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The Medium Is the Danger: Discourse about Television among Amish and Ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) Women

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ABSTRACT

This study shows how Old Order Amish and ultra-Orthodox women's discourse about television can help develop a better understanding of the creation, construction, and strengthening of limits and boundaries separating enclave cultures from the world. Based on questionnaires containing both closed- and open-ended questions completed by 82 participants, approximately half from each community, I argue that both communities can be understood as interpretive communities that negatively interpret not only television content, like other religious communities, but also the medium itself. Their various negative interpretive strategies is discussed and the article shows how they are part of an "us-versus-them" attitude created to mark the boundaries and walls that enclave cultures build around themselves. The comparison between the two communities found only a few small differences but one marked similarity: The communities perceive avoidance of a tool for communication, in this case television, as part of the communities' sharing, participation, and common culture.

When my son was hospitalized after a procedure, there was a television in his room. I stayed with him the entire week, and I knew that in this situation I was allowed to watch a little bit. But I decided to call the hospital staff and ask them to turn it off. With this thing in the room, I couldn't take care of my son, I couldn't pray or read my Bible, and I couldn't think about God.

The Amish woman quoted here sheds light on the conflict caused by living a very strict and devoted religious life in a modern, Western, and secular society. The main question this article addresses is how Amish and ultra-Orthodox women's discourse about television can help develop a better understanding of the creation, construction, and strengthening of limitations and boundaries separating enclave cultures from the world. I argue that both communities can be understood as interpretive communities that negatively interpret not only television content, like other religious communities, but also the medium itself. Their various negative interpretive strategies will be discussed, and the article will show how those strategies are part of an "us-versus-them" attitude created to mark the boundaries and walls that enclave cultures build around themselves.

The Old Order Amish and the Ultra-Orthodox

The Old Order Amish (hereafter, Amish) and the Jewish ultra-Orthodox¹ comprise the case studies of this research. Because both are part of the unique communities that avoid the television medium, they differ from other religious communities that mostly negotiate with its content. The Amish are an ethno-cultural religious group affiliated with the Anabaptist Church, residing in the United States

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¹This research does not include the Habad and Breslav ultra-Orthodox Jewish sects because their use of technology is different than that of the other sects.

and Canada. They number close to 300,000, or less than one-tenth of 1% of the American population (Kraybill & Bowman, 2001; Kraybill, Johnson-Weiner, & Nolt, 2013). Their religious and social lives are dictated by the *Ordnung* (literally, order), a set of rules that stresses humility, simplicity, obedience (Hostetler, 1993; Kraybill, 1989), and deep commitment to *Gelassenheit*, “the idea of yielding fully to God’s will and forsaking all selfishness” (Kraybill et al., 2013, p. 65). The Israeli ultra-Orthodox are a Jewish religious group that constitutes 9.4% of the adult population (ages 20 and over) of Israel (Friedman et al., 2011; Central Bureau of Statistics–Israel, 2014). Their religious and social lives are bound by a stringent interpretation of Jewish religious law, a commitment to the study of Torah (especially the *Talmud*), and to unquestioning faith in rabbinic authority (El-Or, 1994; Friedman, 1991).

The Amish and ultra-Orthodox women who participated in this study will enable us to view the world from the unique perspective of the real educators and gatekeepers in religious societies – the women (Neriya-Ben Shahar, 2008, 2012, 2016)—“The main socializers [...] transmitters and guardians of cultural norms and traditions, including religion, in their maternal role” (Beit-Hallahmi & Argyle, 1997, p. 146). Literature on ultra-Orthodox women is abundant (e.g., Davidman, 1991; El-Or, 1994; Neriya-Ben Shahar, 2008; Feder, 2013), with some dealing with their exposure patterns and conceptions of mass communication (Neriya-Ben Shahar, 2008, 2012). Literature on Amish women, on the other hand, is sparse.² Studies deal with historic aspects (Schmidt, Zimmerman-Umbel, & Reschly, 2002), the status of women in various Amish societies (Johnson-Weiner, 2001; Schmidt & Reschly, 2000; Van Ness, 1995), and home births (Jolly, 2007). None have dealt with mass communication in general, or television in particular.

