

# THE OLD ORDER AMISH: TO REMAIN IN THE FAITH OR TO LEAVE<sup>1</sup>

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The Amish continue to amaze the non-Amish world with their capacity to retain a distinct cultural identity. Rather than conforming to the values of modern society, they have insisted that being “in the world and not of the world” is the best adaptation of the New Testament model of Christian community. Their conscious effort to be different from the fallen world by consciously drawing symbolic boundaries between themselves and the society around them continues to mystify and intrigue. Questions frequently posed by non-Amish include: What keeps Amish people from being seduced by the modern world? And for those who leave, what factors lead to the decision to defect? This paper will examine some of the push and pull forces that influence Amish youth in their decisions regarding church membership. Factors to be examined include father’s occupation, marriage and family dynamics, gender, urbanization, variations in degree of severity of Ordnung, and attendance at an Amish school.

## Data Sources

The researcher obtained qualitative data for this paper in interviews with Amish informants in the Old Order Amish settlement of northeastern Indiana. That settlement borders the State of Michigan and is spread from about the middle of Elkhart County to just east of the center of LaGrange County, a distance of about 35 miles.<sup>2</sup> The statistical data were taken from the 1980<sup>3</sup> and 1988<sup>4</sup> editions of the Elkhart-LaGrange settlement directories.

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2. A few families live across the southern border of LaGrange County in northern Noble County.

3. Eli E. Gingerich, comp., *Indiana Amish Directory* (Middlebury, Ind., 1980).

4. Jerry E. Miller, comp., *Indiana Amish Directory* (Middlebury, Ind., 1988).

The first *Indiana Amish Directory*<sup>5</sup> was published in 1970, the initiative for this first community census coming from geneticist Harold Cross. Along with other colleagues (most notably Victor McKusick) at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, Cross worked with Amish collaborators to produce nearly complete census data on settlements in Indiana, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. These researchers primarily wished to trace genetic anomalies in particular Amish families and regions of the country,<sup>6</sup> and to do so they needed clear census information.

Although the 1970 *Indiana Amish Directory* was compiled with the aid of computers at Johns Hopkins University, successive directories have been done entirely by Old Order Amish families. The Amish have been convinced that community directories are useful tools for, among other purposes, locating homes in an unfamiliar district where church services will be held or keeping track of birth dates of friends and relatives.

The directories contain information on individual church districts and families within those districts. Specific pieces of data include: the name of each family member, names of each spouse's parents, numbers of children, birth and death dates, dates of marriage, church affiliations of children, and occupations of household heads. The 1980 *Directory* includes information on 10,901 individuals; the 1988 on 14,341. Unfortunately social scientists have almost entirely overlooked this rich source of data.<sup>7</sup>

#### CHANGES IN RATE OF DEFECTION SINCE 1920

The Elkhart-LaGrange settlement has experienced a rather dramatic population increase in recent decades. In 24 years, from 1964 to 1988, the population of the settlement grew from 5000 to more than 11,000 persons.<sup>8</sup> As population density has increased, has the number of persons leaving the Amish also increased? In this study the term for

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<sup>5</sup>. Harold E. Cross and Eli E. Gingerich, comps., *Indiana Amish Directory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970).

<sup>6</sup>. For an overview of this research see Victor A. McKusick, *Medical Genetic Studies of the Amish* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

<sup>7</sup>. A few other studies have used the directories' data; see, for example, Thomas W. Foster, "Occupational Differentiation and Change in an Ohio Amish Settlement," *Ohio Journal of Science*, 84 (1984), 74-81. Some families have been reluctant to participate in the data collection for these directories. In 1980 eighty-seven families refused to provide information, and in 1988 fifty-six families were not included.

<sup>8</sup>. The dynamics of this population increase have been described in an earlier paper: Thomas J. Meyers, "Population Growth and Its Consequences in the Elkhart-LaGrange Old Order Amish Settlement," *MQR*, 65 (July, 1991), 308-21.

persons leaving the Amish community will be “defectors.” Defectors are children who have left their parental home and have been identified in the directory by their parents as having made the decision not to join the Amish church.

