

## Technological Diversity and Cultural Change Among Contemporary Amish Groups

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*Abstract:* Although the Amish are popularly supposed to eschew all technology, in fact they are discerning users of it. For example, privileging small family farms and shared community labor, the most conservative Amish communities keep technological innovation to a minimum. In contrast, more progressive communities may permit members to engage in non-agrarian, entrepreneurial enterprises and allow a wider range of technology. The result is a growing technological diversity in the Amish world that would have been unimaginable a century ago. These changing ways of being Amish have implications for family life and community relationships, the education of Amish children, economic interaction with non-Amish society, and the role of the church in the lives of Amish business owners.

In the minds of many North Americans today, the phrase “Amish technology” is an oxymoron. After all, these are the folks who still wear nineteenth-century garb and drive horse-drawn buggies. Yet as author Howard Rheingold has argued, the Amish are not “knee-jerk technophobes [but] very adaptive techno-selectives who devise remarkable technologies that fit within their self-imposed limits. . . .”<sup>1</sup> For example, while car ownership and public grid electricity remain off-limits in all Amish communities, other technologies, including computers and cell phones, are increasingly evident in Amish settlements. There is, in fact, growing technological diversity within the Amish world. In some settlements, teachers painstakingly make old-fashioned “hectographs” out of glycerin and copy tests one at a time, while in others, they just hook the photocopier to a car battery and print as many tests as they need in seconds.<sup>2</sup> Some communities still harvest

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1. Howard Rheingold, “Look who’s talking,” *Wired* 7 (1999), 128-131; 160-163. See esp. 130-131.

2. A hectograph is made by heating glycerin and combining it with gelatin and water. It must set twenty-four hours before it is used and can only copy about 100 pages before it wears out. Before reusing the hectograph, the teacher must let it sit for three days. To make different copies in a short time, the teacher must reheat the hectograph between each different design or page. See Karen M. Johnson-Weiner, *Train Up a Child. Old Order Amish and Mennonite Schools* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2007), 252.

ice to refrigerate perishables in the hot summer months, while others employ propane gas to power stoves and refrigerators, thereby making available the benefits of these appliances while eliminating the need to connect to the grid. In many communities, propane gas has also eliminated oil lamps, and Amish homes in some church districts even feature a central gas distribution system. In all communities, batteries power flashlights, but in many they also run a host of other devices, from clocks to calculators and even cash registers and word processors.

These differences, both between the Amish and their non-Amish neighbors and between different Amish communities, would have been unimaginable at the beginning of the twentieth century, when all Amish lived lives very similar to those of their rural non-Amish neighbors, who also lacked electricity, telephones, and indoor plumbing. Since then, however, the mainstream culture has fully embraced the technological revolution. Non-Amish farmers have adopted factory farming practices, brought the tractor into the field, mechanized production, and expanded in size. At the same time, Amish communities, particularly in the larger, long-established settlements, have faced growing populations, a subsequent lack of affordable farmland, and the need to think about how to confront a more technological future.

The Amish response to these social changes has been shaped by community-specific patterns of decision-making grounded in tradition, the largely unwritten code of regulations (*Ordnung*), and the community's understanding of key Amish values. The most conservative Amish, such as the Swartzentruber groups, who regard the small family farm, shared labor, and multigenerational interaction as essential to an Amish life, reject or severely limit technology. As one Swartzentruber Amish minister put it, "We don't like to change. When you change, that's when you get into trouble."<sup>3</sup> To survive, members of these communities have often chosen to move to regions where cheap, available farmland enables them to continue a pre-industrial lifestyle with which their great-great grandparents would have felt comfortable. Other Amish groups, however, determining that "the old patterns . . . [are] no longer viable. . . ."<sup>4</sup> have moved away from farming, permitted greater and more varied interaction with the non-Amish world, and adopted and adapted hundreds of state-of-the-art technologies. In short, the use of technology—and resistance to it—reflects distinctly different

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3. An elderly bishop noted with some satisfaction that he "could count the new devices on 6 fingers."—See Donald B. Kraybill, Karen M. Johnson-Weiner, Steven M. Nolt, *The Amish* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2013), 315.

4. Marc A. Olshan, "Amish Cottage Industries as Trojan Horse," in *The Amish Struggle with Modernity*, ed. Donald B. Kraybill and Marc A. Olshan (Hanover, N.H.: The University Press of New England, 1994), 145-146.

Amish responses to changing social conditions and plays a key role in the construction of multiple and very diverse ways of being Amish.