The few comparative studies of the Amish and the ultra-Orthodox conducted to date pointed to differences in levels of schooling, attitudes toward state involvement in health and education, relationships with the state (Neuberger, 2011; Neuberger & Tamam, 2014; Spinner, 1994), and perceptions of the Internet (Neriya-Ben Shahar, 2016). The comparisons showed that the Amish are an agrarian working society (Kraybill, 2001) while ultra-Orthodox are a society of scholars (Friedman, 1991). The ultra-Orthodox make pragmatic use of technology while Amish reject innovations, do not use electricity, and travel by horse and buggy. The reality of the latter dimension is in fact much more complex in both communities, involving an intricate combination of acceptance, rejection, and adaptation (Caplan, 2007; Cooper, 2006; Hurst & McConnell, 2010; Kraybill et al., 2013; Lev-On & Neriya-Ben Shahar, 2011; Neriya-Ben Shahar & Lev-On, 2011, 2012; Zimmerman-Umbel, 1992).

Technology Among Religious Communities

Marvin (1988) argued that technology and media play an important part in the creation of the limits of every community, with old and new groups negotiating issues like power, authority, and knowledge regarding new technologies. Users share information, ideas, problems, and solutions about technologies, and those interpretations are an important part of the relationships between individuals, groups, communities, and technologies. Political and sociocultural situations have an important influence on the value norms of every group, and all affect the artifact’s meaning among them (Leonardi, 2003, 2009; Pinch & Bijker, 1984).

These technology–community relationships are more complicated in religious societies (Stout, 2001). Campbell (2010) wrote about the values and priorities of religious communities as reflected in their discourse and decision making toward all new technologies: “The success, failure or redesign of a given technology by a specific group of users is based, not simply on the innate qualities of the technology, but also on the ability of users to socially construct the technology in line with the moral economy of the user community or context” (p. 59). When the technology has features with potential problematic influences on the community, and if it could open the community to the

²Bender (1989) and Stoltzfus (1994) are interesting reads, but they are not based on academic studies.

secular world, it will be rejected, especially if the technologies “encourage the cultivation of values and practices antithetical to the communities’ prescribed religious life” (p. 122).

Many studies have dealt with religious people and television (Bobkowski, 2009; Davies, 2007; Golan & Baker, 2012; Hamilton & Rubin, 1992; Roberts, 1983; Warren, 2001). Most focused on content limits and content-reading strategies or watching behaviors. Some researchers have written about the phenomenon of nonexposure or excluded media, people who have decided to live without cinema or television, but this was mostly found to be a personal decision (Ammerman, 1987; Atkin, 1985; Lepter & Lindlof, 2001).

Both Amish and ultra-Orthodox communities prohibit television and use limits and sanctions to enforce this prohibition. The Amish prohibit the use of electricity, which is a technical limit (Kraybill et al., 2013). Ultra-Orthodox communities use electricity, so they choose an important social sanction: Their education system accepts only children without a television at home. If the school finds out the family owns a television, the child is removed from the school the same day (Neriya-Ben Shahaar, 2008).

Interpretative Communities and Enclave Cultures

One of the key terms in this article is *interpretive community* (Fish, 1980), “a collectivity of people who share strategies for interpreting, using, and engaging in communication about a media text or technology. The strategies are devised with respect to norms and standards that evolve among the community members through innovation and the influence of argument” (Lindlof, 2002, p. 64). Even though these communities do not need to be geographically based and can be diffused, “any interpretation is the property of the community as a historical social body” (Lindlof & Meyer, 1998, p. 253).

Religious communities are interesting sites from which to examine the strategies of interpretive communities. These strategies are a resource for identity creation, ethos, and spiritual worldviews (Lepter & Lindlof, 2001; Lindlof, 2002). For example, Stout (2004) examined how an interpretive community of Mormons who live in Las Vegas created various rich strategies to cope with the secular environment around them.

