another way scribes can build imagined community around traditional language. Every Budget national edition includes a column written in Pennsylvania Dutch. Scribes also often discuss their use of the language as a way to connect with other Anabaptists, as was the case in this scribe letter from Colorado:

An Ohio load stopped hubby out by the road and the driver asked, “Gleichsh du epplesise?!” An unusual saying to us, but guess not in Ohio. After asking for directions to Eli Mast’s home they proceeded there. Not finding Eli at home they left a note of thanks for the use of his rest room. Eli reported they used an unusual amount of toilet tissue for a one time pot stop. Looks like Eli has friends who also like to play tricks. (Mrs. R.C. Yoder, 2010)

An ability to recognize the Pennsylvania Dutch phrase is crucial to understanding the nature of the joke at the conclusion of the anecdote. Other writers also share experiences through the traditional tongue:

We continue having beautiful fall weather but would be glad for a good soaker! This morning when I drove the children to school up Paul Overholt’s driveway I could hardly see from the “shtaab”. The word “dust” just doesn’t say it like the Pa. Dutch. (P. Yoder & M. Yoder, 2010)

Phillip Miller was received as a member last Sun. and our son Daniel was baptized. I called my mom last week and told her in Pennsylvania Dutch that Daniel is going to be baptized (gedauft) on Sun. Daniel heard it and said, “I’m gonna what?!” Elvin and I both know Dutch but Elvin doesn’t know it well enough to carry a conversation, so the children haven’t learned much of it. (M. Schrock, 2011)

Sunday morning there were these 2 grandfathers asking the 2 grandmothers about walking to church or driving? The grandmothers

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9 “Church service,” “young people,” “wedding party,” “maid,” “to be held,” and “visitor.”
10 “Do you like applesauce?!”
replied, “It’s a nice morning, let’s walk.” Grandfather replied, “Vel ich musz done der gahl ab chatta.” (Then I must un harness the horse.). (E. Stutzmans, 2011)

Many of the writers provide translations or otherwise recognize that their readers may not be able to understand those passages. However, by including them, scribes continue to build imagined community around old Amish and Mennonite traditions that, as a practical matter, may not be part of daily life for many readers.

Spirituality and Worship

The Budget’s editorial guidelines specifically instruct scribes to “(i)n general, omit items that could be considered ‘preaching,’” including sermon topics and phrases such as “Lord Willing” (“Guidelines For Writing Your Letters,” n.d.). The newspaper’s publisher and national editor both said the policy is meant to keep letters shorter to preserve space and to minimize the chance of letters turning into forums for the debate of dogma. Direct references to religious beliefs were found among the letters in the sample, but they were relatively rare and were most common in letters written by missionaries.

However, faith permeates every aspect of Amish life, including scribe letters. Through references to community events and observations about the world around them, scribes frequently illustrate the centrality of Godliness in their everyday lives. The national editor of The Budget elaborated:

I think if you read the letters, or you read the paper, you get a feel for God, you get a feel for who these people are, how they view God, how they live by God and the Bible with their sense of community, helping, that kind of thing. The religion part of it comes through even if it’s not preached as “this is what you do.” I’ve had English people say they get that feel, they have that sense of their commitment to God, community, church, family. So even if we don’t preach in our paper, it’s actually preaching. (F. Erb-Miller, personal correspondence, March 30, 2012)
Perhaps the most overt illustration of the importance of faith in scribe letters can be seen in the emphasis on worship services. Reports about regular worship services – sometimes referred to as “gma” or “gmay” by more orthodox writers who use Pennsylvania Dutch – are included in the majority of scribe letters. Those reports are often provided fairly early in the letters and include information such as where services were held, who visited, and who was absent. When services are cancelled due to bad weather or funerals, the cancellations are reported. In Old Order Amish communities where services are held in private homes, letters often note where upcoming services are to be held. Attendance is reported, and absences from services are noted as well. Old Order Amish church districts are often identified by bishop (e.g. “Perry Yoder’s district was held at ...”). Mennonite sects that worship in church buildings are usually identified by congregation name (e.g. “The visitors yesterday at Shadylawn were ...”). Both types of groups often report the same basic worship service information. The inclusion of that information, and its prominence in letters, helps reinforce the already-important role of faith among Anabaptist readers of *The Budget*.

