Go Forth and Multiply: Changes in the Timing of Marriage and Childbearing Among Young Amish Women.

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The first Amish to come to North America from Europe settled in Southeast Pennsylvania in 1738 (Nolt, 1992). As they grew in numbers, they migrated and started new rural settlements in other parts of the United States and Canada, particularly in the Midwest states of Ohio, Indiana and Illinois (Crowley, 1978). Even though the Amish may live in close proximity to their non-Amish neighbors, their strict adherence to a rural-based lifestyle involving 'plain' dressing, restricted use of modern technology, a continued reliance on the horse and buggy for local transportation which therefore compels them to live in close proximity to each other, maintenance of their Pennsylvania German dialect, promotion of in-group marriage patterns, and a congregational style of decision-making of church rules, all serve to maintain their communities as socially and culturally distinct from the mainstream influences of American life that surrounds them (Ericksen et al, 1979; Hostetler, 1993; Donnermeyer et al., 2000).

The Amish are also unique in their fertility patterns. Stemming from their strict adherence to their religious ideology, the Amish have strong traditional norms that favor large families and church doctrine that opposes contraception (Dorsten, 1999). Like the Hutterites, the Amish also have much higher levels of fertility than the general U.S. population (Ericksen, 1979). As a consequence of their high fertility, their rate of population growth over the past 100 years has been rapid. The Amish do not proselytize and there are therefore few converts to their faith. Rates of leaving the faith are also low (Wasao and Donnermeyer, 1996; Greska and Korbin, 2002). In 1900 the Amish population was estimated to be about 5000 in North America. Today the number is over 160,000 (Donnermeyer, 1997).

This increase in population during the 20th century has precipitated significant social and economic change within Amish society, especially within the past few decades. One consequence has been a rapid change in the employment base of the Amish. For example, in the greater Homes County Amish settlement area in northeast Ohio, an area which constitutes the largest Amish community in the world, the ratio of farmers to non-farmers declined from 2.41 to only 0.61 between 1965 and 1988, (Kreps, Donnermeyer and Kreps, 1994) and by 1995 had shrunk to 0.47 (Donnermeyer, unpublished calculations, 2003).

Another consequence of recent population growth has been an increase in the number of Amish church districts. Decisions regarding Amish rules for everyday living stem from the church districts or congregations to which families belong. Each congregation consists of approximately 25-35 families. Directly resulting from its growth in population, the number of church districts in Holmes County, for example, increased over the same three decades (1965-1995) from 55 to over 160.

There has also been a growing differentiation of congregations along liberal and conservative lines (Wasao and Donnermeyer, 1996). Today, the Amish in the greater Holmes County area, for example, are represented by four major affiliations that are not in "fellowship" with each other, from the most conservative Swartzentruber groups to the most liberal New Order groups. Each group has its own recent history and its own interpretation of what Amish life is supposed to be. Hence within what outsiders might consider a single Anabaptist religious group, belonging to one group rather than another has important ramifications for everyday living, and may well impact the way in which the transition to adulthood is navigated by Amish youth.

Most Amish today are classified as Old Order Amish, and they are fairly moderate in their interpretations of the bible and hence in how they live. For example, Old Order Amish use gas and kerosene refrigerators and central heating in their homes and have indoor plumbing (Kraybill, 1994). The remaining affiliations represent groups that have broken away from the original Old Order Amish. Swartzentruber families maintained a separate identification beginning in 1913. The next most conservative are the Andy Weaver Amish who split off in 1955. Both of these splinter groups have rejected more modern changes in farm and household technology that were slowly infiltrating everyday living in the Old Order communities, and also have a stricter interpretation of the shunning of members who either dropped out of the Amish faith, or who they feel have committed serious violations against the proscribed Amish ways of living (Donnermeyer, 1997). The most recent group to split off in the mid-1960s is also the most liberal group of New Order Amish in terms of their use of technology. However, the New Order Amish are more conservative when it comes to matters of alcohol and tobacco use, *and the courtship behaviors of their unmarried youth*.