The interpretative strategies of religious communities can be understood as part of the segregationist patterns created by enclave cultures. *Enclave culture* is a concept derived from cultural theory that refers to a dissenting minority, which often tends to be sectarian (Douglas, 1992). In anthropological studies, it is customary to make a binary distinction between such cloistered religious communities and the open, free outside world. Almond, Appelby, and Sivan (2003) developed and deepened the enclave concept, applying it to fundamentalist Muslim, Christian, and Jewish societies:

The enclave ... is usually the response to the community’s problem with its boundary. Its future seems to be at the mercy of members likely to slip away. For some reason, usually the appeal of the neighboring central community, it cannot stop the members from deserting ... The only control to be deployed in order to shore up the boundary is moral persuasion. The interpretation developed by this type of community thus stands in opposition to outside society. (p. 32)

Enclave culture theory highlights the boundaries between the “threatened” community and the surrounding society. It frequently employs such images and concepts as “fences,” “boundaries,” or “walls,” which can be both physical and spiritual, as in the “wall of virtue” they build around themselves. These help to create clear definitions of “us” and “them,” the “pure” versus the “impure” (Douglas, 1966). One way of preserving the community’s boundaries is to monitor mainstream media and their content, which can breach the walls (Almond et al., 2003).

The combination terms *interpretative communities* and *enclave cultures* will enable us to better understand one of the main collision points between religious communities and the modern world: technology. A review of the literature shows that study about religious communities and television has focused on interpretation of television’s content, more than on the medium itself. This article focuses on two of the unique religious communities that live among modern and secular societies but refuse to use one of the most important symbols of modern technological society: the television.

The study not only describes the various discourses within these communities but will also enable us to understand one of the main interpretative strategies of the creation and preservation of enclave communities' walls: the rejection of the medium itself. Therefore, the main research question is, "What interpretative strategies are used by Amish and ultra-Orthodox women regarding the television?" The secondary research question asks what we can learn from a comparison of Amish and ultra-Orthodox women's interpretation strategies.

Method

Sample

Eighty-two women participated in this study: 40 belonging to the Lancaster PA Old Order Amish community and 42 to various Israeli ultra-Orthodox communities. Because of the ongoing discussion revolving around the definition of ultra-Orthodox and Amish, for this study I relied on the self-definition of the respondents (Friedman et al., 2011; Pew Research Center, 2013).

Snowball (or referral) sampling was used because it is well suited to closed communities (Lee, 1993). To overcome the internal homogeneity of each group, research assistants (women from the respective communities) were asked to set a number of "snowballs" in motion among women with different demographic characteristics. The women's ages and number of children were compared by independent *t*-test to ensure that differences in their answers were the product of cultural differences and not demography. No significant differences were found between the ages of the two groups ($t(34.8) = 1.32$, $p > .05$) or number of children ($t(68) = .15$, $p > .05$).

Research Instrument and Method

Women who agreed to participate in the study were explained its purpose, that is, to understand how they view and use new media, and signed an informed consent to participate. They were assured there were no correct or incorrect answers and were each paid \$10 for their time when the questionnaire was completed. As with Hurst and McConnell (2010), who were aided by the cooperation of bishops in their fieldwork with the Amish community in Ohio, I hired assistants from the community to help recruit participants and to administer the questionnaires, usually in the subjects' homes.

The questionnaire consisted of both yes/no and open-ended qualitative questions. The Amish women, who usually only have eight years of schooling, seemed less familiar with responding to questionnaires than the ultra-Orthodox women, who had an average of 14 years of formal education. The two groups were given similar questionnaires, the Amish in English and the ultra-Orthodox in Hebrew. The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and a chi-square test; the qualitative analysis followed Strauss and Corbin's (1990) grounded-theory approach.