### RESISTANCE TO TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE

The Amish have always been economically linked to the wider world even as they have resisted worldliness. Not surprisingly, however, the more limited and proscribed those links are, the more technologically conservative the group. For example, among the Swartzentruber Amish, who are some of the most conservative of all Amish groups, farming remains the principal source of income and is deemed most conducive to leading a Christian life. They have emphasized the importance of small family farms by restricting economic interaction with mainstream society. Swartzentruber *Ordnungs* forbid community members to work within village limits or to do wage labor for non-Amish employers. They have further privileged the small family farm by limiting the technology available for farming and manufacturing. This favors a largely unspecialized work force able to assist with all manner of work and fosters generalized labor exchanges between neighboring farms. Their small family farms allow parents and children—multiple generations—to work and live together.

Families do not earn much money on these small farms. For example, in their study of the large Holmes County settlement in Ohio, Charles Hurst and David McConnell found that the most conservative churches had the highest proportion of families living at the poverty level “in part because of the limitations they impose on themselves.”<sup>5</sup> But they achieve a lifestyle that emphasizes family interaction and shared labor for the good of the family and the church community. Because Swartzentruber Amish families all work together, not only must the available technology be accessible to all, but a generalized participation is required in even the most basic daily activities. In a Swartzentruber house, for example, the wood stove in the kitchen means that everyone is likely to be involved in the cooking, albeit in different ways. Little boys and girls spend their days filling the wood box with wood that older brothers have chopped. The lack of indoor plumbing means that various family members haul heated water from the stove to the dry sink for cleaning up after meals.

Swartzentruber *Ordnungs* permit their members to operate small, home-based businesses, such as bakeries, furniture and harness shops, and saw mills. Nevertheless, if the demands of the business impinge on participation in family life or community activities, then the business is

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5. Charles E. Hurst and David L. McConnell, *An Amish Paradox: Diversity and Change in the World's Largest Amish Community* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2010), 211.

deemed unacceptable, and church members will feel pressure to curtail their activities. One successful Swartzentruber furniture maker, faced with a backlog of orders and the need to either hire help from outside the family or cut back, removed the wooden sign advertising “chairs for sale” and replaced it with one that said “worms 3 cents,” a boost to his young son’s new business.

In *1001 Questions and Answers on the Christian Life*, a handbook explaining the practices of Amish life, the anonymous Amish writer comments that farming is the ideal way of life because “we have the opportunity to work together as a family. The lines of ‘your work’ and ‘my work’ become blurred so that it is ‘our work.’”<sup>6</sup> Among the most conservative Amish, working at home as a family remains the goal. One young woman asserted that that she enjoys milking time when she and her husband go to the barn together. When their daughter was an infant, they routinely left her with an unmarried aunt who lived next door, but now that she can sit up on her own, the child goes along to the barn. Another family works together on maple syrup production, with mother and father taking turns with the children to boil syrup. Still another young Swartzentruber mother routinely takes her small children to the harness shop only a few yards from the house, where she sews saddles with her harness-maker husband. Yet another, working alongside her husband, varnishes furniture that he builds. “We have a small crib out there,” she said, meaning that even the baby is able to be in the shop with the parents, the whole family together at work.<sup>7</sup>

### REINFORCING SHARED LABOR

The Swartzentruber Amish and other conservative groups privilege activities that reinforce shared labor over those that will take church members away from home and family. One very conservative Amish woman shook her head over her son-in-law who had become quite successful at building home additions for non-Amish clients. That he was earning a very good income did not, in her mind, excuse his absence from the community during the day or the fact that he was not there to eat meals with his family or to help his wife with the children. When he later gave up his business to farm full-time, she was pleased.<sup>8</sup>

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6. *1001 Questions and Answers on the Christian Life* (Aylmer, Ont.: Pathway Publishers, 1992), 139.

7. Unless otherwise noted, quotations are drawn from the author’s field notes and reflect participant observation in Amish communities in upstate New York. Observations are based on both formal interviews and informal conversations in informants’ homes and in the context of daily activities.

8. Karen Johnson-Weiner, *New York Amish: Life in the Plain Communities of the Empire State* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2010), 258.

Conservative Amish women help men, and men, in turn, are active in a variety of ways in the domains the mainstream world might think of as female, whether watching over children as they play outside, preparing the small garden plot for planting, or doing the grocery shopping. One mother, commenting on how important it is for her sons to help in the house, said she told them regularly, "If you don't help us, how are we going to know you'll help your wives when you marry?" Reflecting the Swartzentruber belief that women must take special care when they have their periods, she noted that, if the girls couldn't work, the boys not only needed to do the heavy lifting, but they also had to help with the laundry because at that time of month "the soap gets into the blood and causes cancer."

As these examples suggest, the small, technologically primitive farm and home-based shop enable family interactions to cut across gender boundaries. Wives, mothers, and sisters are able to be involved in a variety of ways with the work of husbands, fathers, and brothers and vice versa. Further, the lack of specialization in farming and other work breaks down generational barriers, reinforcing the ideal of a family where all work together and children learn from older siblings, parents, and grandparents. As a result, even elderly community members and very young children can be involved in the daily work life. The community needs the wisdom of its older members—they know how things should be done—and the energy of its children, who, learning from parents and grandparents, take over chores and carry on the traditions.