As Table 1 demonstrates, the percentage of persons leaving the Amish in this settlement has decreased from 21% among those individuals who were born in the 1930s to 5% in the 1960 cohort. The Table also indicates that, with the exception of the most recent birth cohort (those born in the 1960s), migration has been fairly stable. This finding is not consistent with data from other settlements. For example, Donald B. Kraybill<sup>9</sup> has reported that in recent decades as many as 15% of the Amish of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania have migrated to other settlements. Significant numbers of Amish from Geauga, Trumbull, and Astabula counties in northeastern Ohio are moving south to Hart County, Kentucky.<sup>10</sup> However, in the Elkhart-LaGrange community it is clear that the majority of young people have chosen to remain within the settlement of their birth rather than to emigrate to less populous areas of the country or to take the more radical step of leaving the Amish.

TABLE 1. PERCENT OF CHILDREN REMAINING AMISH,  
LEAVING THE CHURCH, OR MIGRATING

Years of Birth	Total	Remaining	Leaving	Migrating
<sup>a</sup> 1920-1929	100 (772)	75 (582)	18 (137)	6 (47)
<sup>a</sup> 1930-1939	100 (1095)	68 (745)	21 (234)	8 (88)
<sup>a</sup> 1940-1949	100 (1737)	75 (1310)	14 (245)	8 (130)
<sup>b</sup> 1950-1959	100 (2349)	83 (1947)	11 (246)	7 (156)
<sup>b</sup> 1960-1969 <sup>c</sup>	100 (1983)	92 (1832)	5 (102)	3 (49)

N of cases in parentheses.

<sup>a</sup>Data taken from 1980 *Indiana Amish Directory*.

<sup>b</sup>Data taken from 1988 *Indiana Amish Directory*.

<sup>9</sup> Donald B. Kraybill, *The Riddle of Amish Culture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 195.

<sup>10</sup> Dana Canedy, “Ohio Amish Build New Kentucky Home,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer* (July, 1, 1990), 12a-13a.

“This cohort includes many young people in their late teens and early twenties (835 out of 2818) who have not made a membership commitment. Therefore, the analysis included only those people who have left their parental homes.

#### FATHER’S OCCUPATION, MARRIAGE AND FAMILY DYNAMICS

The 1988 *Indiana Amish Directory* lists 407 families with children who have left the Amish. These families constitute 21% of a total of 1958 families. What are some of the characteristics of these families which may lead children to defect? The issue to which persons working in other settlements have given much attention in the past is the shift in employment away from agriculture and to industry. Scholars such as Hostetler,<sup>11</sup> J. Erickson et al.,<sup>12</sup> E. Erickson et al.,<sup>13</sup> and Martineau and MacQueen<sup>14</sup> have argued that a father’s non-farming occupation is directly related to a child’s leaving the Amish. Data from northern Indiana do not support this argument.

In 1988 the largest occupational category among the heads of households in the Elkhart-LaGrange settlement was factory work. The factory men work primarily in the recreational vehicle and mobile home industry. Although Amish men have worked in these factories since World War II, in the past two decades increasing numbers of them have entered factories instead of beginning their careers on farms. As recently as 1970, 61% of Amish household heads were farmers; however, by 1988 that figure had dropped to 37%. By contrast, in 1970 26% were employed in industry, and by 1988 this group had increased to 43%.

In previous research<sup>15</sup> I have examined the occupational shift that has occurred in the Elkhart-LaGrange settlement and have demonstrated that there is no difference in rates of defection when fathers’ occupations are cross-tabulated with children’s membership status. I have argued that, rather than the shift to industry being a threat to the Amish way of

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11. John A. Hostetler, *Amish Society* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980).

12. Julia A. Ericksen, Eugene P. Ericksen, John A. Hostetler, and Gertrude E. Huntington, “Fertility Patterns and Trends among the Old Order Amish,” *Population Studies*, 33 (July, 1979), 255-76.