I encountered a number of difficulties and issues working on this project that shed light on the challenges associated with research on cloistered communities (Lee, 1993; Rier, Schwartzbaum, & Heller, 2008; Steinmetz & Haj-Yahia, 2006; Kraybill, 2008). The first was gaining access, especially to the Amish community. I was fortunate in that I had a personal connection with a family from Lancaster who agreed to host me on their farm six separate times. My activities mainly included washing dishes, folding laundry, working in the fields, and doing errands in my car. Working side-by-side with the women affording me the opportunity to conduct numerous interviews, and some women even agreed to help distribute the questionnaires. Finding ultra-Orthodox participants was easier because I have extensive personal and family ties to the community.

From personal conversations with the Amish women and experience with the ultra-Orthodox community, I assumed the respondents would be concerned they could be identified through their responses, would be asked questions offensive to them and their lifestyle, that my research assistants would appear in immodest dress, and that it would take up too much time. The first concern was

assuaged by complete anonymity; like Cooper (2006), the numbered questionnaires contained no identifying information and were formulated with sensitivity to language and values. In addition, the research assistants adhered to the dress codes, language, and conduct of the community (as a religiously observant Jew, I dress in a manner suited to both groups). Since the research assistants in both groups belonged to the respective communities, their manner of dress and behavior were acceptable.

Findings and Discussion

Interpretative Strategies Toward Television

To examine the interpretative strategies of the Amish and ultra-Orthodox women toward television, the questionnaire asked simply: “What do you think about television?” The women’s answers fell into three strategies: television contains bad content, the medium itself is a danger, and the “us-versus-them” attitude.

Television Contains Bad Content: The First Interpretative Strategy

This strategy, found in both communities’ answers, focuses on television content. It can be further divided into two agendas: bad content and the influence of the content.

Bad Content

“Things I hear that you can watch on there are **shameful**”; “The content is very **bad**” (Amish). “An endless stream of **false messages**” (ultra-Orthodox). Women from both communities used various negative terms to describe the content: bad—negative, terrible, the worst; junk—trash, garbage, filth, nauseating, and dirt; danger and destruction—a very real threat, distorted, obstructive, risky, burns, a hindrance, a destroyer, distraction, detrimental, spoils, interrupts, disastrous, killer, harmful; as well as various other terms, such as not true, shallow, cheap, low quality, disgraceful, unacceptable, hacks, slander and gossip, levity and laughter non-educational, and not for children.

Influence of the Content

“Programs on the TV can pollute our **minds**”; “It crowds the **mind** with worldly issues”; “Too much **soul damaging** content on it” (Amish). “It loads un-filtered information on my **soul**, which distances me from my self, from God, and from my role in this world”; “Nothing has more impact than sitting and watching, filling your **head** with other people opinions”; “I don’t want to watch things that spur us to leave the path of truth”; “I don’t want to fall from grace and watch things that have a **bad effect** on me”; “People **watch** bad things and **it gives them ideas**, they can’t understand that it’s a show. They really **do** the horrible things”; “We can’t *get out of our **minds** the things we watched there*” (ultra-Orthodox).

The women also mentioned the influence of *violent content*: “I think watching **violence** on TV can be very harmful to children and adults”; “If there were no television, there would be less **violence**” (Amish); “Too much **violence** in the shows, it makes the person immoral and brutal” (ultra-Orthodox).

The first strategy, marking television content as bad and dangerous, isn’t new or unique to the Amish and ultra-Orthodox. Religious communities have traditionally been afraid of the influence of television content on their community’s values because of their incompatible worldviews (Valenti & Stout, 1996). They are afraid of worldly influences (Lamberts-Bendorth, 1996) and perceive television news as including immoral content (Golan & Baker, 2012). Therefore, religious audiences use various kinds of selective exposure (Bobkowski, 2009; Hamilton & Rubin, 1992; Iorio, 1996; McFarland, 1996), which is frequently a subject of religious leaders’ sermons (Cohen, 2012; Stout, 2012).

