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Socio-Cultural Practices and Livelihood in the Amish Community of the USA

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Abstract

This study embarks on the Amish community's socio-cultural life patterns, which are religious and cultural groups. Global scenarios exceed the limits of technological innovations and people are abysmal in using them in their day-to-day operations and beyond the imagination of their limits. Most of the world is racing behind it but the Amish are the exception. They are conscious of stopping the brain drain process through their productive work as their life-guiding principles. The main objective of this article is to understand the Amish community and identify livelihood ideologies, and transformation among them. It attempts to understand the sociocultural significance of the Amish community by unraveling facts of their day-to-day practices. This article applies the qualitative method. Field visits, observation, interviews, and textual review are major tools and techniques. The article claims that many life-guiding principles in the Amish community could encourage outsiders to stop and think a minute about being Amish and to take benefits. Life-guiding principles could be learned from them. To be happy with the bonding of relationships and forgiveness character offers humanity a secret but very important gift. Many more unimagined and miraculous findings are mirrored through Amish life.

Keywords: agrarian lifestyles, bonding, commitment, forgiveness, settlement

Introduction

A simple lifestyle within the innovation and aggression of technology. The Amish are a community of cultural and religious groups. They are mostly known for their traditional and conservative lifestyle. They are Christian, basically Swiss-German Anabaptist origins. They were from Switzerland, France, and Germany in the late Sixteen (Gross, 1997). They believe in nonviolent practices but are violently persecuted, sacked, and thrown into the water, cut heads by other churches, and relocated to America and Canada. As a result, there are no Amish in Europe (Poppova, 2020). Their settlement in America took place first in the eighteenth century (1727-1770) and the second wave of migration in the nineteenth century (1817 to 1860) (Wenger & Wenger, 1988). Similarly, Kuhnova (2012) cites that approximately 3000 Amish displaced in Canada and America (Robinson, 2005). They shifted to Pennsylvania as their new world and gradually extended their community in different places of America as such Ohio, Indiana, Iowa, Illinois, Kansas, and Tennessee (Muddy Pond, and Hickory). They reached America and were silently residing but in about 1937 when the American government started town planning and demolishing their one-room schooling model, they resisted and protested the government. As a result,

the Amish and their lifestyle became public through the New York Times headlines (Kraybill, et.al., 2013). Their way of life thrills today's modern people as simple dress, plain technology, communal, agrarian lifestyle, commitment to separation from the modern world, and discarding of theoretically based education; are considered as the key aspects of their cultural pattern. They are craftsmen, and professionals in agriculture, and they believe in their hard work. They are attributed to multiple natures distinctly separate from the modern world. The Amish community provides a wealthy space for a sociological significance study of community forces and business formation to become able to create a social network, even though they are facing the problem of humbleness and separation from the world. They believe in the transformative power of the community (Kraybill, et.al, 2010). They are in the way of new order positions of spirituality and control of youth but that was not true in 1980 (Hurst & McConnell, 2010). Amish are rational to serve their family, community, and religion; they prefer small communities, manual labor, are nature lovers, and have a strong sense of humility (Foster, 1984, p.11). Although they respect elected authority and pay government taxes, they strongly believe in the Bible and like to live accordingly. They claim that the Bible/ religion holds higher authority than the government (Field visit 2023).

Kraybill et al. (2011) claimed that Amish socio-cultural bonding, community sense, and hard work are examples and reflect honesty and passion for their family business. They were devoted to their agriculture, crafts, leather, furniture business, and grocery business focused on their manual skills. However, they used small and semi-automatic machines in their business, and from the plow, their business is slightly transforming some of them used black color Adidas shoes (Field Visit, 2023). It indicated that their indirect transformation in their business and dress up became the subject matter of sociological studies. The socio-cultural framework indicates economic strength whereas religious ethics and community trust reduce overhead costs. Their grocery, leather, and furniture are handmade and unique. It is believed that they sell original and hygienic products at reasonable prices. The synergy between culture, religious belief, and community bonding underscored their pattern of livelihoods and their ability and success in preserving tradition.

Research Questions

Who is the Amish?

How do the sociocultural settings of the Amish Community stand?