Thus although the Amish maintain a separate and distinctive way of living from their "English" neighbors, they are not an unchanging, nor a homogeneous population. Their rapid increase in population and consequent migration to new settlements and shifts in occupation away from farming have brought the Amish into closer contact with the non-Amish world. And on top of these forces that have led to a greater diversification within the Amish as a whole, has been the added development of tourism. The two largest settlements of Holmes County and vicinity in Ohio, and Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, are both visited by over one million tourists each year (Kreps et al., 1997). We would therefore also expect that these forces of change would impact Amish youth.

The Amish have traditionally educated their children in one or two room parochial schools close to home through the eighth grade only. And having received a Supreme Court exemption from state laws for mandatory education beyond this level, this tradition continues today (Donnermeyer, 1997). Following the end of formal education, Amish youth have then traditionally worked with their parents: boys with their fathers in the fields, and girls with their mothers in the house and garden. As fewer Amish males now farm than in the past, Amish youth also have more options, and potentially less direct supervision in their activities. Unmarried girls often also work outside the home – although this practice ends upon marriage.

Another tradition among the Amish, and one that has attracted considerable media coverage over the past couple of years, is that of *rumspringa,* which literally means "running around". When Amish boys and girls turn sixteen years old, they are permitted to leave their communities and live free of the strict Amish codes of conduct for the next few years. *Rumspringa* is therefore a rite of passage in the transition to adulthood - a chance for Amish youth to experience the outside world so that they can make an informed choice about whether or not to be baptized and become an adult member of the community. The nature of *rumspringa* differs from community to community, and as mentioned above, church affiliation and associated beliefs play a part in the degree to which Amish teens are granted freedom at this stage. Some youth become associated with Amish and "English" peer groups that express serious forms of deviance, such as drug use. For others, peer associations are more conforming. However, *rumspringa* still represents a time when Amish youth can move beyond the boundaries of their parent's district, both geographically and symbolically.

An original intention of *rumspringa* was not just to help transition children into independent adulthood, but also to facilitate the meeting of spouses from within the faith (Hostetler, 1989). Again, the nature of what is or is not sanctioned as moral behavior during this time differs depending on church district and hence upbringing. Despite this time of relative freedom, and the fact that contraception is not practiced among the Amish, writing in the late 1970s, Ericksen and her colleagues (1979) stated that the rate of pre-marital conception among the Old Order Amish was low. More recently, Dorsten and her colleagues (1999) wrote that children are rarely born out of marriage. However, there appears to have been no research undertaken using data from the 1980s and 1990s that explicitly addresses this issue.

The relative paucity of quantitative analyses pertaining to the Amish primarily stems from a lack of computerized data. However, a wealth of data is available in written format. The Amish collect and publish their own Directories in which every male head of household is listed along with information pertaining to his parents, wife, parents-in-law, and children, all of which are organized according to church district. These directories, in particular the directories containing information on the largest Amish settlements, are published fairly regularly (approximately every 5-7 years). For our analyses we have created a Stata database using data available from two different Amish settlements in Ohio. First is the greater Holmes County settlement which is the largest Amish settlement in the world with approximately 27,000 people. Second is the Geauga/Trumbull county settlement which is the 4th largest with about 10,000 persons. The Holmes county directory was published in 2000 and the Geauga/Trumbull county data were published in 2001. They are therefore very recent data but refer to all Amish currently living in these areas and hence to marriage and childbearing patterns over several decades.

In this paper we will examine how changes in the lifestyles of Amish families might have impacted the transition to adulthood of young Amish women. Amish women are listed in the directories with their husbands and for each, we know their date of birth, date of marriage and the names and birthdates of each of their children. From information on

their church district, we are also able to ascertain their religious affiliation. We examine how age at marriage, age at first birth, and most especially the timing of childbearing in relation to the timing of marriage, differs by cohort. We also pay particular attention to potential associations between the occurrence of premarital conceptions and births and religious affiliation.

We are currently nearing the end of our data entry process and anticipate having a Stata data set up and running in a few weeks time. We plan to have our analyses completed by the end of December and hence a paper ready well in advance of the PAA deadline.

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