Privileging the small family farm as the ideal Amish environment also means that the home, not the school, is where children learn to carry out the family and work traditions of their parents and grandparents. Indeed, in the most technologically conservative communities, the lessons of school are of limited importance. For example, in Swartzentruber schools, which operate on the outskirts of Swartzentruber community life,<sup>9</sup> teachers provide instruction in the English and "Bible German" necessary for life in a Swartzentruber community and in the practical skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic, which are not easily or efficiently acquired in other settings. As one teacher noted, "If they ha[d] to learn [these subjects] at home, they wouldn't learn them as well." Yet from the limited curriculum to the archaic texts used, every element of Swartzentruber schooling links children to their parents and grandparents, reinforcing the continuity of the present with the past. Parents expect that schools will reinforce the

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9. For an in-depth look at Swartzentruber schools, see Johnson-Weiner, *Train Up a Child: Old Order Amish and Mennonite Schools*, chap. 3.

lessons of parents and church, and the school gives way to community needs, with time off in the fall for husking corn. And, when school is out, children are once again at home to learn the important lessons of life.

Marginalizing school learning further distances the community from the mainstream world, making even the smallest technological innovation even more obvious—and thus more easily controlled. When LED flashlights became available, a number of Swartzentruber families bought them, perhaps captivated by the brightness of the light and their economy. But the Swartzentruber churches soon decided that this innovation was not for them, and families disposed of the new lights quickly.

The more the community rejects technology, the more likely that face-to-face interaction will remain the norm, as community members work together. This generalized community-wide interaction is evident throughout the most conservative communities. One young dairy farmer told me that his family usually gets together with six other families for silo filling and threshing. With six neighbors, he says, threshing “takes roughly a week all together.” Researcher Henry Troyer notes that “by harvesting their grain with binders and threshing machines rather than with combines, [the Amish] preserve the need for community cooperation. Harvesting with combines would be only a two-man operation, and it would not involve a community effort. Threshing is a community affair, always involving seven or eight neighbors.”<sup>10</sup>

In a system of “frolics” or work parties, families in the most conservative communities accomplish large tasks from home building to silo filling to butchering. Data collected by Victor Stoltzfus over forty years ago, at a time when most Amish communities were still largely agrarian, suggested that Amish farmers might spend as much as 30 days a year in such labor exchanges.<sup>11</sup> For the most conservative Amish, this pattern has changed little.

Without gas refrigerators and freezers, women in the most conservative homes are also involved in labor exchanges, whether helping to feed visiting workers or engaging in food preservation, sewing, cleaning, or strawberry picking. Preserving beef and pork by canning or smoking the meat is a labor-intensive process that begins with butchering. Generally families—either groups of neighbors or parents with married children—take turns to help each other. While men

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10. Henry Troyer, “Limited acceptance of technology as a key to Amish communal strength” (paper submitted to symposium on “The Future of Community in a Technological Society,” Columbia, Mo., Nov. 8-10, 1984), Heritage Historical Library, Aylmer, Ont.

11. Victor E. Stoltzfus, “Amish Agriculture: Adaptive Strategies for Economic Survival of Community Life,” *Rural Sociology* 38 (Summer 1973), 196-206.

do the actual slaughtering and heavy lifting, women pick meat off of bones. Older girls serve coffee and schnitz pies to the workers. While one person holds the sausage casings, another cranks the machine to fill them; the children bring in wood, first to keep the kettle boiling and then to smoke the finished sausages. Later, the family will work together to render the fat, mix it with lye and borax, and, much later, grate the dried bricks of soap to make a powder. Family members also work together to harvest field and garden produce. Farming, a Swartzentruber dairy farmer notes, is “a good way to keep the boys out of trouble. And I can be at home with my work. I want my boys to grow up to be farmers.” As a mother in the same community put it, “It’s easier to teach [children] on a farm.”

When innovation does occur, it is acceptable only to the extent that it reinforces this generalized interaction. For example, a number of conservative Amish communities in upstate New York have accepted bulk milk tanks. By enabling families to ship grade A milk, bulk tanks have made it economically feasible for more young families to farm. The Swartzentruber Amish located the bulk tanks in small, neighborhood dumping stations, reinforcing both shared labor and a way of life in which farmers milked by hand and took milk to market in cans. Indeed, one bishop notes that the dumping stations were really “a step backwards”—in his mind a positive development since milk truck drivers would no longer drive to Amish homes to pick up cans of milk—and so the non-Amish world would intrude less in the daily life of the settlement. A conservative Swiss Amish community in upstate New York, refusing to have the tanks powered by electricity from the grid, installed individual tanks that were generator-run. Like the Swartzentrubers, they continue to milk by hand.