13. Eugene P. Ericksen, Julia A. Ericksen, and John A. Hostetler, “The Cultivation of the Soil as a Moral Directive: Population Growth, Family Ties, and the Maintenance of Community among Old Order Amish,” *Rural Sociology*, 45 (Spr., 1980), 49-68.

14. William H. Martineau and Rhonda Sayres MacQueen, “Occupational Differentiation among the Old Order Amish,” *Rural Sociology*, 42 (1977), 383-97.

15. Thomas J. Meyers, “Stress and the Amish Community in Transition” (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1983); Meyers, “Population.”

life, the shift has had the opposite effect. As one informant said, "If they all had to farm with horses, there would be far fewer Amish men today."

Farming is a difficult occupation to enter into, especially with land becoming scarce as a result of increased population density. There simply is not enough land for all young people to begin married life on farms. If a couple is able to purchase a farm, the profit margin is narrow, especially as the young farmer faces a large debt. Given these conditions, non-farming occupations have become important means of making a living for many Amish men and a few Amish women.<sup>16</sup>

A second issue within the family is the impact on other brothers and sisters when a sibling has decided to defect. No such impact is clear. In this settlement, the number of children defecting in any given family ranges from zero to twelve. Table 2 gives a breakdown of the number of children defecting per family. In 11% of the total number of families, at least two children have defected. However, if one looks exclusively at the families with children who have left the Amish, 155 out of 407 families, or 38%, have only one child who has chosen to leave the Amish. There is no clearly established pattern showing how a sibling's decision to defect influences the membership decision of other siblings. In fact, the majority of defectors appear to leave on their own, with other brothers and sisters remaining in the faith. Further research is needed to analyze more fully the impact of a child's life choices on other siblings' decisions about membership.

Table 2. NUMBER OF CHILDREN DEFECTING PER FAMILY

Number of Children Defecting Per Family	Number of Families	Percentage of Total Number of Families
0	1958	83
1	155	7
2	94	4
3	78	3
4+	<u>80</u>	<u>3</u>

<sup>16</sup> Another alternative to farming that is becoming increasingly important in the Elkhart-LaGrange settlement and many other communities is the small Amish-owned- and-operated shop. Kraybill (1989) has argued that this option may be beneficial for the Amish, while Marc Olshan, "The Opening of Amish Society: Cottage Industry as Trojan Horse," *Human Organization*, 50 (1991), 378-84, suggests that this pattern has some major pitfalls.

TOTAL	2365	100
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Table 3 depicts the impact of birth position on defection. Although defection is not clearly linked with any single sibling position, older siblings are more likely to defect than are those in younger positions. A child is more likely to defect if he or she is in one of the first three positions and less likely to do so if positioned later in the family.<sup>17</sup> The table also suggests that in each successive position after the second, the number of persons defecting decreases and the number of siblings who have also defected decreases.

Table 3. BIRTH POSITION AND THE DEFECTION OF OTHER SIBLINGS<sup>a</sup>

Number Defecting in Each Birth Position	Number of Sibs Defecting	No Sibs Defecting
1	70	38
2	80	57
3	72	52
4	52	45
5	43	42
6	39	31
7	25	25
8	20	18
9	16	15
10	10	10
11	5	4
12	4	4
13	3	3
TOTAL	440	344

<sup>17</sup>. Although the emphasis here is on siblings, parental attitudes have a significant impact upon a child's decision to remain Amish. Unfortunately, data are not readily available to test the impact of parental influence.

<sup>a</sup>The data in this table were taken from a random sample of 33 church districts, or approximately one-half of the Elkhart-LaGrange population in 1988.

In the Elkhart-LaGrange settlement the average family includes 7.39 children.<sup>18</sup> Thus positions greater than eight have relatively small numbers of defectors. What is interesting is that there is a larger group of defectors in positions one to three than in four to seven. These findings are contrary to social scientists' descriptions<sup>19</sup> of firstborns in comparison to later-borns. According to those descriptions, firstborns tend to be conservative, with a "strong tendency to adopt the values of their parents." However, later-borns are "less cautious, more impulsive. . . more peer conscious and more willing to challenge authority."<sup>20</sup> Table 3 clearly suggests that the Amish do not fit the pattern of the dominant culture. Those most likely to reject the values of their parents appear to be in early sibling positions and those who conserve the tradition come later in the family.

