Hutterites and Their Notions of Health: A Study of How Social Climates Produced Unique Ideas of Health

By Derek Walde

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Dr. Tracy Penny Light

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Hutterites’ beliefs and societal view stemming from the Ana-Baptist doctrine, not only shapes their worldview, but also their notions of health. The way they define and experience health is an outcome of the society and the belief system that they were raised in. Their particular social climate created a unique understanding of the body and health because health and the social atmosphere are intertwined, as popular culture and societal beliefs impact how a society defines a person as “healthy”. In the case of Hutterites, an isolated sect of people, their culture and societal views are much different than mainstream Canadian’s view. Therefore, their definition of health is much different than Canadian popular culture’s definition, which leads to the conclusion that health is a social construction. This idea will be explored more throughout this paper, as I will focus on Hutterites’ religious beliefs impacting their notions of health, while comparing those health notions to popular culture notions of health by Canadians from 1940 to 1990.

The Hutterites are an isolated and agrarian religious sect of people who follow Ana-Baptist teachings. They live in the Prairie Provinces of Canada and throughout the upper great plains of the United States. Following the Ana-Baptist teachings that came out of the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century, the Hutterites are one of only three Ana-Baptist groups left in existence, with the other two groups being the Mennonites and the Amish.[[1]](#footnote-1) In the 2016 Census, Canada was home to just over 35,000 Hutterites, who reside in collective dwellings known as Hutterite colonies.[[2]](#footnote-2) These collective dwellings are home to about 75-150 people per colony and are located far from large populations of people, situated in the middle of the countryside of the Prairie Provinces intentionally built out of sight, in land depressions and valleys.[[3]](#footnote-3) Everything necessary to live can be found on the grounds of a colony; living quarters, a school, a church, barns, gardens and much more, creating a closed-in society. Hutterites are involved in grain farming and raising livestock. Additional other jobs on the colony include; soap making, carpentry, and shoe making to service the needs of their community and collect extra cash from outside suitors for their products. Unlike their Ana-Baptist friends, the Amish, the Hutterites take on many of the technological advancements by society, but only when they do not add to the temptation of greed.

In Hutterite colonies men are the source of authority, however women do exert influence through their husbands or in their workplace spheres. The minister is the temporal head of the colony and the rest of the power is mostly diffused equally amongst the community members, however God is the absolute authority over all the people in the colony.[[4]](#footnote-4) Within this culture there are highly prescriptive gender roles in the workforce that are based on religious doctrine, where women are to tend to gardens, bake, make clothing and once married, must leave their colony to join her husband’s colony. Whereas the men are more involved in the day to day work of large scale farming, tending to livestock, running large machinery and being the spokesmen of the colony.

