EXPLICIT STRUCTURE, COMMUNAL DECISIONS: SETTING SANCTUARY'S BOUNDS

Very little is currently known about how rules of the past are evolving in Amish communities to deal with the unique material affordances of today's modern digital technologies. As the community's needs change with decreased agricultural work, it is unclear whether and how these tools can serve to help Amish people satisfy their goals. Indeed participation in the twenty-first-century economy requires "always on" connectivity and open channels of communication with customers. As the Amish enter this commercial environment, old rules about connecting with the outside world *are* evolving. In particular there is an effort to ensure that digital technologies are adopted in ways that are sufficiently limited and precisely tailored to enable the satisfaction of community goals.

In this chapter, the explicit, visible collective and public approaches to developing rules about digital technologies today will be explored. Despite recent changes to the process of adopting digital technologies in Amish communities, two distinct approaches are key to calibrating official church rules: mutual respect for differences and necessary consensus. These approaches are foundational to setting the boundaries that demarcate Amish sanctuary from digital surveillance and control in today's evolving social and professional spheres.

CHURCH GOVERNANCE AND GEOSPATIAL ORGANIZATION OF DISTRICTS

The *Ordnung* constrains individual technology use, which keeps people in good standing with the church. Amish *Ordnungs* vary across districts, despite efforts to achieve uniformity across districts and settlements. *Ordnungs* are developed in each district and are tailored to fit church members' particular needs. (If a district's members are all farmers, the *Ordnung* might be different from a community where there are no farmers, for

example.) Those in charge of updating and enforcing the *Ordnung* are the church bishop, ministers, and deacons. Church districts typically have one bishop, two ministers, and a deacon. In the formal governance structure of Amish church communities, their role is to lead the church in making and enforcing church rules. According to Timothy, a minister, church leaders are resistant to anything new. They may watch what happens in other districts when a new device comes in. If they see that it is not likely to have unwanted impacts on social relationships and community well-being, then they might adopt it.

In interviews, participants suggested that the geographical arrangement of people within a church district, combined with the role of leaders, were the main forces in place to resist social change. The arrangement of people within an Amish church community has been well documented by other scholars (Hurst and McConnell 2010; Kraybill, Nolt, and Weaver-Zercher 2010). The social and geographical bounds of each church community are concretely defined (figure 3.1). In addition to the geographical boundaries, the names of the members of each community are listed in Amish directories, which are very reliable and widely utilized documents. The size of districts is kept small so that it is possible for all members to congregate in one family's home for church services on Sunday mornings. Typically, there are about twenty to thirty families in a district. If a district grows larger than this, it is split into two districts. Districts usually have names and are presented as distinct entities in Amish directories. An individual and his or her nuclear family are typically members of the same church. Districts are geographically bounded so that it is possible to travel from home to church by buggy, foot, or bicycle. In figure 3.1, each district is represented by a box with a number inside. The entire map depicts the districts that comprise an Amish settlement in Indiana. Members of a church district or community are referred to as "brothers" and "sisters" and seen as extensions of the family.