Many scribe letters either begin or end with inspirational quotes or statements. Those quotes are humorous at times and serious at others, but they almost always carry a spiritual or inspirational message. The passages reinforce a value system that will be familiar to Anabaptist readers of *The Budget*, regardless of sect, age, or geographic locale. In some cases, those quotes speak specifically to religious beliefs or activities. For example:
The prayers that carry the most weight and are of rarest beauty are those in which we don’t demand but just report for duty. (J. Zehr & D. Zehr, 2010)

We should follow where He leads and swallow what He feeds. (J. Schrock & S. Schrock, 2010)

Only when we have knelt before God can we stand before men. (Overholt & Overholt, 2010)

Although quotes that directly referenced God or spirituality occurred with some regularity, quotes more often referenced faith more subtly by emphasizing values underpinned by the Anabaptist faith system, such as loving one’s neighbor, humility, a realization that God controls the world, and proper perspectives on one’s place in the world. For example, the following passages were used to conclude letters that appeared in the first section of the February 10, 2010 national edition:

When you think life is tough, take time to think of someone whose situation is worse than yours. (L. Stutzman, 2010)

Friendship is something the blind can see and the deaf can hear. (J. Yoder & M. Yoder, 2010)

An empty heart is a far greater misfortune than an empty purse. (J.L. Zehr, 2010)

“Love is that condition in which the happiness of another person is essential to your own.” – Robert Heinlein. (Schmuckers, 2010)

Thought: It matters not what you are thought to be, but what you are. (A. Miller & B. Miller, 2010)

Most of our troubles are imaginary and never happen. (Eicher & Eicher, 2010)

Although those quotes do not carry overtly religious messages (the quotation from Robert A. Heinlein’s Stranger in a Strange Land, for example), all of them emphasize values that are rooted in the Amish and Mennonite faiths. By bookending their letters with such
messages, scribes reinforce fairly broad religious beliefs in ways that would appeal to almost any Anabaptist reader, regardless of sect.

Mentions of church services and the inclusion of inspirational quotes and statements are common, almost structural elements of scribe letters. Other, less formulaic means of storytelling also convey the distinct value systems of The Budget’s Anabaptist readers and writers. Faith is often expressed through stories about everyday life occurrences, such as the weather, crop harvests, or illnesses. For example:

Winter Wonderland! Tree branches are hanging down because of their heavy load. We humans could never so quickly and prettily frost the outside world. (Mrs. R.J. Hershberger, 2010)

Leroys and Ed Schrocks came home from Crab Orchard, Ky. on Tues. after visiting Joseph Yoder, their grandson and nephew. Lots of prayers have gone up on behalf of this young man that is so critically injured, which is a reason he is still here. (N. Miller & S. Miller, 2010)

In each of those examples, scribes emphasize the power God holds over everyday life, a belief that would be familiar to the majority of The Budget’s Anabaptist readers.

Similarly, scribe letters reflect the notion that hardships bring individuals closer to their God. That value is often expressed directly, particularly when it relates to health problems or difficulties created by the weather. For example:

Little 6 month old Emma (Andy) Schwartz came through her open heart surgery well and was doing as good as can be expected. Poor little girl, hopefully God is sparing her the pain that seems so unfair to her! But, God is in control and maybe she isn’t suffering as much as the parents and family. At such times one feels so small as we realize it is all in the hands of a higher power. (Schmidt, 2010)

We were refreshed with .3” of rain this week, while others got as much as 2”. Eva picked our first peas today, and said the prospects for a bumper crop like last year are not too likely. With our present water shortage, nothing is busting its shirt at the moment, but the summer is not over yet,
and we still live in hope. The Lord has never yet forsaken the righteous, although we certainly can’t claim that rank either. (E.D. Burkholder, 2010)

Each example expressly recognizes a faith that God will provide fitting outcomes to difficult situations. Similar ideas can be expressed without direct references to God. For example, because of the physical nature of traditional Anabaptist life, an average national edition of *The Budget* includes a number of accounts of farm- and work-related accidents. Often, readers are reminded that accidents that did not result in loss of life or serious injury could have been worse. For example:

Ben Troyer also had a minor accident that could’ve easily been worse from having a wire on a feeder made from wire panels hitting his face just below his eye towards his nose. It knocked his glasses off and also bled quite a bit. (J. Troyer & M. Troyer, 2010)

Elsie Yoder (Melvin L.) had an unpleasant experience the other week when going on Road 450. Her horse shied from a semi-gravel truck. He took the ditch and overturned the buggy. Elsie wasn’t hurt much, but had a very sore shoulder for awhile. The buggy needed some repairs, too, so could’ve been much worse. (Borntragers, 2010)

When discussing accidents, scribes also sometimes used words such as “mishap” and “setback” to describe injuries that did not kill or incapacitate, even when the injuries required stitches or trips to the hospital. By observing that seemingly bad conditions could always be worse, *Budget* scribes reinforce the importance of faith and the presence of God’s mercy.

