

The amish way of life essay



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The Amish Way of Life Shannon Mason Introduction to Cultural Anthropology
Jessie Cohen December 14, 2011 The Amish Way of Life The Amish culture is fascinating to me, because it exists in our own country, and our own communities, but yet it is not an integral part of our mainstream society. Although the Amish culture exists in our own backyards, The Amish have distinct gender roles, cultural beliefs and values, and their own way of handling sickness and healing. As in many cultures, the Amish people have very distinct gender roles.

This means that men and women have certain tasks and traditions that are separate for each gender, and as a rule, these tasks are not performed by the other. The Amish father is responsible for providing for his family through farm work or by employment in the local community. Many Amish men are working away from the farm [because of] the declining availability of farmland. Many Amish men work as carpenters, masons or laborers in factories. Some have home based businesses such as furniture making, harness repair or the shoeing of horses.

Amish culture teaches girls to serve and please others such as their parents, husbands and relatives. An Amish wife is identified by using her husband's name, eg. Eli Katie means Eli's wife, Katie. The social life for an Amish woman is centered around church, funerals, quilting bees, baking, barn raising and frolics (Lemon, 2006). Unmarried young women often find work in shops and restaurants owned by "English" (the generic term for non-Amish persons), or in housecleaning services (Cates, et al 2006).

It seems that women would rebel against the lack of personal identity this culture allows them, but since they are raised and taught this to be normal, it is rarely questioned. Amish beliefs and values contain aspects that are the same as mainstream society, but much of their attitudes and beliefs are very unique. The Amish culture is said to be a branch or denomination of the Christian religion. For example, rather than being Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, etc, the community is Amish.

They base their beliefs on the Christian bible, however all Amish communities are not the same. There are subgroups that compose the Amish Culture. There are four groups of Amish: Swartzentruber (ultra conservative), Andy Weaver (conservative), Old Order (conservative), and the New Order (less conservative). Today the Amish stand somewhere between the parent body, the Mennonites, and the four subgroups. The New Order of Amish attempts to balance distinctive rituals and practices against accommodations (Lemon, 2006). The Old Order is the most visible of Amish groups.

They are the ones you notice right away, when in public because they are identified by their plain dress and use of horse and buggy as primary mode of transportation. It is imperative to the Amish beliefs that they be separated from the rest of the world. Also, their main beliefs include loyalty to community and family, rather than loyalty to themselves individually, a commitment to physical labor, humility when interacting with others, and recognition of and commitment to the church as the main authority in their lives. They, like other religions, believe that life on earth precludes heavenly rewards.

They may grieve death, but they also rejoice in the promise of eternal life (Cates, et al, 2006). Another curiosity, as reported by William Schreiber in 1960, was that unlike American weddings being held on Saturdays, the Amish always held their weddings on a Tuesday or Thursday, and the wedding season for the Amish lasted from early Fall until late Winter, and did not extend into a leap year (Schreiber, 1960). Some things that make the Amish vastly different from the mainstream Christian practices are, that the Amish leave school after the eighth grade.

They don't believe any further education is necessary. Also, they have the same internal tensions and conflicts as those found in any community, but they are likely to present a united front to the world. While this serves the group well, it can hinder attempts to understand the individual. Few behaviors or traits will be mentioned directly that might be perceived as boasting or pride, or conversely, critical of others (Cates, et al, 2006). The Amish have some practices that are uniquely their own.

In the 1997 Universal Pictures movie *For Richer or Poorer*, Kirstie Alley and Tim Allen depict a miserable New York couple that got framed by their accountant, and fled from the IRS to Amish country. This movie accurately shows how toned-down an "English" person has to become to fit into an average Amish household. Removing all makeup and jewelry, dressing in plain clothing, and working from daylight until the sun goes down are just a few things that had to change for the couple (Lukanic, et al, 1997). There are a few things that the movie incorrectly depicts.

Those are: * It is said they are hiding out at the Yoder's because Amish don't pay taxes, when in fact they pay all but social security. * In the end Brad and Sam are looking at the corn field, but it would have [already] been harvested because the Amish harvest before they have weddings. * The Amish would never hold a wedding outside. They take place in the bride's parent's house. * The film depicts the Amish community holding a barn dance. The Amish do not dance, it is considered secular and therefore sinful (IMDb 1997). Another example is Charlotte Allison, an 18-year-old University College Falmouth student.

She recently spent six weeks in Middlefield, Ohio, as part of a television series, *Living With The Amish*. Charlotte was made to remove all traces of her makeup and change her clothes to match the clothing of the other women present. Although at first she didn't like the idea of looking the same as everyone else, she soon found it to be comfortable and was accepted by the others in the community (The Western Morning News, 2011). Perhaps the most effective way to learn and accept the beliefs of another culture is to show a sincere desire to participate and live among the people in their communities.

The Amish people also have their own beliefs and practices concerning healthcare. One main example is childbirth. In America, when it is time to deliver a baby, we are typically seen at the nearest hospital. We surround ourselves with doctors, nurses, support staff, and all the high-tech equipment and machinery at our disposal. The Amish people deliver their babies at home, only going to the hospital if there is a medical necessity. Amish express their [inclination] for prenatal care [with the use of] nurse

midwives, lay midwives, home deliveries, and limited use of high technology (Lemon, 2006).