ADOPTING TECHNOLOGY VIA COLLECTIVE, PUBLIC DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

As a new technology comes along, it goes through a formal decision-making process in Amish communities. Although church leaders play an important role in facilitating this process, the church collectively makes
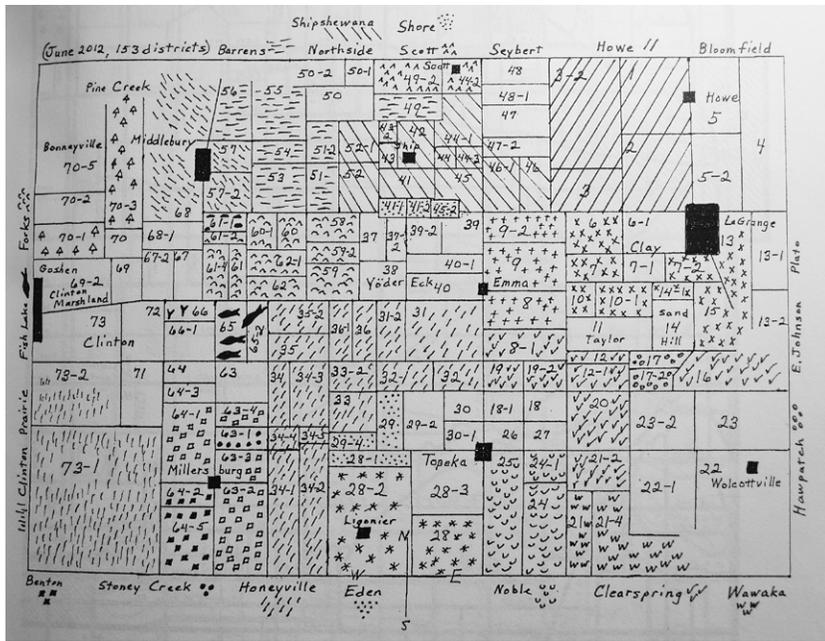
Figure 3.1
A 2012 map of districts within an Amish settlement in Indiana. *Source*: Indiana Amish Directory, 2012.

the final decision. "We aren't a dictatorship," said Calvin, a bishop from southern Indiana. Generally new technologies are considered twice a year when the church goes over the *Ordnung* and considers amending it. During this time, church members deliberate over potential changes and decide together whether to inscribe new rules in the governing document. Both men and women who have been baptized are considered members of the church, and their votes count equally when such matters are being decided. Young people who have not yet been baptized are not eligible to vote on such decisions. Bishops work with the church members to learn how people feel about potential changes and work to understand members' needs. There is a preparatory church meeting before the communion church meeting in which the *Ordnung* is amended. In the preparatory meeting, any disagreements among members must be resolved or communion is postponed until resolutions are reached. Church leaders make suggestions about what the rules should be, but ultimately each member of the church votes on them. Enforcing rules, however, once they are made, falls

under the church leaders' jurisdiction. According to Calvin, the goal of the decision-making process is that "[they're] trying to learn how to control or discipline [themselves] in order for [their] community, society, and individuals to function."

Abiding by rules is a condition of membership in the church body. According to Jerry, a minister, "Church leaders have rules and standards. If people don't follow the rules, they aren't members of the church." Victor, a bishop, echoed this notion, saying, "Rules are spelled out for people when they become a member of the church. Expectations for following rules are communicated up front." If people become displeased with a church's rules, they may move to join a different district that better aligns with their values. Often in these cases, individuals leave a large, progressive community and move to a smaller, more conservative community because they believe that this allows them to better adhere to Christian beliefs and raise children in a more low-tech, small-scale setting at greater remove from the larger society. Scholars such as Cong (1992) have documented situations in which the adoption of a technology—kerosene refrigerators, in this case— caused a group of more conservative Amish to move out of a larger, more progressive settlement into a smaller, more geographically isolated region where their values could be more freely enacted.

For example, when I asked John, a minister, about the decision-making process in place in Amish communities to regulate the adoption of new technologies, his response indicated that people often move out of or into a church district because of its particular inclination toward progress. According to John,

> Every area is kind of . . . they determine on their own . . . you know, yay or nay. This is acceptable, and [these are] the guidelines. And some areas of the community are naturally more conservative. And that's why people purchase property and put up homes in those areas because their choice is "I want to be in a more conservative area." Or vice versa, where people decide "I'm going to go to a more progressive area that is much more liberal." So, a lot of it is the area in the community in which you reside.

I asked John how common it was that people moved into districts for philosophical reasons. He said,

> It would be tough to put a percentile on that because normally when a young couple gets married then they go out and look at property for setting up

> homekeeping, sometimes it's only by what's available. And sometimes it's . . . well they're looking in, seeking a specific area. So, I would say it's pretty prevalent. But I can't put a percentage on it. Because I know there are some areas where I would prefer to live and there are some areas I have no desire to live.