In maintaining a subsistence economy by minimizing their use of technology, the Swartzentrubers and other conservative Amish emphasize the value of cultural capital over monetary capital—the exchange of labor, friendship, and community support rather than the exchange of cash. There is little money for nonessential items and little leisure time. When the Swartzentruber Amish travel, for example, it is usually to participate in church-community events such as weddings, funerals, and barn raisings. These events provide further opportunity to share labor and reinforce community ties.

Minimal technology in the field and in the home helps to ensure strong family and community networks of exchange and mutual aid. It requires that community members interact face-to-face in a variety of contexts, further reinforcing behaviors emphasized by the *Ordnung*: simplicity and dependence on God and the church community. Ultimately it strengthens the ties that bind the church community,

clearly marking the boundaries between the community and the world, and making change that might lead to assimilation even more difficult.

#### ACCOMMODATING CHANGE AND BEING AMISH DIFFERENTLY

Amish communities whose *Ordnungs* permit members to establish larger manufacturing enterprises or to work for wages outside the home for Amish or even non-Amish employers define what it means to be Amish very differently than their conservative counterparts. This different way of being Amish manifests itself in the size, number, and kind of Amish enterprises one finds in different communities. Here the acceptance of technological innovation—both the adoption of new technology and the adaptation of existing technology—makes such enterprises successful. But, not surprisingly, greater openness to technology leads to new patterns of social interaction. For example, Amish-owned businesses in Lancaster County tied into global markets stand in contrast to the small home-based shops evident in conservative communities, which continue to market goods produced on site in face-to-face interactions with a largely local clientele. One Lancaster County Amish businessman, for example, has outsourced the manufacture of his products—LED lighting fixtures designed for Amish homes—to Chinese factories.<sup>12</sup> In more progressive settlements, which have access to electric generators, forklifts, cell phones, hydraulic and pneumatic power, and even email, shops produce a range of products that are sold through national and international networks.<sup>13</sup> In contrast to the small Swartzentruber builder who used snail mail to ask a non-Amish friend to phone in an ad to a local “pennysaver” newsletter is the Amish-owned Eastern States Metal Roofing in Panama, New York, which has a Better Business Rating one can check online and appears on Angie’s List.<sup>14</sup>

Even when the business is not so large, interaction with the non-Amish public may indicate patterns of interaction with the world that are quite different from those of the most conservative communities. In Lancaster County, for example, one can stay in an Amish-owned guesthouse or pay an Amish family for the privilege of a meal in the family home. In contrast, Swartzentruber families are unlikely to let a customer into the home, keeping the public at the roadside stand or on the porch. One business in western New York, clearly targeting a tourist

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12. Kraybill, Johnson-Weiner, and Nolt, *The Amish*, 298.

13. *Ibid.*, 297-298.

14 Eastern States Metal Roofing is located at 7820 Route 474, Panama, N.Y., 14767. It has an A+ Rating on the Better Business Bureau Review. See <http://www.bbb.org/upstate-new-york/business-reviews/roofing-materials/eastern-states-metal-roofing-in-panama-ny-65000041> (accessed Nov. 20, 2013).

audience, offers quilting demonstrations, while another provides a craft store and buggy rides. Both provide a phone number, a sharp difference from their Swartzentruber counterparts who not only would not have a phone anywhere on the farm but will not even talk on a phone, preferring to have a non-Amish neighbor make necessary calls. In sharp contrast to the Swartzentrubers, who will not work for wages for a non-Amish employer, Amish in Northern Indiana frequently work in non-Amish factories and carry cell phones.

Enabling members of the community to enter into regular business arrangements with those outside the church community challenges traditional notions of what it means to be separate from the world. As sociologist Judith Nagata pointed out, "As their investments and entrepreneurial interests grow, Amish farmers are content to concentrate on these alone, and to relegate many of the traditional and more generalized tasks of the farm, such as repairs, maintenance, slaughtering, and even carpentry and corn-shelling to other specialists who trade their services for wages, rather than offer them in the old frolic system."<sup>15</sup> Indeed, these different ways of being Amish have turned the community outward in ways that would be unthinkable in the most conservative settlements. Progressive Amish invest their income, while ultra-conservative Amish refuse to get Social Security numbers and so have difficulty opening bank accounts.

### SPECIALIZATION AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES

As adults in progressive communities leave the home to work, their children must learn in new ways the job skills that will sustain them as grownups, for employers outside the community often require special skills. Book learning replaces hands-on learning, and schools offer a wider curriculum, reflecting the need to prepare children to compete with their publicly educated counterparts.<sup>16</sup> There may even be a call for specialized vocational training and education beyond the traditional eight years. One Amish teacher in Indiana notes, "When all Amish were farmers . . . some parents put more emphasis on the farm knowledge than on the basic studies." But, he continued,

At this time a low percent of Amish young men enter agriculture as an occupation. . . . Instead they go to the factory and . . . many have

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15. Judith A. Nagata, *Continuity and Change Among the Old Order Amish of Illinois* (New York: AMS Press, 1989), 140.