Hutterites’ entire lives, social structure and belief system are rooted in Ana-Baptist teachings. The foundations of the Ana-Baptist doctrine lie in the inherency of the Holy Bible, reading the Bible literally, striving to live like the Early Church did in the book of Acts of the Holy Bible, and being fundamentalist Christians, where scripture is taken and applied to every part of their daily lives. These Ana-Baptist beliefs lead to three major characteristics of a Hutterite lifestyle. The first and one of the most important characteristics to understanding their health norms is living communally, where Hutterites share ownership of all goods, materials and land, to create a society where everyone has fairly equitable social status. This society is not based on individualism but the opposite, as the orientation of the Hutterite thinking is towards the group and its total welfare, rather than individual enhancement. From a small child, they are taught to fight individual will and see the value in others and the community. Another key characteristic of their lifestyle is the belief in anti-materialism and simplicity, as they strive not to idolize the material world by simply not accumulating goods. Only when man can free themselves from the grasp of the material world, can they truly be moving closer to the truth and God. Cultural and geographical separation from society is another major characteristic of Hutterite belief, as they strive to be as self-sufficient as possible in order to be non-reliant on mainstream society to avoid acculturation. They intentionally live and farm in the rural areas of Canada to get away from city life and the evils of society. Even their clothing and language are manifestations of the desire to be distinct and separate.[[5]](#footnote-5) In the end all these characteristics and the adherence to a strict lifestyle, is “to overcome temptations and never stray from the path of righteousness. The regulations are intended to combat selfishness, individualism, greed and the will to earn more.” The Hutterite lifestyle and belief system is extremely unique and contrasts Canadian society, which in return influences health notions in each setting.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Anthropological and ethnographical work on the Hutterites has been extensive, as many of the foundational books on the Hutterite society were done between 1960 and 1980. However, the very first book to be published on the Hutterites was done by Lee Deets, in 1939, as his book opened up the research world to Hutterites.[[7]](#footnote-7) John Hostetler, John Bennett, David Flint, Harold Lobb, Victor Peters, and Peter Stephenson have all published books from 1960 to 1980, which focus on a general overview of lifestyle.[[8]](#footnote-8) However, the scholarship in regards to health and Hutterites has many gaps, with certain subjects such as; mental health and death being discussed in some detail. Joanne Cacciatore, Howard Brunt et. Al, Vishwajit Nimgaonkar et. Al, and Joseph Eaton have all discussed either mental health or death in the Hutterite community.[[9]](#footnote-9) However, scholarship on the overview of Hutterite health notions are absent, as the historical study done so far briefly touches on the subject or neglects it all together. Another major gap is the differences in health expectations, and experiences between the genders, which will be explored briefly in this paper, but not extensively. The foundation has been laid, now more in depth and precise work needs to be done to interrogate Hutterites more comprehensively, especially in terms of health.

In this paper I will explore the Hutterites’ unique social atmosphere, created by their Ana-Baptist religious beliefs, and show how their culture led to definitions of health from 1940 to 1990. Comparing Hutterite health norms and Canadian’s popular culture ideas around health will help illuminate that different social climates affect health norms differently. This essay will argue that the Hutterites health notions are created from their unique social environment produced by their religious beliefs, thus making health a social construction. To illuminate how the social climate affects Hutterite health norms, I will be split the essay into three parts; medicalization within Hutterite communities, death, and mental health.

Medicalization within Hutterite Communities

Being that Hutterites are secluded, isolated and culturally different peoples from mainstream Canadians, the definition of health within a Hutterite colony needs further examining. The Hutterites’ fundamentalist Christian view of life, where their religious beliefs permeates into all Hutterian thought, becomes the ultimate defining feature of health.[[10]](#footnote-10) Robert Crawford, writes about the movement in Western society, known as healthism, where one’s health is an individual responsibility. The ability to perform and actively improve your health whether through medical practices of increased self-awareness, is one’s duty as an individual.[[11]](#footnote-11) However, this dynamic was far from the realities found within a Hutterite colony from the years 1940 to 1990, as their religious beliefs led to a different notion of health based on the commune working together to achieve a state of “healthiness.”

The move towards increased medicalization in the Hutterite community from 1940 to 1990, was based on their religious beliefs, which called for the use of medical technologies in order to better the health of the community and to keep people working for God longer. This term medicalization came into academia in the 1970’s and can be defined as “the expansion of medical authority into everyday life.”[[12]](#footnote-12) Robert Crawford explains medicalization as the “expansion of professional power over wider spheres of life… replacing religious and legal actors and their modes of social control.”[[13]](#footnote-13) A similar trend can be found in the Hutterite community, as old versions of folk remedies and traditional practices were superseded by medical professionals. However, the movement in the Hutterite communities in some ways contradicts the definition given by Crawford, as the professional powers did not replace religious actors, rather religious actors pushed them towards medicalization, as Hutterites saw their religious doctrine guiding them towards modern medicine.