The following information is taken from the work of Betty Spencer Lemon. (2006). Amish Health Care Beliefs and [Practices] In An Obstetrical Setting. Journal of Multicultural Nursing & Health. The information is vital to understanding the vastly different approach to childbirth than the “ normal” American way. Babies are a welcomed gift in the Amish culture and are viewed as a gift from God. The Amish view fertility as a family and community gift. ... Most Amish couples do not use birth control to limit their family size, since it is believed that use of birth control would be interfering with God’s will.

Therapeutic abortions, amniocentesis and other invasive prenatal diagnostic testing are also not acceptable. Amish folk wisdom is an integral part of their prenatal practices, for example: walking under a clothesline will result in a stillbirth or crawling through a window or under a table will cause the umbilical cord to be wrapped around the baby’s neck (Lemon, 2006). In preparation for childbirth a five week formula (5-W) is sometimes used in the last five weeks of pregnancy. It is thought that the herbs in this formula tone and calm the uterus, quiet the nerves, ease pain, and help make labor easier and on time.

In addition, it has been known to help with menstrual disorders, morning sickness and hot flashes. The herbs included in this formula are: Red Raspberry Leaves: This herb has been used as an old friend to treat diarrhea, vomiting and the flu. It is used for similar purposes of relieving nausea and

pain in labor. Red raspberry capsules and red raspberry teas are also used.

Butcher's Broom Root: This herb is used for hemorrhoids, varicose veins, and thrombosis. In addition, it is a diuretic, anti-inflammatory and improves circulation. This herb contains pseudo steroidal saponins which cause blood vessels to constrict and blood to thin.

During the final months of pregnancy women may have circulatory problems such as varicose veins; therefore this herb is considered important.

Black cohosh Root: This is a hormonal herb. It has an estrogenic effect because it contains compounds which mimic the effects of estrogen; therefore it is contraindicated in the early stages of pregnancy as it could bring on premature labor. This herb has a nervine effect which relieves spastic muscles, dilates peripheral blood vessels and helps reduce blood pressure. These actions aid the uterus and other muscles during labor.

The anti-cramping effect of black cohosh is thought to help reduce pain during delivery. Black cohosh is also used to treat menopausal and PMS symptoms and menstrual cramps. Because black cohosh may mimic the action of estrogen, anyone who has had a cancer that's estrogen sensitive, such as breast, endometrial or ovarian, should avoid using it. Since this root contains a blood-thinner, it should not be taken with blood-thinning medications (such as coumadin or heparin).

Dong Quai Root: The anti-inflammatory and diuretic effect of this herb is used for treating swelling prior to labor. During labor it eases smooth muscle contractions and gives a general sedative effect. This herb, in Chinese medicine, is considered a blood building tonic as it is high in iron, magnesium, and niacin. This Chinese herb is sometimes referred to as a female ginseng and is used extensively in

China as a postpartum tonic. Squaw Vine Root: This herb is used to prepare the uterus for childbirth and is also used to speed up delivery and encourage regular contractions. It has an antispasmodic action. The Amish have no major [religious] ... requirements for labor and delivery. The women labor in soft pastel colored gowns. Men may be present and most husbands choose to be involved. Delivery may be at home with a midwife, at the birthing center, or at a hospital. (Lemon, 2006) The Amish faith also controls the culture's health care concerns in areas other than childbirth. Amish people aren't adverse to necessary life prolonging medical procedures as long as they are not too expensive. If a member of the community needs dialysis or cancer treatment, it is not against their beliefs.

However, if the procedure is found to be too costly, or a drain on the community resources, it is discussed as a group, and the group elders will make a decision regarding the continuation of services. In addition, Amish people believe in a basic DNR (do not resuscitate) rule. If the person was meant to live, God would have spared his or her life. In conclusion, the Amish culture is vastly different from mainstream America because they have distinct gender roles, have strict cultural beliefs and values and because they have a primitive way of handling sickness and healing, despite the fact that they are in our own backyards.

There is value in their culture, because of their clean living, un-hurried lifestyles, and because they are un-burdened by many of our day-to-day troubles. The Amish have everything they need, and they do not want the things that they do not have. Much like other cultures in the world, they reject the American ways of living, not needing our cell phones, computers,

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GPS, and other technological advances. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you, love thy neighbor as thyself, do not lie, cheat, or steal from one another. It sounds rather utopian. References Charlotte Smitten by Amish Way of Life. 2011, November 24). The Western Morning News, 3. Retrieved December 12, 2011, from ProQuest Newsstand. (Document ID: 2518670011). For Richer or Poorer (1997) - Goofs - IMDb. Retrieved 12 14, 2011, from [www.imdb.com/title/tt0119142/trivia?tab= gf](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0119142/trivia?tab=gf) Jana Howington and Steve Lukanic. (1997) For Richer or Poorer. Universal Pictures 1997, Directed by Bryan Spicer, Retrieved 12 8, 2011, from www.imdb.com/title/tt0119142/ Lemon, Betty Spencer, (2006). Amish Health Care Beliefs and Practices In An Obstetrical Setting. *Journal of Multicultural Nursing & Health*, 12(3), 54-59.

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