16. Johnson-Weiner, *Train Up a Child*, especially chap. 6. As noted, these progressive Amish schools are "offering a curriculum that prepares children to compete economically with their non-Old Order counterparts on a playing field that may be only marginally, if at all, in the Old Order world."—Johnson-Weiner, *Train Up a Child*, 131.

their own businesses. Now you can easily see the change in view of education. The people's needs are changing.<sup>17</sup>

Specialized education has already appeared in some settlements. Writing about the large Amish community in the Holmes County area in Ohio, for example, Grace Miller noted that "the East Holmes school district sponsors an adult technology class that has become popular with Amish young people. In this class they learn basic computer functions and become familiar with spreadsheets, word processing, and basic bookkeeping." Miller went on to add that one Amish woman who had successfully completed the class was "employed in a shop in Berlin, where she uses a computer system to ring up purchases and track inventory."<sup>18</sup>

Anticipating change in the Amish schools in his community, an Indiana man mused,

Do I look for more grades being added? . . . Yes, eventually I look for more grades. I don't think we'll be a better community for it, but it will very likely happen. Already a factory has this policy: you must have a high school diploma to apply here . . . unless you are Amish! I don't think that is a very good plan. It is not fair and will result in bitter feelings toward Amish.<sup>19</sup>

In short, as Amish *Ordnungs* redefine acceptable Amish ways of earning a living and supporting the family, they are redrawing the lines that separate the Amish church-community from the world.

Nagata suggests that, as the Amish "surrender some of their economic distinctiveness, they face the problem of remaining different and apart from the world, to which end they erect new boundaries. They are constantly walking the narrow tightrope between accommodation and separation."<sup>20</sup> Further, she argues, although the specific content of Amish culture has changed, "most of the underlying principles remain the same, notably the core-value of separation."<sup>21</sup> But even though all Amish assert that they must remain separate from the world, following Paul's admonition to "be not conformed" (Romans 12:2), nonconformity can mean very different things. Is the Amish man who carries a cell phone so that he can be easily reached by his non-Amish client or employer separate from the world in the same way as the ultra-conservative

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17. Ibid, 241.

18. Grace Miller, "The Amish and Technology," Amish Heartland, Aug. 1, 2004. <http://www.amish-heartland.com/amish%20culture/2004/08/01/the-amish-and-technology>.

19. Johnson-Weiner, *Train Up a Child*, 241.

20. Nagata, *Continuity and Change Among the Old Order Amish of Illinois*, 142.

21. Ibid.

Amish man who refuses to talk on any telephone “except in an emergency”?

This is a question that troubles some Amish. Writing in *Family Life*, an “Amish minister” worried about those who were “progressive-minded rather than conservative.” “In our church circles,” he wrote, the progressive

shows up in an increasing conformity to this world’s thinking and eventually to practice. This is the core reason why the computer and its sister [the cellular phone] are so threatening to us as plain people. . . . If a business is so large that it demands a computer for internal management, it is nearly always in conflict with principles that maintain us as horse-and-buggy people. In other words, it is too big. The business needs downsizing or simplifying.<sup>22</sup>

Nevertheless, writing about Ohio Amish church members employed by non-Amish enterprises, Grace Miller asserts that, “Church leaders have voiced no objection to their members’ use of technology in their employment. [. . .] Amish employees see it as their calling to serve their employers to the very best of their ability—which, in today’s world, means with technology as much as the work of their hands.”<sup>23</sup> She suggests further that “Church members seem to be able to separate their work lives from their home culture, and have no desire to bring home the electronics that could corrupt their chosen way of life.”<sup>24</sup> The implication is that the home—the center of Amish life—somehow remains untouched. Yet, the very separation of home from work means a compartmentalizing of life alien to the Amish in the most conservative groups.

### TECHNOLOGICAL CHOICE AND AMISH FAMILY LIFE

Like Amish businesses and workplaces, Amish homes reflect Amish values and thus what the church community considers appropriate ways of being and acting Amish. As Amish men and women have moved off the farm and into separate workplaces, homes increasingly demonstrate both the necessary technological adaptations that will allow fewer people to do more and the greater buying power of a cash economy. Nagata has suggested that one result is “greater reliance on automation, and a tendency to spend surplus cash on remodeling the home.”<sup>25</sup>

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22. Amish Minister, “A Fire in the Land,” *Family Life*, April 2010, 8-13. See especially 11-12.