Before the movement towards medicalization by Hutterite communities, women acted as the primary medical professionals of the community. Folk remedies, medical teas, herbs, creams and dietary adaptions were made to benefit the health of the community. Teas and herbs were often used to cure colds, stomach aches, and intestinal problems along with many other uses. The women in the community were considered experts on how different vitamins and minerals affected and metabolized in the human bodies in order to ensure good health. Techniques such as bloodletting were also popular, but one of the most memorable techniques of medicine used by the Hutterite women was salves. Salves were made up of cow udders, goose fat, and soft cow dung in order to treat flesh wounds. Gender expectations of women in the colony was to be the caretakers of the population being the experts in medicine and the body.[[14]](#footnote-14)

This way of folk medicine became less prevalent in the 1960’s as modern medicine took over enroute to a state of medicalization. In 1967, John W. Bennett remarked on the six Hutterite colonies in Saskatchewan he was studying, that they were taking full advantage of the modern medical services. Bennett stated that “they fully accept medical science; some of them read popular medical literature, and they all consult doctors when the occasions arises. Nearly all, Hutterian women in the Jasper [South-West Saskatchewan] colonies go to hospitals to have their babies.”[[15]](#footnote-15) Folk medicine was starting to be phased out in favour of more modern practices, however this was a result of religious reasons.

Childbirth and midwifery offered an area where health notions, especially around medicalization differed between Canadians and Hutterites. Certain women within the Hutterite community would learn from the older women of the community and become the colonies’ midwives. These midwives were very involved in the birthing process, however their role did not diminish in the colony due to medicalization, rather just the venue changed. Midwives were very involved at the hospital doing most of the work and garnered praise from the doctors. [[16]](#footnote-16) This continual use of midwifery was very different then the realities in the Canadian context. The “Hospital-based, physician-attended childbirth grew steadily throughout the 19th century and by the 1940s, midwifery was no longer a maternity care option for the vast majority of Canadian women.”[[17]](#footnote-17) Then in the 1970’s, midwifery made a reassurance in Canadian society, leading up to 1994, where midwifery was officially seen as a profession in Ontario.[[18]](#footnote-18) Hutterites continued to use and place an importance on midwifery, due to their religious beliefs and religiously defined gender roles, which called on women to help the mothers in the colony, which contrasted the medicalization of Canadian society, where the medical practices, even on women’s bodies, were taken out of the female’s hands and into medical professionals. Gender expectations of women on health in Hutterite communities stayed more constant, where as in Canada, the gendered roles of health were more malleable.

The communal state of healthiness was at the centre of Hutterite health notions especially when looking at medicalization, as it was the colony’s responsibility to ensure the health of each other. An example comes from the ethnographic study done by Victor Peters, where he was in a Manitoba Hutterite colony, and found one day that the women of the colony were concerned about the ministers health due to his increasing weight, which was caused by too rich of a diet. In order to ensure better health, the women with their expertise and the expertise of a secular dietician from the neighboring town, collaborated to create a more healthy diet, to ensure better colony health.[[19]](#footnote-19) The cause for such concern was rooted in the perception that a healthy minister was paramount to keeping the spiritual and mental health of the community intact. The minister’s health was paramount to the keeping a state of communal healthiness. Medicalization was present in the example, as they relied on a medical professional to ensure better health for the community as a whole, through helping the minister. Therefore the medicalization of the colony was an attempt to protect the colonies health, in order to better uphold their religious beliefs.

The communal view of health has another facet, as the attitude towards work is intertwined with their religious belief and health. In the colony “a good church member, is one who does his honest share of work in the colony,” in conjunction with that, everyone is responsible for other’s well-being.[[20]](#footnote-20) This belief applied to health drove everyone on the colony to stay healthy in order to be a good worker for God and the colony. One Hutterite was quoted saying “we believe that if you do not work, then Satan will work.”[[21]](#footnote-21) The failure to uphold their ability to work at a productive rate, diminished one’s feeling of adequacy, because the idea of reciprocity begins to break down since not working would disrespect the communal system in place, as each person’s work was an integral part of the structure of the Hutterite colony.[[22]](#footnote-22) Health was an integral part of Hutterite religious beliefs, as it allowed the colony members to keep working, which in return brought Hutterites closer to God.