How is the livelihood of the Amish community?

What is the knowledge contribution from Amish?

Objectives

The objectives of the article stand for understanding the Amish community, identifying the guiding sociocultural settings of the Amish community, different life learning patterns of their livelihood to the outside world, and knowledge contribution.

Methodology

This article applies qualitative methods and accommodates descriptive and exploratory designs to focus on the description of phenomena and insight relying on analyzing new areas of research and likewise exploratory methods used in elaborate interviews, field visits with observation, and bouncing back to a conclusion. It is based on field-based observation, and interviews as the primary sources of

data, and literature are secondary source. When the researcher visited Pennsylvania state, encountered Amish people, distinct from others, thrilled to know about them and their community. Many scholars, Moledina et al. (2014), Kraybill & Nolt (2004) Hostetler (1993) were talking about inhabitants of Amish, got information about locations as such Ohio, Indiana, Chicago, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee in the United States of America. It supported visiting appropriate places and applied an accidental random sampling method of selecting participants for interviews. Relevant works of literature are consulted for conceptual and empirical purposes. It reflects the introduction of the Amish, their sociocultural significance, and their knowledge contribution to the outside world.

Theoretical Framework

This article draws on various theoretical frameworks based on context and surroundings. Durkheim's structural functionalism is applied to explore examples of maintaining social order and cohesion, while Talcott Parsons' theory emphasizes the role of social institutions—family, church, and school—in maintaining social stability and preserving the Amish way of life. Similarly, Erving Goffman's symbolic interactionism focuses on everyday practices, and Herbert Blumer highlights the meanings of actions and interactions, such as communal barn-raising, cooperation, and cooperation.

Karl Marx's conflict theory analyzes the Amish resistance to modern capitalism and technological change, viewing these as threats to their traditional way of life and values. C. Wright Mills elaborates on power dynamics and societal struggles, strategic resistance to structural institutions, and structures, and understanding how the Amish resist dominant power structures and maintain autonomy. Franz Boas's cultural relativism advocates for understanding the Amish culture without external imposition, appreciating their values and beliefs within their context rather than through modern perspectives. It offers a critical lens to Amish socio-cultural dynamics and livelihood to deepen the analysis. Amish reconcile traditional technologies and their success based on socio-cultural values with economic resilience—an article based on different theoretical foundations about the Amish community, their sociocultural pattern, and livelihood.

Conceptual Framework

This article attempts to explore conceptual clarity about the Amish community and their sociocultural practices and livelihood focusing on their identity, social structure, religion and belief systems, education pattern, socialization, economic practices, modernity and technology, and knowledge production. Based on their theory, Marx highlights class and production cooperation and labor practices, Mills relates to structural power dynamics and cultural autonomy, and Baos framework for cultural logic and their adaptive strength, and Boas on cultural relativism. Diversification in economic activities from plow to profit, and inclination to use branded shoes (Field visit, 2023) has inclined them into significant turning points that linked them to the outside world.

Sociocultural Structures of Amish Community

Amish believe that modern technologies influence social breakup. The Amish culture provides innumerable learnings and is superior to their community-guided life and their cultural practices. If it is lost it will be a dreadful loss to the world. They are excellent citizens who have something valuable to teach (Cohen, 2014). They prefer community patterns of trust and relationships in their life guiding principles. A remarkably well-integrated tradition as such simple keeping body and soul together,

wearing, schooling, legal belief, and forgiveness characteristics are included in an amazing culture that has survived colonial times and gives a miraculous glimpse to the outsiders. Historical values and their continuity are amazing elements of their life patterns, and their postures could reflect their sociocultural outcomes (Kraybill, et al., 2014). Economic strategies are strengthened through cultural narratives and livelihoods are guided accordingly.

Dress: They are enriched with plain dresses with a hat that covers the head and ears, mainly homemade garments. They are beyond the modern materialist world and fashion culture. They wear simple gowns to cover their body with bonnets. They prefer white and avoid colorful dress-ups as they said that they practiced using the same according to their community guidelines but slightly they are inclined to the outside world indirectly (Field visit, 2023)

Technology: They use technology that they used before the seventeenth century beyond modern technology. They avoid electricity, automobiles, cell phones, and modern sophisticated technologies. A self-sufficient way of life and distraction from the modern world guides their life. However, they are using semi-automatic machines in their small business as such for making slices of bread and juices and stretching machines for leather products.