23. Miller, “The Amish and Technology.”

24. *Ibid.*

25. Nagata, *Continuity and Change Among the Old Order Amish of Illinois*, 141.

Indeed, homes in more progressive communities often feature the latest technology, albeit modified to run with inverters, generators, or solar power. More basically, however, they provide further evidence of the ways this progressive Amish identity is changing the personal relationships that are at the core of Amish life.

Even the smallest technological innovation can alter the myriad ways in which the members of an Amish community rely on each other. For example, after making egg noodles with her sisters—an all-day job that involved mixing and rolling dough, cutting noodles, and drying them—one Swartzentruber woman looked at the mounds of finished egg noodles and pondered the notion of a mechanical noodle maker. She noted that such a machine might be “interesting” as a time-saver—but then, she added, “What would we girls do?” Gas refrigerators and freezers—an expense unknown to the most conservative homeowners—mean that housewives spend much less time preserving food, and their husbands will not work together to harvest ice. A gas stove means that meals can be cooked by a single person, without the need for little helpers to bring in wood. In progressive communities, inverters convert the direct current of batteries into alternating current that can power kitchen appliances like mixers and food processors, further simplifying meal preparation. Indoor plumbing means no one needs to fetch water, and so clean up requires far less time and effort. Built-in toilets rule out the planning and conversation that can take place in multi-seat outhouses,<sup>26</sup> and bathtubs and showers mean personal hygiene is no longer the once-a-week bath time of the most conservative groups—itsself an activity that necessitates shared labor and turn-taking. All of these innovations facilitate individual action rather than group activity.

They also mean that particular activities can now occur at the convenience of the laborer rather than according to the seasons and traditions. For example, in more progressive communities, the growing number of Amish women working outside of the home, coupled with a general shift away from farming, means that many families may no longer be raising and preserving much of their own food. Simply put, a cash paycheck means that meat may be bought and frozen at any time of the year. By contrast, butchering in the most conservative settlements is a daylong communal activity usually involving two to three families, and it can only be done when the weather is cold enough to preserve the meat until it can be canned.

These changes have consequences for the broader church-community. Hurst and McConnell have noted that, in the Holmes County area

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26. One teacher in a conservative community noted that “a lot of plans got made in the outhouse.”

settlement, the shift away from farming, along with the adoption of refrigerators and freezers that permit food to be easily kept cold year round, has resulted in an expanded wedding season.<sup>27</sup> Marriages no longer need to take place only in the colder months after harvest, as they still do among the most conservative groups.

More important, because the shared labor that characterizes food production and preservation and other household tasks is no longer necessary in more progressive homes, grandparents, parents, and children no longer need to work together in the same way. This is evident in the extreme in the Pinecraft community on the outskirts of Sarasota, Florida. Founded in the late 1920s, Pinecraft welcomes nearly 4,000 Amish "snowbirds" a week during January and February, with an average of ten busloads of mostly older Amish arriving each week.<sup>28</sup> Pinecraft is possible because labor is so specialized and money so plentiful that grandparents no longer need to be present at home for their grandchildren, Amish adults can afford second homes and long vacation stays away from relatives, and churches can spare the wisdom of the elderly.

A cash economy based on specialized labor not only changes the traditional role of grandparents but of parents as well. Since married women are generally expected to care for children and the home, it is more often the husband who works outside the community, gendering childrearing and other home-based activities in a new way. A man's paycheck stands in stark contrast to the less bankable results of food preservation, clothes making, and childrearing. Moreover, wage labor, unlike household work, is limited to set hours. Men thus have the time and money to engage in activities outside of the community that women, at home with the children, cannot. The result may well be a reinforcement of patriarchy in male-female relationships.<sup>29</sup>

At the same time, however, an Amish identity that permits technological innovation and entrepreneurial activity is marked by an increasing number of businesses operated outside the family home and owned by women. Women have always contributed to family economies. To do so in a way that takes them out of the household and away from children and grandchildren, however, is new and reflects an

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27. Hurst and McConnell, *An Amish Paradox*, 108. See Lyndsey MacAllister, "Change or Continuity? The Illinois Amish Wedding, 1880-1980," (Unpublished paper, 2002, Heritage Historical Library, Aylmer, Ont.). MacAllister observed: "No longer solely reliant on the agrarian calendar, marriages now occur more frequently throughout the year."

28. Kraybill, Johnson-Weiner, and Nolt, *The Amish*, 242.

29. Karen Johnson-Weiner, "The Role of Women in Old Order Amish, Beachy Amish and Fellowship Churches," *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 75 (April 2001), 231-256.

Amish mindset quite different from that of the most conservative groups.