The Hutterites were very intertwined in the medical system in Canada, partaking in all medical services that a normal Canadian would partake in. In a study done in 1990, they found that Hutterites were more likely to see a doctor then other Canadians.[[23]](#footnote-23) The Hutterites were active in the process of medicalization, however this was on their own terms. Health in the context of a Hutterite community was a community activity, not just a responsibility of the individual. Unlike Robert Crawford’s healthism where Western society was moving towards an individualized view of health, Hutterites followed their religious beliefs of communalism and applied that to health. From the Hutterian Articles of Association in 1965; “The Church [or the people of the community] is constantly dedicated to healing the poor, helping the poor, helping those who are sick and weak.[[24]](#footnote-24) The use of modern practices was viewed within a Hutterite colony as progress towards a more healthy community.

Medicalization was viewed by the colony as a way to reach a state of communal “healthiness,” while upholding their responsibility to work. Health was intertwined with their religious beliefs of work and communalism, concluding that their social climate was directly affecting their view of health. In contrast with Canadian views, Hutterites approached medicalization and health in a unique way, as they took a communal view instead of an individual view. Medicalization offers the first example to illuminate that health is a social construction, as social environments created by their religious beliefs determined their definition of healthiness and how to reach a communal state of healthiness.

Death

The view of death in Hutterite communities was another topic of Hutterites’ health that should be examined because it illuminates the impact that their religious beliefs have on their notions of health. Death was an accepted part of Hutterite life, based in Hutterite religious doctrine, as their faithfulness to God was rewarded with a place in Heaven in the afterlife. Even in the most troubling deaths involving young children, by mainstream Canadian standards, the Hutterites saw these deaths as a blessing. Cacciatore and Thieleman, in a study of death in a Hutterite community, stated that “Hutterites prize the deaths of children and consider the death of a child a blessing.”[[25]](#footnote-25) Another view was that “death is considered the most important moment in a Hutterite’s life, as it marks the entry into eternal life in Heaven.”[[26]](#footnote-26) Since death is seen as the end of an earthly struggle and it allows them to live a life no longer bound by temptation, thus creating unique notions surrounding death. An older Hutterite woman was quoted saying “all is finished” on her death bed, which explained the peace and fulfilment that death brings to a Hutterite, as death was seen as the beginning of a better life, rather than an ending.[[27]](#footnote-27) Western Society’s view of death was much different, as death was the entry way into the unknown and the possible end of one’s existence. Therefore, the health notions involving death are different because of the contrasting belief systems of mainstream Canadians and Hutterites. Hutterites ascribe to ritualized tradition of funerals, faith in an afterlife and social cohesion. These are all rooted in biblical doctrine to create a unique set of health notions revolving around death, as each helps ease the pain of death.[[28]](#footnote-28)

In the aftermath of a death in a Hutterite community, a specific set of rituals for the grieving and funeral process are followed, which have been curated over hundreds of years. The body was taken home and prepared for burial, while a large group of women met at the home to pray, comfort, and be with the family. An expert in carpentry took measurements and crafted a coffin, while other men dug a hole. The gendered expectations of health in funerals was for men to deal with grief and help the family through their physical abilities, where women were to comfort the family displaying their emotional depth. The wake came two days after the death and the funeral three days after. Roughly 300-400 people attend the funeral, as all colony members as well as family members from other colonies attend. Typically an hour to two in length. Inspiring messages and songs about God providence and the continuing importance of living God inspired were led by the minister. Communion was also taken to remember that God had saved them and that He still provided for them. Throughout the wake and the funeral, there was time to mourn, but also a time to reflect on the better life that the deceased was now having. The first few days after a death, the community picks up most of the family’s workload, relieving any extra stress.[[29]](#footnote-29)

This highly ritualized process has been in place for many years and is relatively unchanged, which helps the grieving process. The ritualization of the death process is based on biblical doctrine, as the traditions are in place to re-orient the thinking of Hutterites towards a more pure way of thinking and dealing with grief. Retaining the process of bringing the body home, focusing on God’s providence in the wakes and funerals, and a shared view of the afterlife, all of these rituals created a comfort and recognition of larger power at work. The ritual of having the funeral on third day was rich in religious symbolism, as the person who has died is now risen again in Heaven, much like Jesus rose from the dead three days later. All of these rituals serve as a reminder that there is an afterlife and God’s provision. There should be little concern about what was to come after their death, as the most important part of the death process was fulfilling God’s plan in preparation for one’s death in order to ensure a heavenly place. Therefore it was vital to get the family back to working towards living out God’s plan in order to ensure their places in Heaven. Due to the comfort and the re-focus on God’s providence found in these ritualized traditions, rooted in religious doctrine, Hutterites have less anxiety about death.[[30]](#footnote-30)