Living Pattern and Language: The Amish are not a caste group but a cultural and religious community passionate about community-based living. Amish children can venture outside the community depending on local customs and the specific rules of their Amish group. They primarily speak Pennsylvania Dutch, with English serving as their secondary language. This bilingualism reflects their distinct cultural identity while allowing them to interact with the broader society when necessary. Guiding from community leaders, the Bible, their own ethical values domination, and less impact of the outside world on their community limited them for the adoption of traditional pattern of living.

Education: Amish children's education is distinct from other communities, emphasizing one-room schoolhouses. In 1937, the Amish exemplified their unity and strongly opposed the government's plan to consolidate schools and succeeded in maintaining their educational practices. As a result, formal education is provided up to the eighth grade in Amish-run one-room schools. Higher education is discouraged in favor of skill-oriented work, such as furniture making, agriculture, dairy farming, and construction. Ohio State University has initiated practical and field-based teaching methods for the Amish, including farm visits, demonstrations, and food preservation practices. This approach has increased knowledge, awareness, and positive attitudes among the Amish (Hoorman & Spencer, 2002). The Amish value hands-on experience and practical work, which they believe guides them toward a comfortable and sustainable way of life that is distinct from national, and regional policy of government. Kraybill, et.al., (2013) News of the New York Times insisted on their education structure.

Rumspringa: Rumspringa marks a crucial period in the lives of Amish youth, offering them a choice between the traditional Amish way of life and the outside world. After completing their education around eighth grade, they enter this stage where they can explore lifestyles both within and outside the Amish community. While Amish girls/boys complete eighth grade and fourteen or fifteen, they get the opportunity to choose Amish life or go outside essential to commit to the Amish church (Stevick, 2014). If they choose except Amish life, they never return to their community. This pivotal decision represents a significant milestone that shapes their future paths, a special horizon of life that offers a choice to live within the community or not.

Religion: Their religious practices spread as a global slogan of categorical forgiveness exhibited through their forgiveness responses against murder cases (Karrer, 2012). They are patient and nonviolent. They are Christian- anabaptist religious group. They claim that their ancestors came to America for freedom of religion against violent persecution before they reached America. It shows their keen interest and devotion to religion. They like to be guided by the Bible. They enjoyed worshipping in their house, workplaces, and meeting places. Their value of life and way of living is guided by the interpretation of the Bible. They are committed to non-violent activities and usually refuse military service. They are a self-sufficient craftsman's community passionate about agriculture and construction depending on their interest and skills.

Activities: They are committed to agriculture and construction work. They used traditional agricultural patterns, Bugees to ride, and horse-drawn plows. They are artesian, prepared clothes, furniture, other home appliances, leather materials, and groceries. Now their attention is transformed from plows to profit. They enjoy their living from small businesses and expanded livestock (Hoorman & Spencer, 2002). They are self-sufficient seems that they worship work. They have enjoyed being farmers, animal husbandry, and producing daily consumable goods that address their daily needs. Research highlights that there is a high success rate (90%) of Amish enterprises due to their socio-cultural capital which is rare to other businesses where their community bonding represents their worth and strength. They convert their social capital into a pattern of trust and value of life (Kraybill et al, 2011). They made domestic products with their efforts. There is the charm of this type of product. Not for the Amish but for other people's encounters in the general stores where homemade goods are available. They are professional in leather material and furniture. According to the order of customers, they prepare readymade products on the spot which has supported the success of a business.