A final factor related to family life is the decision to marry. Amish society exerts strong pressures on young people to marry. Singleness is much more stigmatized than in the dominant culture. Every Amish child—and particularly an Amish girl—clearly receives the impression that marriage and family are among the most important components of adult life. Kraybill<sup>21</sup> has described the ideal Amish woman as one who focuses her energies on family life and is capable of managing a household well. Ericksen and Klein<sup>22</sup> have suggested that producing children is perceived as one of the most important contributions that women make to Amish society. For both men and women, childrearing is a vital element of adult life. The single person obviously does not have this opportunity.

Table 4. PERCENT OF DEFECTION BY MARITAL STATUS,  
GENDER AND AGE

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<sup>18</sup>. For further discussion of issues related to family size, see Meyers, "Population."

<sup>19</sup>. For a discussion of this issue see Jerome Kagan, "The Child in the Family," *Daedalus* (Spr., 1977), 33-56.

<sup>20</sup>. Maxine Baca Zinn and D. Stanley Eitzen, *Diversity in Families* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993).

<sup>21</sup>. Kraybill, 73.

<sup>22</sup>. Julia A. Ericksen and Gary Klein, "Women's Roles and Family Production among the Old Order Amish," *Rural Sociology*, 46 (Spr., 1981), 282-96.

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Under Age 46	<u>Men</u>		<u>Women</u>	
	Amish	Non-Amish	Amish	Non-Amish
Married	97%(1261)	58%(249)	93%(1287)	66%(124)
Single	3%( <u>37</u> )	42%( <u>182</u> )	7%( <u>92</u> )	34%( <u>65</u> )
TOTAL	1298	439	1379	189
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46 And Over				
Married	98%(302)	87%(182)	95%(379)	84%(150)
Single	2%( <u>5</u> )	13%( <u>27</u> )	5%( <u>21</u> )	16%( <u>29</u> )
TOTAL	307	209	400	179

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All differences are significant at the .001 level.

N of cases in parentheses.

According to the 1988 *Indiana Amish Directory* only two single men and 65 women had set up their own households. In contrast the directory lists 1869 married heads of household and 1958 spouses<sup>23</sup> of these men. Table 4 demonstrates a relationship between marital status and defection. Among both men and women, young and old, the non-Amish population has a larger percentage of singles than the Amish group. The data suggest that marital status has the greatest impact on the younger defectors. More than a third of the defectors under the age of 46 are single; in contrast, fewer than a fifth of those over 45 have not married. These findings may suggest that younger Amish people are even more strongly affected by the singleness stigma than was the case earlier in this century.

#### GENDER AND DEFECTION

In general, those persons who choose to leave the Amish tend to be male. Although this has been the case historically, Table 5 indicates that this tendency has actually increased during this century. Among the children born in the 1920s to the 1940s, more than one-third of the

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<sup>23</sup>. The difference in number between spouses and household heads is accounted for mainly by women whose husbands are deceased.



defectors were women; but by the 1960s fewer than one-fifth were female.

TABLE 5. PERCENT OF DEFECTION BY GENDER

Year of Birth	Percent of Defection by Gender		
	Defectors in Age Cohorts	Women	Men
<sup>a</sup> 1920-1929	100 (137)	49 (67)	51 (70)
<sup>a</sup> 1930-1939	100 (234)	38 (88)	62 (146)
<sup>a</sup> 1940-1949	100 (245)	40 (97)	60 (148)
<sup>b</sup> 1950-1959	100 (246)	30 (75)	70 (171)
<sup>b</sup> 1960-1969 <sup>c</sup>	100 (102)	18 (18)	82 (84)

N of cases in parentheses.

<sup>a</sup>Data taken from 1980 *Indiana Amish Directory*.

<sup>b</sup>Data taken from 1988 *Indiana Amish Directory*.