The Medium is the Danger: The Second Interpretative Strategy

The second strategy, however, is unique to very few communities and is widespread among the Amish and ultra-Orthodox: a community-encompassing decision to ban the medium itself. This strategy frames the medium as a dangerous device with multilevel influences. The findings show that both communities perceive it as exceedingly influential on many levels. The respondents' answers included five perceived deep-seated effects of the medium: it influences morals and the soul, it affects the mind, it involves visuals, influences behavior, and wastes time.

Morals and the Soul

The TV is a very real threat to the **morals** of any individual, home, or nation"; "Television [...] can do a lot of harm to your normal **standards**"; "It destroys **morals**" (Amish). The Amish women used the word "soul" once ("It could be damaging to your **soul**") as compared to 19 times among the ultra-Orthodox: "The television is a tool that defiles the human **soul**"; "Television watchers are miserable, their **souls** are filled with evil and abominations"; "It's a weapon that destroys the holy Jewish **soul**"; "The television pollutes our **soul**, while we try hard to keep it pure"; "The **soul** of television is secular and worldly"; "I don't want to corrupt my **soul**"; "Watching has a huge impact on the human **soul**"; "The devastating effects of television can subvert the **soul** and numb it "; "When a person watches those disgraceful things, it influences his **soul**, his outlook, and then his actions."

Influence on the Mind

"I was dismayed at how it stayed in my **mind**"; "It fills your **mind** with trash"; "Plus all the junk that they can fill their **minds** with"; "Disrupts pure and creative **thinking**" (Amish). "It's **brainwashing**"; "There is something in the watching that blocks **thinking**"; "Everything you watch on television is so tangible that it's impossible to forget and take out of your **head** (it works a lot on the **subconscious**, therefore it's hard to forget); "It's harmful to the ability to think **abstractly**" (ultra-Orthodox).

Visuality

The ultra-Orthodox stressed the effect of the visual experience, "The sound and **vision** have a bad **effect**"; "It makes a **greater impression**"; "The **eye's nature** is to be attracted to movies. What we watched is **engraved**. It's hard to describe and hard to make it pure"; "It's very **effective**: the terrible pictures could **remain** for one's entire life"; "What we see **penetrates**"; "The pictures **penetrate the soul** and confound it; "The **visual** experience enters **deeper** into the person's soul"; "I want to keep my **eyes**"; "The eyes **watch** and the heart **desires**"; "**Watching** something negative **leads to** a negative personality"; "I don't want to be under the **influence of visions**"; "I wish I could **delete** everything I watched"; "Some stuff I watched as a little girl, I **can't forget** till today"; "A soap that could clean those **visions** doesn't exist."

Behavior

"TV can lead a person to **do** wrong." (Amish): Laziness – "It makes people **lazy**"; "It can turn you into a '**couch potato**' (Amish). "It turns people into **plants**; it turns intelligent people into '**couch potatoes**'" (ultra-Orthodox). Addictiveness – "It's **addictive**" (Amish); "The screen is **addicting** people"; "It **vacuums** the watcher"; "You **can't stop**; you can't **hold back**" (ultra-Orthodox). The impossibility of controlling content, in keeping with the traits of the medium: "It is impossible to **cancel** what they absorb" (Amish) "No **control**"; "No **critic**"; "No **filter**"; "It's **open** and **accessible**"; "I don't have **any option of knowing** what I will watch the next minute" (ultra-Orthodox).

Waste of Time

The word time was mentioned 21 times by Amish women and 13 times by ultra-Orthodox women in the context of wasting time. We can understand that time is an appreciated commodity in the communities. In both communities the women wrote they do not want to spend time that could be

used for better things. “It wastes a lot of **time**” (ultra-Orthodox); “It takes precious **time**”; “It would take up **time** that could be used for more important things” (Amish). The Amish women especially stressed family time: “It takes away valuable **family time**” and Godly time: “It would take **time** away from Bible reading”; “Takes away precious time from God”; “Don’t we have enough reasons to spend our **time** here on earth thinking and working for good (or Godly) interests in this short life?”