Humility – another core value in the Anabaptist belief system – is expressed in a number ways. One of the more common methods scribes use to remind readers of the importance of remaining humble is through the use of humorous stories and anecdotes from their home communities. Often, those humorous stories involve community
members who were involved in minor accidents that resulted in embarrassment more than injury, moments when a child got the better of an adult, or incidences of youthful indiscretion that did not involve moral violations. In some letters, such as the one that follows, the main character in the story (the one who finds him/herself embarrassed) is clearly identified:

One day last week our son Joshua decided to take his paintball gun to work. Guess he thought some excitement on their break would be fun. The crew was busily working inside the new house they are building when their boss, Ervin Miller, comes inside looking for something. He smelled juicy fruit gum and upon seeing the open bag of yellow paintballs grabs two of them and pops them in his mouth. Too late he discovered they were not what he was smelling. The crew wished so bad they could’ve seen the yellow juice he had to spit out, as he later told them the story, and wondered whose paintballs those were. The juicy fruit smell was for real as one of them was chewing that flavor gum. So next time you meet Ervin remember to ask him what flavor yellow (paintballs) gum balls are? (Mrs. I. Miller, 2010)

In other cases, the main character is not identified by name at all, as in this accounting of a woman who forgot to do something before leaving the home for church:

One lady had an embarrassing moment on Christmas morning when she came to church. She had a blue dress on and a black apron. Such things happen if it stays dark so long. (Mrs. J. Stutzman, 2010).

In other letters, the potentially embarrassed party is identified in a way such that only members of the immediate community would be able to easily recognize him or her, as was the case with the following anecdote:

In the evening we about all got together at Merles’ Mon. for Roy’s birthday at 3:00 a.m. Elis left for home by train. When Elis were here, their girls and more of our granddaughters went to son Marvin’s cabin to camp. In the middle of the night 2 boys slipped out of the house and went over to scare the girls. When they were outside the cabin, sounding like a wolf, the girls all went out to see the wolf. The boys took off, but the one
boy got caught in the barb wire fence. Now the girls were the wolf. If you want to know how he got loose, ask Joseph. (R.J.C. Yoders, 2010)

By sharing their own embarrassing stories and the stories of others, and by encouraging proximate acquaintances to ask about those stories, scribe letters actively reinforce the presence of humility in their communities, and they emphasize the value of that trait among the broader *Budget* readership. Those stories also illustrate the value of dialogue and social interaction as a way of creating meaningful bonds and memories that can be shared by families and/or communities. The importance of building memories – even bad ones – is sometimes expressly stated when scribes share stories of their own misfortune, as did one writer who recounted a family trip:

> Our family enjoyed an outing to Ky. when there was no school . . . . We toured a part of Mammoth Cave and visited Abraham Lincoln’s birthplace and boyhood home, but the trip was made even more memorable by a flat tire, rain-drenched camping, and running out of gas!” (P. Miller, 2010)

Finally, scribe letters often reflect an ongoing cycle of life under the control of an all-powerful God. When scribes refer to the changing of the crop seasons, the passage of months and years, and the transition from winter to spring and spring to summer, they remind readers that the march of time is inevitable. When they write of time, scribes often do so in a way that reminds readers that it is fleeting. For example:

> Feb. 5 – Today 23 years ago something special was going on at my parents’ home in Ky. . . . [sic] our wedding! Contrasting with today’s snowy weather, that day was very mild, sunny and springlike. I do wonder where all that time went so fast! (Kilmer, 2010)

In ways direct and subtle, scribe letters remind readers of *The Budget*’s national edition that their existence should be a faithful, reflective one. A belief in God and adherence to spiritual teachings and values such as humility are fundamental parts of
Amish and Mennonite culture. Because of that fundamental importance, discussions of faith permeate most aspects of scribe letters, from descriptions of work to talk of the weather and social life. Religion’s position of prominence in the letters reflects a basic theme that most readers of The Budget likely would identify and relate with, regardless of their geographic locations.