Faith in the afterlife also adds to the unique set of notions of death, as throughout their lives they are taught about the joys in the afterlife. Within the Hutterites’ life there is very little doubt about the afterlife, as there is no speculation to the joys and activities to be expected.[[31]](#footnote-31) A minister was quoted saying this during a funeral, “there is no better place than to be in heaven with God.” Heavenly bliss and the certainty of an afterlife lead to a place of acceptance of death, as one Hutterite mother said “I know that I will see my children and my husband again. I feel very sad for people who don’t have that faith. ...I don’t know how they survive such grief.” A place of solace was found amongst the family members who recently had family members pass on, as it was part of a larger plan made by the Divine.[[32]](#footnote-32) The faith in Heaven, where life is better, allows acceptance of death as another stage of life.

Tied into the ritualized process, social cohesion was built into the traditions of death. Other Hutterite mothers cried as much as the mother that lost the child, in an act of solidarity and communal identity. Within Hutterite communities, “God expects us to care for one another and love one another,” and another Hutterite mother of a deceased child stated “I’m never alone in my grief ...I never feel lonely. Someone is always there to feel my sadness with me.”[[33]](#footnote-33) The established social cohesion and group identity are based on scriptural doctrine, as helping the family cope with loss removes the feelings of isolation and loneliness. Therefore death becomes less of a burden on their physical and mental well-being, as isolation can lead to adverse physiological outcomes, including increased morbidity and mortality.[[34]](#footnote-34) The social cohesion that was guided by the religious doctrine of communalism, make death less emotionally taxing for the family, as the community attempts to comfort and ease the stress around the situation.

Hutterites had a unique process around death that still has emotional pains and grief, but ultimately death was not seen as negative, which was dissimilar to Canadians views. In the latter half of the twentieth century in Canada, “death was generally defined as bad, repulsive, contaminating and threatening.” The view of death in Canadian society shifted in the 1950’s, as medicalization was reducing pre-mature deaths. Canadians became less and less accepting of young person deaths along with death in general, as it became less normalized. “Death, which had become common and familiar, became unfamiliar, remote, invisible, and expected only in old age.”[[35]](#footnote-35) The negative viewpoint of death, did not resemble the viewpoint of Hutterites. Even though both groups went through grieving processes, death was seen as completely different as a result of unique social environments based on their belief systems.

An example of these contrasting ideals of death was evident in health promotion, where a group of health professionals in the late 1980’s attempted to apply the same health promotion techniques on Hutterite colonies as they did on Canadians. The outcome came out different than expected, as Hutterites did not respond to the threats of death that were associated with bad health habits, unlike Canadians. Often death was used as a stimulus for health modification, however this technique was unsuccessful due to Hutterites positive oriented view of death. Death was not experienced or viewed in an adverse way, rendering the professionals attempts at health modification useless.[[36]](#footnote-36)

Death as a positive experience was rooted in biblical doctrine, as Northcott and Wilson states, “the meaning of death for the individual and the individual’s reaction to death must be understood in the cultural context… death has different meanings for different subcultures.”[[37]](#footnote-37) In the case of the Hutterites, their religious world view “was designed to overcome the helplessness of man in the face of existential problems of being and non-being, and of anxieties derived from failure, suffering, accidents and death.”[[38]](#footnote-38) The social construction of health was apparent, as Hutterites’ unique biblical worldview affected their notions of death, whereas Canadians worldview created a completely different set of notions surrounding death.