A Discursive Tool

Marking the medium itself as a danger is a clever discursive tool: By characterizing the television as the devil or a sin, they make clear that the device is itself the demon. This is an important difference between the evangelistic Christian and ultra-Orthodox Habad communities who accept the medium and adapt the content to their purposes (Campbell, 2010; Hendershot, 2004) and the Amish and ultra-Orthodox who portray the medium itself as a tool of the devil and toss it outside their communities’ fences. I would like to suggest three possible explanations for their use of this tool.

The first derives from the technology of the medium itself: While the Internet affords the opportunity to “make it kosher” or otherwise block and censor usage so it can be used for work out of the home in both communities, the technology of television does not lend itself to limitations and controls. Of course, religious people can choose not to subscribe to regular television channels, but they have no control over immodest pictures on, say, the news channels. Censorship of content in newspapers and magazines is technically much easier than for television—the ultra-Orthodox mostly read their communities’ newspapers and the Amish try to control the reading of out-of-community magazines (Neriya-Ben Shahar, 2008, 2016).

Moreover, without taking content into account, it is difficult to watch television and work at the same time. It may therefore be more problematic than the other media technologies in terms of guilt feelings (Davies, 2007; Panek, 2014). Printed newspapers and magazines can be censored and their technology is old. Radio enables work while listening, and even the Internet with appropriate limits can be a work tool. Television, however, is a modern technology used mostly for entertainment that does not facilitate appropriate censorship or simultaneous work.

The second explanation is that making the medium instead of its content a demon enables the community to create and maintain strong and stable control mechanisms. The prohibition against electricity among the Amish and the social sanctions levied by the ultra-Orthodox educational system on children whose families own a television leads to almost complete control over those communities’ members. Compared to other religious communities that carry out discussions about selective exposure and whose members can actually watch an unlimited amount of legitimated content, the Amish and ultra-Orthodox understand that any discussion of the topic could lead to negotiation and compromise. Therefore, marking the medium as the devil eliminates the discussion itself.

The third explanation derives from the multilevel effects the women attribute to the medium itself. Through them we can understand how those communities create, increase, and maintain the discourse and consciousness of danger. These effects are ostensibly so clearly rational and simple that the women believe they must protect themselves from their danger. It could be that they name these effects because there is no actual religious prohibition against watching television, like owning a car to the Amish or eating pork to the ultra-Orthodox, but they have decided to frame it as such. In addition, for these devoted communities, which are used to living a life of black or white, the gray area is very dangerous.

This is apparently the reason why their “focus in the medium” multilevel discourse around the television was developed. It teaches us how the devoted religious enclave community defends itself from the outside modern world even without total prohibition, using only moral terms and conditions. When faced with a gray area, the community develops very strong sanctions and a strict discourse. The medium itself must be depicted as having multi-level effects and being a dangerous demon, without any positive facets.

“Us-versus-Them”: The Third Interpretative Strategy

This interpretative strategy, found in both communities, can also be expressed as the black-and-white perceptions that mark the fences and limits between the communities and the television-watching world: “we,” are the Amish or ultra-Orthodox and “them” are the English or non-ultra-Orthodox, respectively.

Amish women wrote: “It is something we do not want **among our people**”; “That’s something we don’t believe in”; “It makes me thankful for **our simple society**—that **our** forefathers and **our** parents chose to live **without them** and not be entangled in the world as much” and one woman cited: “Love not the world, nor the things that are in the world. If any man loves the world, the love of the father is not in Him (I John 2:15).” Ultra-Orthodox women wrote: “**We** don’t want this in **our camp**”; “It’s not **our sector’s** custom to watch television”; “The **ultra-Orthodox community should keep its holy character**, and rotten journalism [she didn’t even mention the word television] hits **our holy walls**” [my emphases].