Outward Symbols of Community

Many of the dominant themes of plain life that emerge in The Budget would be familiar to almost any Anabaptist reader, regardless of his or her sect. However, within Anabaptist life, there are a variety of distinct belief systems and those systems separate sects from the ultra-conservative Swartzentruber Amish to the more modernized New Order Mennonites. Those distinctions can be seen in the melting pot of letters that make up The Budget’s national edition. It is important to note that scribes do not typically critique the belief systems of other Anabaptists in Budget letters. Doing so would violate the newspaper’s editorial policy regarding religious content, which would typically result in the offending section being edited out of the letter. It would also go against the belief system of many Anabaptists if it were to be viewed as inappropriately judgmental or proselytizing. That is not to say that Budget readers do not object to the content of some letters on faith-based grounds, or that they will always refrain from making those objections known. The Budget’s publisher recalled one instance in which a conservative Amish reader contacted him to complain about the inclusion of letters from international missionaries typically affiliated with more liberal Anabaptist groups. However, such complaints are rare (K. Rathbun, personal correspondence, March 30, 2012). Several
common themes allow readers to distinguish different sects. In most cases, those distinctions are made through the expression of practices or traditions. Scribes occasionally use those same outward expressions to separate Anabaptists from non-Anabaptists, who are commonly referred to as the “English.”

In some cases, sects are clearly distinguished in the subheadings of letters. That practice is most common among Mennonite writers who identify their local community by providing the name of their church. Distinctions are occasionally made within letters when both Amish and Mennonite people are involved in the news. That practice is fairly rare; it is most common in letters from Pinecraft, Florida, a community where many Amish and Mennonite families vacation during the winter months. Letters from Pinecraft will often refer to Amish and Mennonite church activities separately. In some cases, scribes who have encounters with members from other sects will write about the differences and their reactions, as did one scribe from Kansas:

We’ve been hosting a 14 year old Mennonite girl from Newton last week and this week. She has no desire to join the Amish that I’m aware of, but her love of reading Laura Ingalls Wilder books and more recently, books about Amish characters, got her thinking it would be interesting to live a plain lifestyle. . . . I must say I was not immediately willing and rather skeptical of the whole idea, but hearing occasionally of her burning desire I gave in to a 4-day trial period. I was pleasantly surprised when Miss Epp came, in a dress as I’d requested. She’s quiet, gracious, polite, but opened up more later and has told me lots about her family and her life, and she’s willing to work, helping with whatever I’m doing. . . . I’m finding that I enjoy her company, she does not make me nervous, but it’s being a neat experience. I don’t think of her as an “English intruder,” but a soul that is just as precious to God as myself. . . . Life in town is quite different than out here in the country on a busy farm, but she loves the quiet peacefulness. (A. Knepp, 2010)
Generally, however, distinctions between Amish and Mennonites – and among the various sects within those groups – are typically much more subtle, and they are often based on language and daily practices. There are clear dialectical differences between more traditional Old Order writers – who use Pennsylvania Dutch and other traditional phrases – and others who use modern language. For example, New Order writers might use the word “girlfriend” or “boyfriend,” whereas a scribe from a more orthodox sect might use the more traditional phrase “special friend.” Scribes discuss evangelism, computer use, and education in ways that distinguish reformist groups from more orthodox sects. Perhaps the most common way writers differentiated their groups was through the description of travel. Rather than simply writing that community members “traveled” or “went” from one point to another, scribes often detailed the mode of transportation in ways that give hints about their communities’ beliefs. As stated earlier, not all Anabaptists eschew modern transportation — some sects allow members to own and use motor vehicles, and many others allow members to ride with “English” drivers or to use public transit such as busses, trains, and airplanes. Phrases such as “bugged,” “went with a driver,” “traveled by bus,” “drove,” and “traveled by air” help Amish and Mennonite readers recognize the relative diversity of the broader Anabaptist society.

Scribes also write with some regularity about their interactions with “the English.” Typically, the English aren’t mentioned by name in scribe letters, and their status as non-Amish people is often noted: scribes write about “my English neighbor” or “an English store,” or discuss activities at a “non-Amish farm.” The following example is another typical treatment: “A couple from Pearisburg, Va. was at the singing tonight.”
They were neighbors to Andy and Caroline there and came out here to travel back east with them next week. They’re not Amish” (B. Miller, 2011).

Non-Amish individuals are mentioned by name in some letters when they have a direct connection to the local Amish community. Often, they are in business with the local Amish, or they may be “drivers” paid to chauffer Amish people who object to driving on spiritual grounds. When they are named, their status as English is still noted, as was the case in this example:

Yesterday, Oct. 6, word came that Mrs. Sarah (Jake) Graber (non-Amish) also passed away after a short illness. . . . She had been a driver for several teachers and special ed students. (Jess & Jess, 2010)

The comings and goings of the English are important to Amish and Mennonites for a number of reasons, and letters reflect that notion. Scribes sometimes discuss the agricultural work of non-Amish farms, often comparing it to those in their own communities, as did a scribe from Ohio who wrote: “A lot of crops went in. The English used nights also, but the Amish could not do it so fast, as Mon. and Tues. were very hot and humid and horses not used to it, made for slow going” (N.J. Stutzman, 2011). Scribes are also particularly interested when land changes hands between Amish and non-Amish, or vice versa. For example:

Our own farmland sold for $1,675.00 per acre. We rejected a $25,000 bid on the building site. Many of the homes were newly built and none brought their money’s worth. There were no plain group buyers. To the general population buildings hold little value. (L. Helmuth, 2010)

We stopped at Ickesburg Store for some supplies. The store has now changed hands since last Dec. It is now occupied by Amish. (M. Horning, 2010)
Writers also sometimes detail their personal interactions with the English. Some scribes write about having to deal with incidences in which their value systems clash with those of the non-Amish world in which they live. For example, in this sample’s study, one scribe wrote about being asked to testify in court (the scribe refused), and another recalled explaining to an English person why the Amish did not salute the American flag. At times, scribe letters suggest that Anabaptist life is a better alternative to English life. For example, one missionary wrote: “I liked one of our church members comments when she told me she feels sorry for the unbelievers in our midst that do not understand our way of grieving” (R. Miller, 2011). Such references were fairly rare, however, and they were most often observed in letters from missionary groups who were writing about the people to whom they were ministering. Those scribe letters differentiate the writers and their communities from the English, but did not directly challenge the beliefs of other Anabaptist readers.

More often, scribes express the idea that it is best to be open and accepting of the English. However, they also often suggest that the English should be kept at arm’s length. Outsiders typically are not written about in an overtly negative light, but scribes clearly differentiate the English from plain people. In some cases, those distinctions are fairly easy to recognize, as was the case when a scribe from New Mexico wrote about selling a puppy to a non-Amish couple from Albuquerque: “At last the folks pulled up in their late model Ford Explorer with its ‘Obama ‘08’ bumper sticker. The white-haired man tottered forth holding Tommy, a politically correct, neutered white male, on a leash” (Coon, 2010). The scribe went on to write about the English couple’s struggle to deal with his
more rambunctious dogs. At the end of the letter, the scribe observes: “I’m sure that Tommy and Tara [the other puppy] are best friends now. It’s just that, in spite of what some dogs owners think, dogs are – well – dogs.” In the same issue, another scribe offers the following account of an interaction with a Pakistani group:

We have done a lot of chicken butchering in the past (over 5,200 birds), but never before did we butcher some for people like we did this week. They are from Pakistan, but live in the states now. Anyway, they came out to bless the chickens as they were dying! And we couldn’t chop the heads off, they wanted to just have a slit cut into the neck and bleed them slowly. Meanwhile the man was going to each chicken, blessing it in his own language, sounding more like “La La La!” Needless to say we were happy when the blessing was done and they went out the drive! The women wears a black scarf wrapped around her neck and head. (W. Yoder, 2010)

More often, however, the English are written about in a more neutral or positive light. For example:

I should also mention that we had an English visitor in church yesterday. This was a college student girl, who is currently staying at Roman Eichers’ doing a culture study. I believe these students do this once a year or so, going to different Amish homes trying to learn more of our lifestyle. Hopefully, they don’t need to experience a “culture shock” while adjusting to our way of life during this short period of time. This girl yesterday was dressed like the rest of us and one would never have guessed that she’s not used to wearing a head covering, a long skirt, and our traditional church clothes, except for the revealing fact that she could not understand our Pa. Dutch dialect. I find this all rather interesting and think I could use one of these girls myself at this time to help me out with small tasks, but better yet even just to keep me company! (J. Miller & S. Miller, 2010)

We have 2 children here from New Hampshire. They are Casey (12) and Kevin (11). Their parents are Peter and Nancy Rhodes. We make furniture for their store. The children will be staying 2 weeks. They have never been around Amish much and are having a great time. (Beachy, 2011)

In each of those examples, the distinction between Anabaptist and non-Anabaptist is important, even though the interactions are generally friendly. Scribes make a conscious
effort to share stories about their interactions with English people, and to share those stories from distinctly Anabaptist points of view. By making the distinctions, *Budget* scribes reinforce the notion that readers are “in the world, but not of the world,” a notion that is central to Amish faith and an idea that is important in the reinforcement of a broader imagined community. Anderson wrote that all “imagined communities” were naturally limited: “even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living beings, has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations” (1983, p. 7). By making note of the things that make them different from others, *Budget* letters help set those boundaries for its readers.
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

At their best, community newspapers satisfy a desire for “the affirmation of the sense of community, a positive and intimate reflection of the sense of place, a stroke for us-ness, our extended family-ness and our profound and interlocking connectedness” (Lauterer, 2006, p. 33). The Budget would seem to meet Lauterer’s ideals: it binds together a community of readers separated by great geographic distances, reinforcing their connections and “us-ness.” The mainstream media comparisons to Facebook (Cohen, 2009; Rabinowitz, 2010) are applicable in a sense – content in The Budget is social in tone and personal in nature, as is much content on social media websites. However, The Budget’s print medium creates the nexus for a broader community in that the newspaper gathers and presents “life” information from the entire community, not merely a self-selected group of “friends.”