Marriage ceremony: In Amish communities, courtship is a noteworthy practice where couples engage in a period to know each other with the intention of marriage. If they receive blessings from their parents and the church community, an announcement called the Banns is made to inform the community. Weddings typically occur on Tuesdays and Thursdays and are usually held in the bride's home or another suitable location. During the ceremony, participants wear handmade clothing, and sometimes simple wedding rings without gemstones are exchanged, reflecting traditional Amish values. The Amish locate great importance on natural fertility as a measure of reproductive success, benefiting from economic and political factors that help reduce infant mortality. This practice contributes to a rapid population growth cycle within their communities (Hewner, 1997)

Business: Without the use of computers, splashy advertising, or personal vehicles, the Amish have managed to create a very impressive image of their business operations. They engage in entrepreneurship through the production of homemade accessories, transforming their businesses into thriving enterprises. Examples include small general stores, leather shops like Muddy Pond, and furniture items such as those from Hickory Furniture in Tennessee. The Amish trail in Ohio and the oldest Amish inhabitants in Pennsylvania also showcase their entrepreneurial spirit (field visit, 2023). They rely on traditional technologies and techniques, such as using horse-driven plows and utilizing fiber materials crafted by traditional Amish artisans. Despite these seemingly modest methods, Amish businesses have turned significant profits, demonstrating the effectiveness of their unique approach to entrepreneurship (Kraybill & Nolt, 2004).

Construction, Contracting, and Practices: This activity is mainly subject to males. They engage in home building, barn raising, and roofing. They have a strong sense of community and mutual aid. Their expertise exemplifies them as the popular craftsman and assumes that they are in a new world and age.

Tourism: The Amish communities have increasingly become centers of tourist attraction due to their farm products, markets, and shops. Their distinct lifestyle, characterized by simplicity and traditional practices, captivates the interest of the outside world. This magnetism is largely attributed to their adherence to a way of life that starkly contrasts with modernity, offering a unique cultural experience.

Certain Amish communities permit limited interactions with tourists, thereby offering glimpses into their daily lives. These interactions are carefully managed to maintain the community's values and privacy. Through such controlled engagements, visitors can learn about Amish customs, values, and the significance of privacy in their culture. This selective openness not only educates outsiders about the Amish way of life but also helps to preserve the integrity of their community by regulating the extent of external influence.

Death Rituals: After the death of an Amish individual, the community gathers to prepare the body by washing, dressing, and placing it in a simple wooden casket. Simple headstones are carved to denote the gravesite. Friends, family, and community members come together to pay their respects. The funeral service, led by a local church leader, includes prayers for the deceased's peace in eternal life, and the community provides both emotional and helping daily household operation support targeting to the grieving family. Additionally, there is a practice known as the "memorial meet," where the community gathers annually to remember the deceased on the anniversary of their death. This event serves as a time for collective remembrance and reflection, reinforcing the community's bonds and shared values.

Discussions

The Amish community is composed of various affiliations, each with its specific values, beliefs, rules, culture, and customs. These affiliations create diversity within the Amish population, leading to variations in their way of life and religious convictions. Despite these differences, all Amish communities maintain a distinct and unique way of life rooted in their religious principles as guided by the Bible and Church leaders. A central aspect of Amish life is emphasizing relationships within family and community. They foster strong, close-knit ties within their communities and prioritize mutual support and cooperation. Additionally, the Amish uphold an anti-wastage mentality, focusing on sustainability and resourcefulness in all aspects of their lives. This strong bonding of family and community relationships and resource use reflects their deep commitment to living in harmony with their values and the environment.

No one can stop the pace of change, but the Amish community stands against it. They are not passionate about modern technological innovations such as electricity, telephones, and advanced transportation. They live in America, but lead lives far removed from modern American life patterns. While many dream of the American lifestyle, the Amish enjoy a miraculous life that contrasts sharply with mainstream expectations. When asked if they consider themselves Americans, they respond that they were born in America. Their ancestors, who arrived 400 years ago, were Americans, yet they remain deeply committed to their religion and community, eschewing modern American life patterns.

Today, America is known as a developed nation and a dream destination for many. However, Americans are often seen as slaves to technology and passionate about mechanization. The nuclear family structure, machine-driven lifestyle, diminished socialization, individualism, and the absence of strong community practices reflect a focus on "I" rather than "we." This has led to feelings of loneliness and societal fragmentation, raising multilayered questions about the direction of society. Do these scenarios truly indicate a developed nation? Are we overlooking the value of minority communities like the Amish in defining what it means to be developed? Are the Amish happier with their distinct way of life?