<sup>c</sup>This cohort includes many young people in their late teens and early twenties (835 out of 2818) who have not made a membership commitment. Therefore, the analysis includes only those people who have left their parental homes.

Males have always had more opportunities than females to explore the outside world. They typically have access to buggies at age 16, and they are permitted more liberties in testing the limits of Amish society.<sup>24</sup> This exploration of the world may include the purchase of a car and settling for a time in a town apartment. For many of these young men, employment is off the farm. Factory employment in particular has made more cash available for major purchases such as automobiles. Thus, indirectly, factory work may have an impact on the increased rate of defection among Amish males.

At this critical period in life non-Amish influences may have a powerful impact on Amish youth. Males are not only more likely to make forays into the non-Amish world; they are also likely to change their appearance almost entirely, giving up Amish garb and grooming themselves like non-Amish. Young women are much more likely to continue to wear cape dresses and prayer coverings, which make them more noticeable and therefore “different” in the English-speaking world.

<sup>24</sup>. For a discussion of the rationale behind the testing of the boundaries of the Amish community, see Hostetler's *Amish Society* and Kraybill's *The Riddle of Amish Culture*.

Without these obvious boundary markers young men may more readily blend into modern society.

Informants also note that since 1972 there has been no threat of a military draft and conscription. In the past, for some young Amish men the choice to remain Amish was clearly related to the draft. In fact, when hostilities broke out in the Middle East in the fall and winter of 1990-1991 and Amish youths feared a potential return to conscription, the number joining the church in the Elkhart-LaGrange community increased significantly. As Table 6 demonstrates, in the year following the outbreak of the Gulf war the number of males who were baptized increased by 277%. Females also appeared to have had some fears of being drafted. However, the increase in female baptisms was less dramatic—from 143 to 227, an increase of 59%.

TABLE 6. NUMBER OF BAPTISMS IN THE ELKHART-LAGRANGE SETTLEMENT IN TWO SUCCESSIVE YEARS<sup>a</sup>

	Males	Females	Total
Sept. 1989 - Aug. 1990	82	143	225
Sept. 1990 - Aug. 1991	309	227	536

<sup>a</sup>The data for this Table are taken from those years' issues of *Die Blatte*,<sup>25</sup> a local Amish publication.

#### CONTACT WITH URBAN COMMUNITIES

The increase in population density of the Elkhart-LaGrange settlement has led to much more contact with the non-Amish people of the towns within the settlement's boundaries. In this study those churches which border the towns of Goshen, LaGrange, Middlebury, Topeka, and Shipshewana were separated from the rest of the districts. Table 7 demonstrates more defection among those congregations which border small towns than among those in more rural areas. Clearly, the boundary between the Amish and the non-Amish community is harder to maintain in more urban areas, even if the towns seem quite rural.

Living close to town leads to much more informal contact with English society. In particular, informants have mentioned Amish chil-

<sup>25</sup>. *Die Blatte* (Middlebury, Ind.), 1989-1991.

dren's increased contact with non-Amish. As one person said of those living near towns, "After school, when the children have nothing to do, they go into town."

Table 7. RETENTION AND DEFECTION BY RESIDENCE<sup>a</sup>

	Town N=592	Rural N=1916	Total N=2508
Amish Retention	80%	86%	85%
Amish Defection	20%	14%	15%
Total	100%	100%	100%
Chi Sq.= 14.63 P < .001			

<sup>a</sup>The population of towns in this area of Indiana has grown rapidly in the post-World War II era; hence this portion of the analysis included only those persons under the age of 40.

Even though Shipshewana is scarcely more than a village, the congregations which are most urban are those in the Shipshewana area. In one of the districts in this community as many as one-third of the families live in town;<sup>26</sup> some members even live in apartment buildings.

Each summer Shipshewana has a thriving tourist industry, attracting hundreds of thousands of people to its shops and markets. As Table 8 demonstrates, the cluster of churches around it has a much higher defection rate than do churches located on the edges of other towns. More than twice the percentages leave the Amish in the Shipshewana area than in other communities.