This thesis illustrates the ways in which one unusual community newspaper binds together its diasporic readership. In exploring the bonds maintained by the newspaper, this thesis contributes to the broader understanding of the ways in which media reaffirm “the widest co-ordinates of the individual’s reality” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 149). The study also makes a modest contribution that may help others understand the ways in which newspapers and other types of media can bind together other diasporas and small communities which, as Jenkins observed, are “no less symbolically constructed” than nation states (2004, p. 114).

In Imagined Communities, Benedict Anderson described print media, and newspaper reading in particular, as an important factor in the creation of a “remarkable
confidence of community in anonymity which is the hallmark of modern nations.” A newspaper reader, “observing exact replicas of his own paper being consumed by his subway, barbershop, or residential neighbours, is continually reassured that the imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life” (Anderson, 1983, pp. 35-36). In this thesis, I have examined the ways one unusual community newspaper could construct such camaraderie among its audience. Anderson envisioned nations of people united by common senses of national values that are reinforced by, among other things, use of common media. The Budget’s audience is not united by nationalism – instead, its readers are united by common religious beliefs, and the important tenets of those beliefs are reinforced weekly through scribe letters in the newspaper. The notion that a newspaper can bind similar people in different places together was clearly voiced by one Budget scribe, an Ohio resident temporarily staying in Pinecraft, Florida, a popular winter vacation spot for Anabaptists from northern states:

On Thurs. noon we did what a lot of other Pinecraft folks do; we attended the “circus” held in the parking lot of the Tourist Church. I have no convictions in attending this kind of “circus”, as it is simply a place where friends meet friends, and where you observe who the other “snowbirds” are that disembark from the Pioneer Trails coach. Surprises, smiles of delight, handshakes and hugs, are all quite commonplace. . . .

Coming back to the parking lot where the bus arrives, Thursday’s arrival is a little special and draws a bigger crowd than the other days. Any idea why? It’s Budget day! Whole stacks of them are unloaded, placed on a table, then passed out to those who have dropped their dollar into the jar. Leftover copies are then taken and sold in area restaurants.

Outside of our home communities, there’s probably nowhere else in the U.S. where every week, hundreds of Budgets, fresh off the press, find their way into individual homes and help people to become “informed”. Without apology I admit that I was among them. (M. Gingerich, 2010)
The scribe letters that make up The Budget’s national edition are grounded in familiar values of faith, family, and community, and letters are written in a casual, conversational style that mirrors the face-to-face conversations and other traditional forms of Anabaptist communication, such as the circle letters described in Chapter 3. Those factors combine to evoke an atmosphere of intimacy on the pages of the newspaper’s national edition, and the broad circulation of The Budget distributes that intimacy beyond state and even national borders. Scribes sometimes reference the sense of community they feel through reading and writing for The Budget. Some write about the relationships in direct ways, as did an Ohio scribe who wrote: “[t]his will be my last letter for the Budget. It has been a pleasure to make and meet new friends through the Budget” (M. Detweiler, 2011). Others reference community in more subtle ways. For example, one Indiana scribe described a sense of familiarity attained through reading accounts of the weather in The Budget:

Well, we have just come through another ultra-warm week with temperatures in the upper 90s. Also very sultry and sticky. I noticed in last week’s Budget that many other states are also experiencing the same. (A.M. Burkholder, 2010)

Often, the overall narratives of scribe letters present fairly uniform depictions of life: children are born, couples are married, and family members grow old and die. The descriptions are rooted in work, faith, family, and a broad set of common values that emphasize faithfulness to God and relationships among neighbors and family members. Overwhelmingly, those stories are presented not as narratives about places, but as narratives about people who happen to identify strongly with their locales. The significance of a sense of place is an important facet of Anabaptist life. Anabaptist traditions, history, and economic factors create important bonds between individuals and
proximate communities (and, importantly, others in those proximate communities).