Mental Health and Hutterites

Throughout most of the essay, the focus has been on physical health, however health was double sided in the Hutterite community, where the health of a Hutterite went much deeper to the spiritual well-being of a person. Anthropologist and scientists alike have been fascinated by the Hutterites and their mental health. Due to their unique culture and belief system, scientists have used Hutterites as a study group to find root causes for mental health problems and possible solutions, which has led to many studies. All the studies that have been done on Hutterites concluded that the mental health of Hutterites was world class and better than the Canadian average.[[39]](#footnote-39) Despite this, there are cases of mental health issues in Hutterite communities, however these are taken care of quickly and promptly because mental health was seen as a spiritual sickness, which could be combated through religious means.

Lee Deets, an ethnographer in 1939, stated “almost all members of Hutterite Society have extraordinary mental health and freedom from mental conflicts and tensions.”[[40]](#footnote-40) However, there are cases of mental health issues found on a colony. One term, *Anfechtung*, was often used by Hutterites to talk about mental health, which means temptation or attack. *Anfechtung* was described as involving guilty feelings, doubt, fear and the inability to work, where they would withdraw from Hutterite society. Often this term was closely related to depression or anxiety in the Western Society context, however this term Anfecthtung had spiritual implications, as these symptoms came from a place of spiritual sickness, where the flesh was at war with their earthly desires. The individual felt spiritual defeat, where one felt abandoned by God, often arising out of a failure to overcome personal conflict, based on spiritual shortcomings.[[41]](#footnote-41) Simply put by a Hutterite Edward Kleinsasser, it is “a mental/spiritual form of depression.”[[42]](#footnote-42) Hutterite colonies often took two routes to cure and treat *Anfechtung*, both rooted in religious doctrine, and both attacked the illness from a religious perspective.

The first method of treatment was through the Ana-Baptist doctrine of communalism, where everyone worked towards a state of communal healthiness, as everyone was responsible for each other’s mental health. The colony extended brotherly love, company and support to those who were suffering from *Anfechtung.* Victor Peters explained that “an atmosphere within which the emotionally disturbed persons were encouraged to get well or to function in a socially accepted manner within the limits imposed by their illness.”[[43]](#footnote-43) They did not see the need to remove the person from the colony and be sent to a strange hospital, rather treatment was found in the colony. The mentally ill person was encouraged to be involved in everyday life of work and community, as the community used their communalism to try and show support and solidarity.[[44]](#footnote-44)

Another method to tackle this mental illness was rooted in spiritual turmoil, where the help of the minister was needed to resolve the illness. One of the ways in which *Anfechtung* would arise was out of personal conflicts with one another, leading to spiritual deterioration. Often times it was disagreements between the colony members on certain decisions, which led to hate in their hearts. Due to the minister’s position to ensure good spiritual and mental health in the colony, they would work through these problems and resolve conflicts between the members. Another reason for mental health problems was just solely based on the idea of spiritual sickness, where the person was at conflict with God. *Anfechtung* was seen as “a spiritual struggle with unique cases,” where God would exposed spiritual problems. Since the minister’s job was to ensure and foster fruitful relationships with not only other colony members but God as well. The minister took on the task of re-aligning their hearts with God and fixing their spiritual deficiencies.[[45]](#footnote-45) The spiritual well-being was bettered using these tactics, rooted in religious teachings of communalism and religious counselling.

In contrast, Canadian popular culture norms of mental health told a different story, as Canadians viewed mental health as purely medically, physically, or psychologically, absent of spiritual possibilities. Often times mentally ill Canadians were taken to asylums to be treated and medically examined in order to be cured. Canadian society pushed for mental health to be clinically serviceable, where medications and quick treatments could be available to fix the problems without having to house them in mental hospitals to receive therapeutic treatments. Many of the government grants in Mental Health in Canada were increasingly involved in the biological side of mental health, as anatomic (microscopic studies in neurocytology) and biochemical studies were heavily funded in the 1960’s.[[46]](#footnote-46) The medicalized way of viewing mental health as increasingly biological or physically was completely absent of spiritual possibilities. In addition mental health was now to be treated by the medical experts, instead of common folk, to an increased state of medicalization. The Hutterites and Canadians differed on the ways in which mental health was defined, viewed and cured. Canadians viewed mental health medically, whereas Hutterites viewed it through spiritual terms.