One important symbolic separator of the two worlds in which the Amish live is the horse and buggy. Kraybill<sup>27</sup> has observed that one of the most effective boundary markers is the preservation of a horse culture. In his words, a horse is "a striking symbol of nonconformity, [as it]

<sup>26</sup>. Topeka is the only other town with Old Order members living within the town proper.

<sup>27</sup>. Kraybill, 60-61.

separates the Amish from the modern world and anchors them in another one. . . . Safeguarding the horse culture is one sure way of preserving the continuity of tradition." In part because of the difficulty in finding a suitable place to stable horses in town, some of these "urban Amish" do not own horses. They walk to work and to church. When they need to go elsewhere they simply hire a driver.

Table 8. RETENTION AND DEFECTION BY RESIDENCE IN SHIPSHEWANA

	Shipshewana N=149	Other Towns N=443	Total N=592
Amish Retention	66	84	80
Amish Defection	34	16	20
TOTAL	100	100	100

Chi Sq. = 21.07 P < .001

Since Shipshewana is a major tourist attraction in northern Indiana,<sup>28</sup> more than 25,000 people invade this small town each week during the summer months. They visit the flea market, horse auction, and many tourist shops; and some of the community's Amish have extensive contact with these outsiders. Many of those Amish work in shops, restaurants, and the sale barn; or they sell goods to tourists along the roadsides.

#### VARIATIONS IN ORDNUNG

"Ordnung" refers to the body of church rules and discipline, both spoken and informal. Since the beginning of the Elkhart-LaGrange set-

<sup>28</sup>. For a description of the growth of tourism in northern Indiana, see David Luthy, "The Origin and Growth of Tourism in Northern Indiana," *Family Life* (Oct., 1991), 21-23. For a more general discussion of the impact of tourism on Amish society see Roy C. Buck, "Boundary Maintenance Revisited: Tourist Experience in an Old Order Amish Community," *Rural Sociology*, 43 (1978), 221-34, and Roy C. Buck, "Tourist Enterprise Concentration and Old Order Amish Survival: Explorations in Productive Coexistence," *Journal of Travel Research*, 18 (Sum., 1979), 15-20.

tlement there have been variations in the patterns of Ordnung from one portion of the community to another. These differences are directly related to differences in Ordnung among the different immigrant groups who settled in Indiana. The two largest such groups included families from Holmes County, Ohio, and others from Somerset County, Pennsylvania. The Holmes County group settled in what became known as the Clinton area, directly east of Goshen in Elkhart County. The Somerset County families settled near the western edge of the LaGrange County line, southeast of the town of Middlebury in what became known as the Forks area.<sup>29</sup>

Over time, other clusters of congregations emerged with their own understandings of how to be Amish. Among the most progressive groups have been the Clinton congregations, descended from the Holmes County immigrants. For many years distinctives have set them apart from other churches: e.g., an added layer of rubber covering the steel rims of their buggy wheels. An informant described them as "people who used to dress a little better than the rest of us and who trimmed their beards a little closer." The Shipshewana congregations are the other Amish who have made rapid changes in recent decades: e.g., bicycles and the use of refrigerated tanks (some of them quite up-to-date) to cool milk and sell it in bulk. They were the first churches to follow the lead of the Clinton congregations in adding a layer of rubber to their buggy wheels.

At the other end of the spectrum are churches who have most resisted any concessions to modernity. These include the LaGrange congregations which to this day do not permit innovations that have been accepted in other parts of the settlement for many years, e.g., bicycles, corn pickers, and baling with a baler pulled behind a team of horses. LaGrange churches still require that hay or straw be brought to a stationary baler and that corn be picked by hand.