Part of the “our” feeling was connected to “our leaders.” In both groups, women cited their leaders’ opposition to television: “**Our church** doesn’t allow it”; “Because **our leaders** have decided it, it is something we do not want among our people and why not respect leaders who are appointed above you!” (Amish). “The television is opposite of the **Rabbis’ attitude**”; “If the **rabbis prohibited it**, it means that this is not a good thing”; “**Our rabbis** prohibited television, even though we can’t understand the reasons” (ultra-Orthodox).

Another perspective of “we” is “our values”: “It is the opposite of the **Tora’s values**, opposite **our pure view, our education, our walls**”; “Inappropriate to **our values**, the content is bad from a moral view and from the **perspective of Jewish law**”; “Subjects **we** will never speak about”; “You can see every serious sin that **our community keeps away from**”; “It’s contrary to **our religious principles**” (ultra-Orthodox). “It distracts **our views and values**”; “I would lose my **spiritual values**” “detracts from **our ethic**, not for **Amish Christians**” (Amish).

The “them” discourse focuses on the “Others,” that is, the “English” or “Israelis” who watch television and are part of “the world.” Amish women wrote: “To hear or see all this stuff that’s going on in the **world** is not good”; “I don’t have to know everything that’s going on in the **world**”; “Too much of a distraction from the real **world**” “I’m not an updated person on the latest **world issues**.” The word “worldly” was used in “**worldly issues**,” “**worldly music**,” and “**worldly things**.” The ultra-Orthodox referred to the Israeli population: “The television is a weapon that helps the **Israeli population** become so violent and shallow [...] their youngsters are interested only in alcohol and violence.”

Lindlof (1988) wrote that formation of an interpretative community assures group solidarity and creation of the community’s limits. The women’s answers help us understand that one of the most important and strong tools for separation of religious communities are the walls that the community creates between “We” and the “Other” (Douglas, 1966; Lepter & Lindlof, 2001; McGuire, 1997). The attitudes and beliefs toward technologies are an important part of the communities’ self-definition and the creation of these walls (Campbell, 2010). If the primary requirement of technology is seen as the ability to accomplish a social task (Jackson, 1996), the communities’ attitudes toward technology are rooted in “group-specific beliefs about how the world could be known, and how other groups than one’s own imagined it to be” (Marvin, 1988, p. 6). These beliefs lead to specific media consumption, create collective identities, and mark taste and belonging (Rauch, 2007).

However, these results lead to the argument that technology avoidance is the other side of the coin and enable a pleasure derived from the distinction itself. Technology avoidance creates a sense of identity, “a binary opposition belying an ‘us-versus-them’ worldview, to reinforce symbolic boundaries” (Rauch, 2007, p. 1008). Social capital, which usually focuses on what people have (Bourdieu, 1986), can turn into social capital that focuses on what people do not have or do not use (Author, *in press*). This distinction can create homogeneity; protect self-esteem; and engage in perceptual, affective, and behavioral continual identity (Hildebrand, DeMotta, Sen, & Kongsompong, 2013).

Amish versus Ultra-Orthodox Interpretation Strategies

The second research question asked what we can learn from comparing Amish and ultra-Orthodox women's interpretation strategies. The similarity between the communities is reflected in the negative terms they both used toward the television—the multilevel effects of the medium, television content that is antithetical to the communities' values, and the bad influences of content. Moreover, in both communities we can find the “us-versus-them” discourse that enables them to protect community walls and limits.

But perhaps the most interesting similarity is reflected in their answers to the next question: “Do you think that watching television is in keeping with Amish/ultra-Orthodox values?” All of the women from both communities (100%—42 ultra-Orthodox and 40 Amish) answered “No.” Such a result is rare in social science research. In this case it could be read as a great success for the communities' education.

The main differences between the two communities were found in a careful reading of the women's answers about television content. Only two Amish women wrote about the danger of worldly issues and music compared to 33 ultra-Orthodox references, which usually included the term *secular*. The Amish did not mention modesty, while the ultra-Orthodox mentioned it 13 times in a negative context, like outrageous **immodesty**, **immodest** vision. While women from both communities wrote about the medium's multilevel deep-seated effects—to the mind, morals, the soul, and behavior—only the ultra-Orthodox wrote about the visual. The Amish women used the word *soul* once compared to 19 times among the ultra-Orthodox. Whereas the ultra-Orthodox wrote much about the low quality of television content, it was not mentioned by the Amish at all.