People's daily mood is the major factor that determines life satisfaction (Kahneman & Riis, 2005). We could agree with Brown that Amish people's happiness is different from other people, they have more than 400 years of existence with similar ethical values. Outsiders' observation and their experiences in a landscape, could not measure their happiness. Likewise, Brown (1999) highlights life quality is a necessary thing that is required to be maintained. But the quality of life needs to be reframed as such good conditions of life, best use of available resources, individual happiness, ways of using the resources, and the life of their choosing (Brown, 1999).

No one says that they are inflexible but cannot deny that they are not the slave of modernity. The global nature of change and social transformation is not directly dominating them. I have noticed that they are using the products of multinational companies such as Nike, and Adidas travel bags and shoes but prefer only in black color. They do not enjoy colorful dresses, mostly white and black (Field Visit, 2023). Could we learn from the Amish about their community living, strong family bonding, self-sufficient lifestyle, organic food habits, quality of dependability, nature love, and many more? What is development? Is there a problematization of a developed nation? What is right or wrong? What are the sources of happiness? All these questions are subject to the study. How could we find something is right or wrong? They firmly answered that our community and Church leaders have decided. What's humanity? Life's meaning, power, concern for others, and happiness are not guided by any supernatural power (Baggini, 2005). Respect for the community and religious authority is a challenge to the modern sophisticated world and the human being. How they spend their lives thrills modern society. Even though what will exactly lead us into development or satisfaction, life, way of living, guiding principles, values, morale...? Life philosophy differs according to the individual and the best way of life is not what philosophy guides, explains, and justifies but how the everyday practices remain (Cooper, 2012). Similarly, the conception and content of well-being varies according to discipline. Economists talk about personal benefit whereas psychological literature relates to subjective well-being which depends upon the measure of life satisfaction and effects either positive or negative (Frank, 1997). Community cultivation, non-agricultural enterprises, and emphasis on vocational practices are significant trends and traditions used by this community to reduce brain drain. Self-dependent livelihood pattern teaches modern people to stop and think minutely and track change to livelihood patterning. Some sorts of social transformations in this community attract sociologists to study and research different social and cultural groups. Indirectly they are changing their livelihood. They turned into small enterprises to keep their bodies and souls together by altering the economy of the rural community (Mathies et al., 2024).

The findings of the study indicate that Amish people are entertained with their own socio-cultural and ethical values. They are indirectly linking people outside the world through their small businesses

and are passionate about agriculture, and crafts with self-dependent life patterns. This study is targeted to understand the Amish community, their sociocultural values, livelihoods, and their reflections on the outside world. Many more studies remain for further research.

Conclusion

The Amish community is popular for its conventional way of life, emphasizing simplicity, self-effacement, and a strong sense of community. They typically live in rural areas and observe strict principles outlined in the Order, a set of rules that govern their daily lives. Key aspects include plain dress, rejection of modern technology, and commitment to agricultural livelihoods. Family and community solidarity are highly valued, shaping their distinctive cultural identity and maintaining a distinct separation from mainstream society. Different sociological theories as Durkheim, Talcott Parson, Goffman, Karl Marx, and C. W. Mills, Goffman, and Blumer are attached to indicating socio-cultural practices and livelihoods of Amish as power dynamics, social order, cohesion, societal institutions, community, Church.

There are innumerable questions attached to human socialization. People's perceptions, the way of Amish socialization, and the contemporary global world and modernity. What is modernity? What makes people happy? How do we have to live in the world is conflicting. Human beings are guided by their ideology, philosophy, and principles and even more guided by their daily practices. A high level of self-care is governing them. Conception and the content of living, well-being, happiness, and satisfaction depend upon the psychology of persons. A deterministic nature could not insist researcher uncover the findings. This study sparks a rare glimpse into the Amish community, their life ideology, pattern of work, and sociocultural environment to modern people who are slaves of modern and sophisticated technology in the name of modernity. The Amish are a cultural and religious community having innumerable life-guiding ideologies. Absence of a study of this community, humanity could lose multilayered learning.

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