He said it boiled down to the fact that "you gravitate towards some of those areas" because of your "personal convictions" or "lack thereof."

Sometimes, however, the need for a new technology arises quickly, and church leaders must deal with it locally in a timely fashion. According to Victor, a bishop, in these situations church leaders make decisions on a case-by-case basis. When such a case arises, they first consider the future and try to imagine how the technology might change their way of life. "We think about what will come along with the technology if it is adopted," said Victor. When a member of his church who owned a store asked if he could have a UPS label printer for his business, Victor met with the other church leaders and discussed the man's request. In these discussions, they asked whether the church member had "a want" or "a need" for the new device. In this case, they determined that the store owner had a need for the device. At that point the church leaders asked themselves, "What will this bring with it?" and "Can it be restrained?" He said, "We feel new technologies are always bound to bring something else with it." In this case, the device was allowed, because they did not think that it could be "addictive," or that it could be used for recreational purposes. According to Victor, "Church leaders must understand their members' needs and listen or people will do what they want anyway. They must give a little bit but hold back as much as they can. . . . It can't be that a bishop just forces rules on them without such considerations."

Ivan, a bishop, took a similar approach. He said that when he makes decisions, "I look at what is the need." In his work at a construction company, he used new computers and email, and his colleagues used cell phones, smartphones, and the internet daily. He believed that digital technology use was acceptable so long as it was for work, not recreation. However, Ivan said that he was

> . . . concerned about the part that comes with it when you adopt computers or cell phones like Game Boys, PSPs, all that. Those are negative aspects that come with the adoption of the others. They are different because they're used for pleasure and occupying your time in a non-beneficial way. You can't use them to do business better. They are a hindrance to spiritual life.

Ivan's comments are instructive because they indicate a stark difference between using a technology for business (gaining the resources needed to sustain a family and community) and for entertainment, which is seen as culturally, socially, and spiritually dangerous.

According to Bill, a minister, when making a decision about allowing a new technology to be adopted, "church leaders get together and counsel." They also ask whether the person has a need or a want for the new device. In such situations, they gather around a minister's kitchen table and discuss issues relevant to the specific case. They might discuss the family problems or marriage problems of the person making the request, if there are any. Then they also go to all the church members and discuss the request with them. "They have an opportunity to say their opinion," he said.

During the time that Bill has been a minister, the word processor was adopted as an acceptable technology within his community. He used this as an example to describe how a technology passed through the process of adoption in an Amish church district. At first,

> Someone would come to the church leaders with this tool and say that they needed it for x, y, or z purpose like bookkeeping. They presented their wish to church leaders. Church leaders would then take some time to think about it. They weighed factors like, "What were the advantages/disadvantages of it?"; "What might come with it that they might not anticipate?"; and "What were some of the drawbacks of it?" Like, could someone get addicted to it?

Bill told me that he had a non-Amish employee who was addicted to his cell phone. He said, "He doesn't even eat lunch. He just drinks a big Mountain Dew and plays games on his phone during his lunch break." Church leaders wanted to make sure that people could not get addicted to the new tool, he said.

In the typical scenario, after the church leaders take time to think about the person's request individually, they get back together and share their thoughts. At that point, the bishop suggests a possible ruling, and the ministers and deacon can either agree or disagree. Then their job is to come up with a group proposal. Once they land on a proposal, they present it to the church members. At that time, church members also have the option of agreeing or disagreeing. Church members vote by a show of hands; they could be for or against the proposed rule. Only church members get to vote, so children and other nonbaptized individuals are excluded from

such exercises. If many people are in disagreement, church leaders take the time to talk it over again until the church can come to an agreement. If only one person disagrees, he or she should have a reason that is sufficiently based in scripture. In this case, the church might revisit the discussion or the individual might be overruled. "We have [procedures] like this in place because otherwise it could just turn into chaos," Bill said. These procedures are wrought with conflict, tension, and struggle. The decisions are heavily context based and are vetted on multiple levels to make sure that they are made according to Amish religious, cultural, and professional values. Every effort is made to predict dangers that could come along with the adoption of a technology that would inhibit the exercise of their will, values, and way of life.