Because of its importance, that identification with locality cannot help but come through in the decidedly non-local medium. The national editor observed, “Even if you [as a reader] don’t personally know them [scribes], you think you know them because you have visited their house every week, or their community. Because a writer writes about a community, so you’ve actually visited it” (F. Erb-Miller, personal correspondence, March 30, 2012).

Within those depictions, subtle and overt cues allow members of individual sects to pick out narratives that speak to their specific belief structures. The Budget’s readership ranges from ultra-orthodox Swartzentruber Amish who avoid nearly all post-industrial conveniences, including indoor plumbing, to more modernized New Order sects that deviate from traditions by evangelizing, driving cars, and using modern communication technologies such as the Internet and cellular telephones. Newspaper executives interviewed for this study said they did not believe the manifestation of those differences in scribe letters created significant divisions among readers. The publisher of the newspaper explained:

[People pick and choose what to read and what not to. They read letters from similar church communities to their own. I tell people, “You pick up a daily newspaper and not everybody reads the sports, not everybody reads the comics, not everybody reads life. But it’s there, because there are people who do have an interest in that.” There are 44 pages on average in the national [edition of The Budget]. There’s plenty for everybody to read. (K. Rathbun, personal communication, March 30, 2012)

Although differences among various Anabaptist groups can be seen in the national edition of The Budget, those differences are not central to the content of scribe
letters. The newspaper’s correspondent submissions rarely dwell on or discuss dogmatic
differences. Letters that did so would violate the newspaper’s editorial policies, but
newspaper executives said few writers ever attempt to broach those subjects. Instead, the
majority of scribe letters include content to which many different members of the
newspaper’s diverse readership could relate. By focusing on the central themes of faith,
family, and community, and by presenting those themes in a style that mimics the
Anabaptists’ oral tradition, The Budget contributes to the maintenance of a broad
“imagined community” among its Amish and Mennonite readers.

Limitations and Opportunities for Further Study

This study represents one person’s view of the content in a single newspaper over
an 18-month period. Perhaps its most significant limitation is that it does not account for
the interpretations of Amish and Mennonite readers. Prior to beginning the systematic
readings of The Budget, I attempted to learn as much as I could about the history of the
Anabaptist faith, and about the fundamental aspects of contemporary Amish and
Mennonite life. Those efforts were invaluable when it came to understanding scribe
letters. However, because I am an outsider, I undoubtedly missed some nuances of scribe
letters. Research that includes interviews with Amish and Mennonite readers of The
Budget would provide a different level of insight into the ways the newspaper builds
community among readers. There are also limitations in relying on the writings of scribes
themselves. Because the study did not involve direct communication with scribes
themselves, it cannot address questions about their representativeness to their enclaves,
nor can it ensure that there are not some scribes who are not in touch with their local communities.

It would be worthwhile to compare the reading experiences of scribes to those of readers who do not write for the newspaper. A number of *Budget* letters suggest that scribes hold an unusual position of prominence in their communities, and my interviews with the newspaper’s staff reinforce that interpretation. In any case, it is likely that scribes (who are unpaid contributor/readers) and regular readers have different levels of personal investment in the newspaper. It could be the case that those differences contribute to distinct reading experiences.

By extension, this study also could serve as a starting point for a more in-depth study of the role of *The Budget* in weekly life of various Anabaptist communities. Some evidence suggests the reading of *The Budget* is an important social act. A number of scribe letters indicate that *The Budget*’s content is often discussed among family members and in local communities. The sharing of newspapers is also common (K. Rathbun, personal correspondence, March 30, 2012). This study cannot account for the ways in which scribe letters and advertisements influence discourse in individual Anabaptist communities. The newspaper also could serve other practical purposes. For example, it could be a valuable economic tool, in that it can provide weekly information about land prices, crop yields, and commodity prices.

Advertisements in the national edition present a particularly interesting forum for the exploration of the role of *The Budget* in daily Anabaptist life and discourse. The present study focuses only on letters, which are governed by a specific set of guidelines.
and are in some ways fairly homogenous. Advertisements in the national edition represent a much more diverse set of texts – some include process color printing and photos, for example. At times, the content of advertisements has generated complaints from more orthodox readers who object to content (K. Rathbun, personal communication, March 30, 2012). Many of the advertisements are produced by English companies that wish to reach the Anabaptist market. Further research could explore the common themes in advertisements, and how *Budget* readers react to those themes.