In all Amish communities, women entrepreneurs must reconcile their actions as businesswomen with their more important, scripturally mandated roles as wives, mothers, daughters, sisters, and, above all, church members. In keeping with their God-given roles as “keepers in the home,” even women in more progressive communities are likely to characterize their ventures as “family businesses” and locate them close to home. Indeed, as families move away from farming, women’s businesses increasingly provide a way to put children to work, again a gendering of childrearing quite different from that of communities where labor is less specialized and the family works together.

Nevertheless, in more progressive communities, women’s businesses, like those owned by men, are not necessarily relying on the labor of children doing chores to keep the family economically strong. Rather, like the larger businesses of their male counterparts, they often employ local Amish who work for wages. For example, the owner of a Lancaster County dried flower shop employs “2 or 3 part time helpers and . . . one girl working full time.”<sup>30</sup> A Lancaster County quilt shop owner, whose youngest child is 18, hires her grandchildren to help package quilt pieces. She notes that “we will have 6 or 7 girls in . . . strictly for cutting fabric”<sup>31</sup> on days when she expects tour buses to stop. Interestingly, large quilt shops in progressive communities often rely on piece work done in settlements quite distant from the retail site. By shipping pieced quilt tops to unknown quilters in distant, very conservative settlements, some Amish entrepreneurs in progressive communities have come to rely on the labor of women in the most conservative groups, who quilt tops in between their household sewing, in their homes where, at the same time, they can engage in the generalized labor of the small family farm. Thus, the finished quilt in a Lancaster shop often reflects the specialized labor of different women in widely separated settlements—a sharp contrast to quilts sold in isolated, conservative settlements, which are likely the product of a single woman or a mother/daughter team.

In choosing to move off the farm and into a wider variety of income-generating occupations, more progressive communities have justified technological innovation, resulting in a specialization in labor that divides the male domains from female, wage earners from families, and

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30. Unpublished interview with Lancaster County, Pa., business owner A. S., conducted by Flo Horning for the Young Center for Anabaptist Studies, Elizabethtown College, Elizabethtown, Pa., 2009.

31. Unpublished interview with Lancaster County, Pa., business owner K. S., conducted by Flo Horning for the Young Center for Anabaptist Studies, Elizabethtown College, Elizabethtown, Pa., 2009.

generation from generation within households. Ultimately, the shift from small family farms to manufacturing and wage labor allows for an Amish identity that accommodates personal wealth and the development of a consumer culture with an emphasis on leisure time versus work time. Asked about “time-saving” machines, one conservative Amish couple were skeptical. “Save time for what?” the husband asked. “What would the children do if there weren’t chores?” More progressive Amish, by contrast, are increasing occupied with hobbies that require individual attention and a commitment of time that would, in a less technological era, have been devoted to chores, family, and church-community. Talking about Amish in Ohio who had sold the mineral rights on their farms to an oil company interested in fracking the land, a Swartzentruber Amish man asserted that some “are getting as much as \$45,000 a month ‘royalties’ for doing nothing.” His wife added in a disgusted tone, “What do Amish people need with that much money?” It is a question that comes up often in the most conservative settlements.

In her 1989 study of changes in the Arthur, Illinois, settlement, Nagata observed that “one result of Amish involvement in a highly specialized production with a growing emphasis on extreme commercialization lies in a changing ethic that pervades many aspects of their behavior.”<sup>32</sup> She noted, in particular, a change in religious attitudes, commenting that “more conservative Amish”—those she also calls “hard-core”—“are generally intolerant of [both] economic innovations . . . and probing into their religion on a personal level.” In contrast, “those Amish who are more liberal in their support of technical innovations” support more “spontaneous and personal prayer,” favor expanded education, and encourage more discussion of the faith. To maintain nonconformity even as they have come to live lives very similar to those of their non-Old Order neighbors, progressive groups increasingly come to view the world, not in terms of Old Order Amish and non-Old Order Amish, but rather as Christian and non-Christian.<sup>33</sup>

In the extreme, this encourages a very different attitude toward the church and what some might come to see as arbitrary rules. Where landscaped gardens surround Amish homes and solar panels power Amish enterprises, multimillion-dollar Amish businesses may even threaten the dominance of the church. One successful Lancaster County businessman asserted, for example, “Business is business and church is

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32. Nagata, *Continuity and Change among the Old Order Amish of Illinois*, 125.

