Moving Forward or Backward?: Changing Identities of Amish Women

By: Kayla Kromer

Methods

• Amish Tour July 24, 2008
  — Personal observations
• Library research
• Goal:
  — Look at Amish women’s roles and how they are changing with the increase of tourism and enterprise among Amish communities.

Amish Culture

• Isolated culture
• Emigration from Europe
• 3 central values
  — Religion
  — Agrarian lifestyle
  — Cohesive community
• 8th grade education

Amish Women

• Mother and homemaker
  — Children
  — Domestic duties
• Teachers
• Plain dress

Gender Roles

• Gelassenheit
  — Banned from church positions
• Husband-wife partnership
• Accepted roles
  — Work valued

Tourism

• Public interest – 20th Century
• Tours
  — Organized (bus/van tours)
• Church opposition
Amish Tours: Harmony, MN

Harmony, MN Ctd.

Tourism and Enterprise
- Decrease in available farmland
- Small businesses
  - Preserve traditional culture and values
- Works hand-in-hand with tourism
  - Majority of customers

Amish Business
- Men = woodworking/furniture
- Women = domestic products
- Authenticity/craftsmanship
- Accepting modern practices
  - Fewer children
  - New technologies
  - Non-Amish workers/working outside the community

Women Entrepreneurs
- Economic independence
- Still must submit to patriarchy
- Usually single women
  - Married women: role conflicts

Changing Roles
- Dependent on husband (breadwinner)
- Destroys partnership and family unit
- More defined gender roles between the two spheres
  - Greater gender inequality
Conclusion

• Changing gender roles
  – Decreasing women’s value within the community
• Modernization = shift backwards for women
• Future: possible loss of unique culture of Amish to modernization

Acknowledgements

• My family: for always being so supportive of me throughout my life and encouraging me to do my best. I love you!
• My advisor Nancy Lutz: for her guidance throughout the course of this project.
• The Anthropology Faculty: for all their teachings and help during my time here at SIUE.
• My friends: for always being there for me and especially for helping me get through this school year and complete this project.
• The Amish community/tour guide in Harmony, MN: for inspiring me to do this project.

Picture References

• Figure 1: Hostetler, *Amish Life* (1959)
• Figure 2-3: Hostetler, *Amish Society* (1980)
• Figures 4-8: Kromer, Amish Tours, Harmony, MN (2008)
• Figure 9: Kraybill and Nolt, *Amish Enterprise: From Plows to Profits* (1995)
• Figure 10: Kraybill and Olshan, *The Amish Struggle with Modernity* (1994)