I would suggest some possible explanations for these differences. The first could derive from differences in education between the communities. While Amish women receive only eight years of schooling, the ultra-Orthodox women had an average of 14 years of formal education. This difference could have had an effect on their writing skills, knowledge, and the critical thinking they presented. If this were true, how is it possible that the Amish wrote detailed and rich answers about the medium compared to what they wrote about the content?

Perhaps the reason is simply that the Amish do not have electricity, and therefore the temptation is less powerful than among the ultra-Orthodox, who technically could have a television at home and had to develop a more powerful, scary, and rich discourse to maintain their values. But still, if in both communities there are prohibitions and sanctions toward consumption of the medium, why did the ultra-Orthodox women develop such a discourse?

Most of the ultra-Orthodox women work outside the home compared to the Amish women, who usually are stay-at-home mothers. This fact obviously provides the ultra-Orthodox women with more opportunities for television consumption. Therefore, they developed a detailed negative discourse not only toward the medium, which in any case cannot enter the homes in both communities, but also toward the content, which the ultra-Orthodox women might consume outside the home.

Conclusion

The Amish and ultra-Orthodox women who participated in this study shared with us their enclave cultures' interpretative strategies toward one of the most important modern technologies: the television. Similar to other religious communities (Campbell, 2010; Hendershot, 2004), they deal with television content and see it as a bad influence. In contrast to other religious communities that negotiate the content but use the medium, however, the Amish and ultra-Orthodox have decided to reject the medium itself.

Since this is not an actual religious prohibition, their rejection includes a sophisticated discourse that frames the multiple effects of television on morals and the soul, the mind, vision, behavior, and time. Moreover, they use this discourse as a sociological strategy, maintaining their “us-versus-them” point of view and marking the boundaries and walls they build between their safe enclave cultures and the outside world. Comparison between the groups found they are more similar than different.

The result that showed a 100% agreement among both groups to the question if they think television is in keeping with the community's values is much more meaningful than the differences, which mostly derive from differences in the women's educational and occupational lives.

Stout (2001) argued that *cultural war* is a dual term that is not really appropriate for describing the complicated relationship between religious communities and institutions and popular culture. This argument is correct when referring to most of the religious groups that have deeply and bravely negotiated television content while adapting the medium. On the other hand, we can see two religious communities that have decided to mark the medium itself as a danger, using discursive strategies that have not only created interpretative communities, but also enclave cultures that repeatedly mark the walls, fences, and boundaries between their sacred communities and the outside secular world. This point of view expands our understanding by showing the communities that deal with the daily drudgery of raising the walls, compared to others that build and maintain windows and portholes.

Carey (2009) defined the media as a ritual. "In a ritual definition, communication is linked to terms such as 'sharing,' 'participation,' 'association,' 'fellowship,' and 'the possession of a common faith'" (p. 44). He asked us to pay attention to the common root of the terms "commonness," "communion," "community," and "communication." Taking these common roots as a point of departure, I argue that a community can perceive avoidance of a tool for communication, in this case television, as part of sharing, participation, and commonness. If Carey saw a person sitting down and watching television for entertainment ending up establishing solidarity with the larger community, the insight from this research is that the person who almost never sits down to watch television ends up establishing solidarity within the community.

The issues addressed here need to be investigated further with larger samples that include Amish and ultra-Orthodox men, and that compare men and women from diverse devout orthodox communities with more liberal communities—Jewish, Christian, and Muslim. The 21st century and the new media technologies continue to create unlimited challenges for religious groups, and as Campbell (2010) wrote, the values and priorities of the religious communities are reflected in their discourse and decision making toward every new technology.

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