Mental health and its medicalization can be seen in Saskatchewan in the 1950’s, as a group of clinical researchers began making waves in psychiatry for medical experimentation involving psychedelic drugs. The rise of psychopharmacological explained that “psychedelic psychiatrists used their research in LSD to demonstrate that mental disorders were much like physical disorders.” This biochemical experiment with LSD was a sign of how Canadians viewed mental health, as there was a desire to fix these mental health problems through biological and physical means. This strive for finding a chemically derived solution came out of a social context where, Tommy Douglas, the Premier of Saskatchewan, was deeply wanting reformed health care. Douglas was on a mission to extend healthcare to all citizens and the ability to deal with mental health needed a biological cure, not just therapeutic treatment.[[47]](#footnote-47) The experimentation of LSD in Saskatchewan through the 1950’s, illuminates the biological and physical view of mental health.

Hutterites definition of mental health problems as spiritual was based in religious doctrine, where religious ideas were influencing health notions. Even the ways in which this mental illness was to be cured came from religious belief. As Bennett states, high rates of cures [of mental health problems] were affected by the restorative powers of the colony itself,” whether through communalism or religious counseling.[[48]](#footnote-48) Thus Hutterites’ definition of mental health was based on their social climate, no different than Canadians view of mental health.

Conclusion

The Hutterites’ religious beliefs stemming from Ana-Baptist doctrine, has permeated into all avenues of their lives, even health. From 1940 to 1990, whether through medicalization, death, or mental health, each aspect has offered a unique case where the religious beliefs created a social environment that produced differing health norms. Hutterites’ biblical worldview resulted in a unique definition of health, which encompassed health as a physical manifestation but also a spiritual one as well, where the commune must work collectively to ensure a state of healthiness, in reverence for God. These defining features of health in the Hutterite community are unique because of their unique belief system and lifestyle rooted in the Holy Bible.

Within these Hutterite communities, gender did affect the health norms differently, as women were seen as caregivers, and the medical professionals of the community. They were in charge of diets, medical treatments and keeping the commune healthy. Men on the other hand were less involved in the health process, as they were not actively involved in the preventative side of health, rather lived by the health notions created by the Bible or incorporated the new health practices women created. In death, gender roles and ideals were re-enforced through this process, as women fulfilled the role of the caregiver, tending to the family and comforting those in need, whereas men used their physical skills to carry out funeral process. Men and women performed their health in different ways, which means health and gender are intertwined in Hutterite communities, as gender roles were re-enforced through ideas of health. Midwifery, diets and the funeral processes all exposed differences that health had on gender. Women used their knowledge of emotions and human well-being in the practice of health, and on the other hand men used practical skills to act out their health.

The three sections of this paper have each offered a different example of how religious beliefs produced a particular set of notions. In medicalization, Hutterites were active in the journey towards increased use of medical technologies and doctors expertise. Hutterites acceptance of the new state of health through medicalization was in an attempt to reach a state of communal healthiness, rooted in the biblical teachings of work and communalism. Death was perceived as a blessing because of ritualized tradition in funerals, faith in an afterlife and social cohesion. These three reasons created the notion of death being viewed in a positive light, which came from religious teachings. Finally in mental health, the notions of mental health were rooted in the spiritual health of an individual. This spiritual side of mental health and the ways in which the community helped a mentally ill person overcome their sickness was based in their religious doctrine. Religious doctrine and beliefs became the ultimate defining feature of health in the Hutterite community.

The Hutterites’ lives looked much different than those of Canadians, as “the Hutterites’ religion provides definite answers for many of the problems that come up.”[[49]](#footnote-49) This applies to health as well, where the Hutterite community interrogated their notions of health through their lens of religious belief. Health coming from their social environment, can be explained by their belief of the Holy Bible being related to all aspects of life, as their entire social climate was curated from the teachings of scripture. When interrogating definitions of health in different time periods or people’s, an understanding of the social context is paramount to understand the why of health definitions, and this was apparent with the Hutterites, as the social atmosphere directly related to health notions. Hutterites and their religious beliefs defining health, offers a unique case study to show the affect that social climate can have on health norms.

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