Jerry, a minister, also emphasized the importance of collaboration between a church's leaders and its members in the making of decisions about digital technology adoption. When the Amish make a decision about adopting a technology, church leaders will counsel with members, he said. They negotiate if there is disagreement. Generally, in these negotiations, church leaders discourage the use of new technologies as much as they can. According to Perry, a minister and business owner, these negotiations could get sticky because church leaders usually do not have experience with or understand the technology up for debate. Church leaders often (but not always) are more conservative in their practices and ways of life than the average person, because they try to set an example for those around them.[1] Perry said that people who do not understand technologies are often the ones who get most upset about them. "I have more compassion for those who put a halt to new technologies because they are the pillars that keep things stable among our people," he said. "And young people don't understand the people who are trying to keep things stable." Church leaders have had to realize, though, that people who interact with the outside need phones (as an example) more than those who do not. These individuals often request phones because they feel pressure to keep their business going. Perry thought that the reason some people had adopted cell phones was the fact that the Amish had been pushed out of farming and into businesses that required contact with outsiders.

In such collaborations, church leaders must be cognizant of the environment in which members live and work, while performing their duties to protect the souls of their church members. Their role is to ensure that there

is a balance between allowing businesses to survive in the modern economy and holding true to their heritage and values. In my experience, the latter is the more dominant of these two forces. According to Kenneth, a business owner, "Church leaders drew a line on how much to go along and how much to hold back." In bishop Timothy's district, he said, there were five very prosperous families with at-home businesses (as opposed to families whose livelihood was farming or factory work). He said that they were very happy with their way of life because they could work from home and not go off to work in the recreational vehicle (RV) factories where many Amish people in this settlement work today. To stay competitive in their industries, they asked for permission to adopt new machinery from time to time. If they did not get the machinery, Timothy believed, they would not have their at-home businesses and would likely be forced to work in the factory, away from their families. In this way, Timothy thought that adopting technology could sometimes help Amish people hold true to their core values if it allowed them to stay at home and work alongside their family members. Echoing Timothy's view, Daniel, a business owner, said, "We try to hold back as much as we can but we have to innovate just a little bit."

Sarah, a business owner, felt pressure to use computers, the internet, email, and cell phones to ensure the success of her family's tourism-oriented retail store. She said the bottom line for them was to maintain an open and honest line of communication with the church. "It's not that hard to do. It's part of what we believe to be right," she said. "Sometimes we have to give in and give up something we want. But that is a blessing. Working with the church is the best course of action. Hiding is not good." Thus, in most cases it was out of close collaboration, counseling, and often conflict that church leaders and members believed that they were able to adopt new technologies in ways that reflected their shared value system and kept their communities functioning cohesively.

CROSS-COMMUNITY CALIBRATION: MUTUAL RESPECT FOR DIFFERENCES VERSUS NECESSARY CONSENSUS

The thought processes on technology adoption differ from place to place, according to Andy, a deacon and business owner. Despite differences, church leaders sometimes seek to work across districts to regulate the adoption of technologies in Amish settlements. To date, according to Ivan, a

bishop, "In each district when a new technology came about, the issue was brought into the ministry. Some [church leaders] would approve it, some would not. This yielded variety across districts." This is especially true in northern Indiana, where participants do not see differences across districts as troubling. Many participants noted that it was conventional to respect other churches that had different *Ordnungs* and had adopted different technologies than in one's own church. In fact, some church leaders saw this as a distinct advantage. Kevin, a minister and business owner from northern Indiana, said that in his district, "Church leaders might watch what happens in other districts when something comes in. If we see it's not so bad, then we might adopt it. Sometimes we just don't adopt it, though." In this way, it is advantageous for church leaders to work across districts to observe and regulate technology adoption despite their differences. John, a minister from northern Indiana, agreed, saying,