33. *Ibid.*, 340-344; See also Johnson-Weiner, *Train Up a Child*, 130-166, for an analysis of the ways in which progressive Amish schools are more overtly religious.

church."<sup>34</sup> Another wondered aloud, "Why doesn't the church just stick to church things on Sunday and let businesses alone during the week."<sup>35</sup> A young Amish woman visiting Pinecraft reflected this notion that one could take a vacation from the church and still be Amish:

"When you come down here, you can pitch religion a little bit and let loose," said [a visiting Amish woman] from Missouri. "What I'm wearing right now, I wouldn't at home," she said, gesturing at sunglasses with sparkly rhinestones and bikini strings peeking out of a tight black tank top.<sup>36</sup>

As Pinecraft demonstrates, when life is no longer contained within the church community and fellowshiping congregations, and community interaction is no longer tied to frolics and ritual events, church members may be more inclined to make connections elsewhere and along more specialized lines. Special-interest groups have developed around hobbies such as bird watching. There are also large nationwide gatherings that appeal to only a particular segment of the population, such as the Single Boys' Reunion. Participants in the 2011 Single Boys' Reunion in Nappanee, using the event as a fundraiser, paid

\$50 to \$100 apiece for a mug with the Single Boys' Gathering logo featuring the profile of a young man seated by a campfire in the woods. A poster in their gathering place featured an Oscar Wilde quote: "Rich bachelors should be heavily taxed. It is not fair that some men should be happier than others."<sup>37</sup>

Their more conservative, subsistence farming counterparts would be puzzled by the gathering and amazed at the price of the mug.

Describing a trip he had taken to Lancaster County a number of years ago, a Swartzentruber Amish bishop noted that he had talked to an Amish farmer there who had wondered how the Swartzentruber Amish got along without easy access to a phone. "What do you do if you run out of grain?" the Lancaster man asked. "Do you have to ride into town?" "Well," the Swartzentruber man replied, "We just write a letter." According to the bishop, the Lancaster man hadn't even thought of doing that. The bishop went on to note that, in the early part of the twentieth century, "before Sam Yoder [the bishop who founded the Swartzentruber Amish] broke with the others," we got along with the

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34. Kraybill, Johnson-Weiner, and Nolt, *The Amish*, 410.

35. *Ibid.*

36. Miki Meek, "Where Amish Snowbirds Find a Nest," *The New York Times*, April 12, 2012. See [http://travel.nytimes.com/2012/04/15/travel/pinecraft-fla-an-amish-snowbird-magnet.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://travel.nytimes.com/2012/04/15/travel/pinecraft-fla-an-amish-snowbird-magnet.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0).

37. Kraybill, Johnson-Weiner, and Nolt, *The Amish*, 171.

Lancaster County people. We were all the same.” But, the bishop concluded, “We all change. It’s *how* that’s important.”

## CONCLUSION

Technology itself is not a threat to the Amish. Rather, technology is an outcome of particular decisions that favor one way of life over another. Privileging the small family farm has meant subsistence living and low levels of technology. One writes letters to the feed store instead of calling in an order on a cell phone. Families work together within the church community, reinforcing bonds of mutual aid and highlighting the activities of family and church over events in the non-Amish world.

Other more progressive Amish church communities that have permitted members to engage in a variety of entrepreneurial enterprises or have decided that it is acceptable to leave the farm to support the family have allowed for new understandings of what it means to be Amish. Certainly, as church-communities make decisions that open the doors to new technology, the result has been more fragmented lifestyles in which generations are less likely to work together, family members are increasingly separated, communal frolics are replaced by wage laborers, and church authority is less restrictive.

As some Amish communities accommodate a growing individualism and a widening divide between home and work and parent and child, the presence or absence of a particular technology has come to be as salient a marker of identity as the use of horse-and-buggy or the type of cap a woman wears. As Amish kitchens demonstrate, the Amish have not all chosen to be Amish in the same way. Nor are Amish identities fixed. Some communities are even now moving to undo choices of the past. For example, the progressive community in Burke, New York,<sup>38</sup> has recently attempted to return to a largely agrarian-based economy in order to change, or at least control, practices that it felt threatened their church and community. Although they continue to have telephones in their shops and propane lights, church members have determined to give up, as much as possible, employment “in the public,” non-Amish world in order to strengthen family ties. As one Burke Amish woman noted, establishing the new settlement in the North Country made it possible for her husband to once again become a farmer. “My boys say they didn’t know their father until they moved because he worked away,” she said. “I didn’t want to raise my boys by myself.”<sup>39</sup>

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38. Burke is in Franklin County, N.Y. The local Amish community traces its roots to Delaware and Kentucky. For further information on the Burke settlement, see Karen Johnson-Weiner, *New York Amish*, chap. 7.

39. *Ibid.*, 245.

One member of a progressive Amish community, who couldn't find a driver and had to take a bus to a funeral in another state, said that she "couldn't imagine traveling that way all the time like the Swartzentruber Amish do." Her Swartzentruber neighbors find the progressive Amish lifestyle equally incomprehensible. Clearly, Amish communities are making different choices about technology and about how to be Amish in an increasingly technological world. As Amish communities grow more diverse, not only from their non-Amish neighbors but from each other, the challenge will be to understand the new bonds that are being forged within and between communities and the new markers of Amish identity that are emerging. Amish diversity, unimaginable at the beginning of the twentieth century, will mark the Amish world of the twenty-first.