Table 9 was constructed in consultation with an Amish minister who knows the settlement very well. With his assistance congregations were ranked according to two factors: acceptance of somewhat more modern farming technology and ability to discipline members. Following these indicators, the Shipshewana congregations are at one end of a continuum and the LaGrange districts at the other. Although the relationship between severity of church discipline and rates of defection

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<sup>29</sup> For a description of the early history of this settlement see *Amish and Mennonites in Eastern Elkhart and LaGrange Counties, Indiana 1841-1991* (Goshen, Ind.: G.E.T. Printing, 1991).

is not perfect, clearly there is a tendency in that direction.<sup>30</sup> There appears to be a direct relationship, or at least an indirect one, between defection and Ordnung. The Shippshewana and Clinton congregations—clearly the most progressive—clearly have a greater percentage of defectors than do other congregational clusters in the settlement. In contrast the LaGrange churches have made the fewest concessions to modernity in agriculture and in laxity of discipline, and they have the settlement's lowest percentage of defectors.

Figure 1. A map of the Elkhart-LaGrange settlement, reprinted from the 1988 *Indiana Amish Directory*.

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<sup>30</sup>. As Marc A. Olshan has recently pointed out, it is very difficult to place churches within a particular settlement in a neat continuum from highest to lowest in Ordnung; see his "Affinities and Antipathies: The Old Order Amish in New York State," paper presented at the American Anthropological Association Meetings, New Orleans, Nov. 28-Dec. 2, 1990.

The careful observer may wonder whether there is a relationship between severity of Ordnung and proximity to towns. Do those churches in the greatest contact with urban areas have the greatest difficulty in maintaining strict discipline? No. In fact, in the LaGrange cluster three of the congregations have members living within one mile of the center of town. In contrast, the more progressive Clinton districts have only one church that is close to town.<sup>31</sup>

Table 9. RATES OF DEFECTION IN CONGREGATIONAL CLUSTERS

Percent Remaining	Percent Defecting	Community
63%	37%	Shipshewana
72%	28%	Clinton
87%	13%	Forks
78%	22%	Topeka
81%	19%	Honeyville
80%	20%	Barrens
93%	17%	Emma/Yoder
84%	16%	LaGrange

#### AMISH SCHOOLS

Another important factor in determining the life choice of an Amish person is whether he or she goes to a public or to an Amish school. The first Amish school in the Elkhart-LaGrange settlement opened in the fall of 1948.<sup>32</sup> By 1988 there were 35 schools spread throughout the settlement. The majority of these schools were built after the small country schools in LaGrange County were consolidated into the Westview School Corporation in 1967. Prior to consolidation eight Amish schools had been built over a period of 18 years. In a two-year

<sup>31</sup>. On the map in Figure 1, the Clinton district is 58 and the LaGrange districts are 4, 5, and 11.

<sup>32</sup>. For a more detailed description of the decision to open the Plain View School see Thomas J. Meyers, "Education and Schooling," in *The Amish and the State*, ed. Donald Kraybill (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 87-106.

period after consolidation the number of Amish schools more than doubled. Eleven Amish schools were opened in 1967 and 1968.

Among the congregations listed in the directories this part of the analysis included only those schools (N=25) which opened in the first twenty years (1948-1968) of the Amish school movement. These congregations were selected because they included persons age 20 and over who would have had the option of attending an Amish school. Since most Amish people make their membership decisions in their late teens or early twenties, very few people in the 1988 *Directory* who live in districts which built schools after 1968 could have been in the Amish school population.

In addition, this part of the analysis also includes only persons under the age of 40 who have made their decision regarding church membership. Those over 40 were excluded because they never had the option of attending an Amish school. Table 10 compares the Amish who could have gone to an Amish school with individuals in the same age group who live in districts (N=23) which have never had their own parochial schools.<sup>33</sup>

Table 10. DEFECTION BY SCHOOL ATTENDANCE; FOR MEN AND WOMEN UNDER THE AGE OF 40.