> I'll be right up front, there's not always the same thought process or agreement, if you will, or levels of concern all the way across the board [among church leaders]. But you have that because you're dealing with humans. So, usually it's talked about, it's thought about, it's prayed about. The days go on. And sometimes not everyone is in agreement. But again that is because we're human. But, I think that, for the most part, the church leadership has the best interest of the community in mind. And as an example, you know that there are some areas that allow cell phones by church membership.

Church leaders in southern Indiana, however, take a different tack by trying to "achieve consensus across church districts," according to Sam, a business owner who was my main point of contact in this settlement. The bishops in all thirty districts get together twice a year, and rulings are harmonized across communities, Sam said. It is conventional for leaders from this area to have similar thoughts about what should and should not be adopted. In my research, however, I learned that some differences of opinion did exist, which troubled the church leaders there.

The church leaders I spoke with in this settlement all agreed that cell phones should not be adopted. Many church leaders decided not to meet with me, however, because, as Sam said, there was a fear that if you meet with all of them, there will be inconsistencies, and "this should never happen." He continued, "The community is going through a struggle to decide which direction they should go on the issue of technology and

especially cell phones. One bishop is lenient and the next is opposed to cell phones."

According to Levi, a bishop from this settlement, there have been disagreements among church leaders in the district regarding "material issues." He said that church leaders gather to discuss problems with technology adoption and use in their districts. He thought that achieving consensus has been a process of give and take. "Agreement was not always good," he said. Collective action was best and sometimes required disagreements to be vocalized. According to Levi, agreement could mean that no one was "going along," but they might act as though they were to avoid conflict. The best-case scenario, from Levi's perspective, would be that people voice their disagreements but can still work something out. "They would compromise and go forward in peace and work. We can't all have our way," he said. The basic principles (Amish values and Christian beliefs) are commonly held, however. There are sometimes disagreements regarding the rules, but people with different points of view can still usually visit and be friendly, according to Levi.

In this way, the northern Indiana settlement and the southern Indiana settlement have taken different approaches to working across districts to formally adopt or reject technologies. For members of the northern Indiana settlement, I found that there was an ethos of *mutual respect for differences* that allowed some communities to experiment earlier with technologies and others to wait and watch them to see what happened before they made decisions for themselves. In southern Indiana, on the other hand, an ethos of *necessary consensus* permeated interdistrict relationships. Peer pressure, it seemed, worked to ensure that technologies were (or were not) used according to shared beliefs. However, this stood in contrast to participants' reports of technology use—many church leaders and business owners reported that members of their community owned and used cell phones, even though they were not allowed to do so according to church rules.

These formal processes in place in Amish communities for making decisions about adopting or rejecting new technologies carry substantial weight for their publicity, democracy, and historical privilege. They work to lay a foundation for outlining the boundaries within which their way of life can flourish. No longer are these geographical boundaries marked by the fences of previous eras. Today, these boundaries are social, cultural, and digital. Making decisions about where boundaries lie are contested, inclusive, and

arduous. At all levels of the decision-making process, values systems are consulted. At the end of the day, spirituality is the strongest guide to Amish decisions on where they mark their sanctuary's bounds. These boundaries are essential to the Amish strategy for resisting the negative impacts of today's surveillance capitalism. They tell only half the story (or maybe even less than half), however. There is still much discrepancy between what the official procedures allow and what is actually adopted and used by members of Amish communities. There are a number of informal mechanisms for regulating the adoption and use of new technologies in Amish communities that carry (at least) equal weight to the formal mechanisms just described.