The findings in this study also touch on specific discourses that take place in the national edition from week to week. Readers are encouraged to correspond through the newspaper in certain ways (the most prominent being the “Information Please” column). In addition, groups of scribes address each other by name and appear to carry on conversations in their letters, and they ask questions on behalf of others. Because the sample for this study included only one newspaper per month, it could not examine the presence, frequency, or nature of ongoing conversations among (or facilitated by) scribes. The national edition of *The Budget* has been compared to Facebook and Twitter because of the personal nature of most scribe letters and the interaction among scribes and readers (Cohen, 2009; Rabinowitz, 2010) – this study helps lay the groundwork for a more nuanced examination of those interactions.

In a broader sense, this study contributes to the understanding of the ways in which a community news outlet can foster cohesion among its readers. Anderson’s theory of “imagined communities” is particularly useful in explaining media’s role in reinforcing senses of commonality among readers who are separated by geography. As
technologies continue to put media production and media consumption opportunities in the hands of more people, explorations of the individual-level aspects of imagined communities become increasingly important. *Budget* scribes play the role of opinion leaders within a broad network, but they also act as points of entry for community members to access that network. Scribes might be compared to a public computer in a community library – they are accessed by people who wish to spread information, and their letters disseminate that information to a wider audience. Future research could explore the ways in which different types of media (online or print, or combinations of both) allow individuals to produce and maintain identities along those same lines.

This study suggests that a print-only medium can serve as a true “virtual community,” albeit a community that moves more slowly and requires more investment of energy and resources than a Facebook page or an online discussion forum. The medium itself creates the imagined community. That sense of community could not exist without an established set of values around which it could coalesce: farm work, faith, community, and family. In those aspects of life, every Anabaptist member has a part, and each part contributes to the greater whole – that being the local community (Hostetler, 1980, p. 381). The national edition of *The Budget* creates a forum where those roles are discussed and played out more broadly. By serving as a conduit for the “fond imagining” (Anderson, 1983, p. 154) of those values as “our own,” *The Budget* reinforces imagined community among its readers and becomes an integral part of communal life.
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With more and more churches dividing into new districts and groups moving to new areas to set up communities and wanting to be included in the newspaper, we need to make some changes. Since we would like to include all new communities we need to set some limits. **We request that you limit your letter to 12 column inches or less per week.**

**Guidelines For Writing Your Letters**

* Use a pen with black or dark blue ink. Do not use a pencil or felt tip. No carbon copies.

* Write large enough that it can be read easily, and plainly enough that we do not have to wonder what it says. Be especially careful with names, and please do not abbreviate names or other words.

* Read your letter before mailing it. If you can’t read it—we can’t either. We find sentences that make no sense because words or phrases were unintentionally omitted.

* Omit local visits unless they involve persons from outside the community or are for a special occasion (ill person, new baby, birthday party, quitting for benefits). You need to specify the community they are from and/or what the occasion is for to have the item printed.

* Omit stories of bygone years, example “my sister died 12 years ago today.”

* Omit stories that you read in other magazines, newspapers, etc., that have nothing to do or relate with the group you report for.

* For wedding details you may include the bridal party (nana hucka), eck or head table waiters, and hosters. Omit listings like “people attended from Ind., Ill., Pa.” etc. We need names included if you report where they came from.

* Omit “Lord Willing”, “D.V.” etc. In general omit items that could be considered “preaching.” Sermon or topic subjects should not be included.

* The Budget has a separate column for thank-you notes and showers. Do not put these items in your letter. We do not put addresses in letters except for the following:
  -- For someone newly ordained to the ministry
  -- For someone who has had a death in the family

* Expressions of sympathy / congratulations (mail a personal card to them), or prayer requests, etc., are not to be included in your newsletter.

(over)
* Sign your letter. Your letter will not be used if you do not give your full name on the letter. We prefer your full name as the signature. Also please put your name and address on the envelope and the address section of the stationary.

* If you have a substitute for a week or several weeks, please inform them to write it at the top of the letter that they are substituting for you. This needs to be stated on each letter. They also need to sign their name as having written the letter.

* If you type your letter, please double space and use paper without lines.

* If you fax your letter, it is your responsibility to check with us if you question if it faxed properly. Try and call within 15 minutes of faxing it so we can locate it quickly.

* If you e-mail your letter put your heading and subhead in the body copy of your letter, along with your name at the end of your letter.

There are exceptions to all rules and it is quite possible that there are times when exceptions to these rules are justified, but we hope all writers keep within these guidelines. Poorly written and hard-to-read letters tend to be edited harder.

We appreciate your contribution in making the publishing of The Budget possible, and for helping to make our editing and typesetting jobs easier. Thanks.

Note: If you have a story of something that happened in bygone days, etc., I will be happy to consider it for the "Ponderings and Musings" page. Please submit it on a separate piece of paper.

Fannie Erb-Miller
National Editor