	Amish Schools N=1144	Public Schools N=827	Total
Amish Retention	88	79	84
Amish Defection	12	21	16
Total	100	100	100

Chi Sq.= 29.27 P < .001

The statistically significant difference in rates of defection between persons who have attended Amish schools and those who have attended

<sup>33</sup>. The writer is well aware that not all Amish children attend Amish schools even when they are available. There are bound to be persons in the Amish school group who have attended public schools.



public schools is consistent with scholars' suggestion that Amish schools are critical in retaining the Amish way of life. Hostetler and Huntington<sup>34</sup> have suggested that "for an individual to become Amish the person must be kept within the Amish community, physically and emotionally, during the crucial adolescent years." Amish schools not only protect children from non-Amish influences, they reinforce Amish values and help to insure that peer groups will primarily include other Amish children.<sup>35</sup>

Although Amish parents have many reasons for sending their children to Amish parochial schools, foremost is their expectation that the children will be schooled in an educational environment which is consistent with the values present in their homes. They expect their teachers to respect and represent their tradition. The teacher's job is not to teach religion; that is the task of the church and the family. However, the teacher should teach core values by example. For example, a teacher should command respect as a person of authority. As one school manual<sup>36</sup> suggests, "Be firm and don't argue. Be sure children understand what is expected of them, and then follow through with whatever it takes to get them to obey." The teachers with the best reputation in an Amish community are those who are able to maintain order in their classrooms.

The following incident demonstrates teaching by example. One night some vandals broke into an Amish school and turned the stove over, spreading soot throughout the room. When the teacher arrived the following morning the pupils were indignant and one of them said, "Go get the sheriff." The teacher's response was, "That is not the way we do things." He added that "getting the sheriff wouldn't have done any good anyway." Instead he turned to the Bible and read aloud about returning good for evil, then asked each child to bring a nickel to school the next day, along with a slip of paper bearing the student's name and

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<sup>34</sup>. John A. Hostetler and Gertrude Enders Huntington, *Amish Children* (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers, 1992).

<sup>35</sup>. An alternative argument may be that parents who elect to send their children to Amish schools may be more committed to being Amish than are those who send their children to public schools. If this is the case, then parental commitment may in fact play a more important role in instilling loyalty to the tradition than attendance at an Amish school. Kraybill, *Mennonite Education: Issues, Facts and Changes* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1978) has suggested that this is the case for Mennonite children who attend Mennonite schools.

<sup>36</sup>. *Regulations and Guidelines for Amish Parochial Schools of Indiana*, copy in the Mennonite Historical Library, Goshen College, Goshen, Ind.

“anything else they wanted to put on them.” The children did this, and added some candy to the slips of paper on their desks. Vandals broke in a second time, but only took some candy and never bothered the school again.

Parents are very clear about what they do *not* want teachers to teach. They do not want dangerous or unnecessary materials such as science or sex education presented to their children. The danger in science is that it may include ideas such as the theory of evolution, which the parents consider to be contrary to the Bible. Sexuality should be discussed at home, between parents and children; it is not an appropriate subject for school.

Parents expect Amish values to be incorporated in all school activities. For example, although there is no physical education there is always plenty of exercise at recess. Children play games with great gusto, but place little emphasis on winning or singling out the individual. I have been a teacher in an Amish school, and I was amazed that when we played softball in the fall or spring there was never an argument about who was out or safe at a base. Instead there was quiet agreement on such matters and the game went on. The game was enjoyed as a communal activity, with frequent rotation of positions.

Another core value reinforced in an Amish school is nonconformity to the standards of the world. For example, uniformity of dress is much easier to maintain under the watchful eye of the teacher and the parents who serve on the school board. In a public school a boy may slip off his suspenders in an attempt to be like his English peers. Or a child may quietly agree to use the latest computer-aided instruction, or to watch a film or video without the consent of his or her parents. Not so in an Amish school.

#### OTHER FACTORS

Other factors may help explain why young Amish men or women may decide to stay with their tradition or choose to leave it. Some of these factors are much more difficult to substantiate with empirical evidence than are those presented thus far in this paper. For example, it may be easier to be Amish today than it was several decades ago. There are various reasons for this, including more flexibility in choice of occupation. Many Amish factory workers make no great financial sacrifice in order to remain Amish; so it is “easier” for them to be Amish. Also, in recent decades the world has elevated the status of the Amish. Non-Amish have given their way of life much more credibility and even

envy what they perceive in the Amish as a peaceful vestige of an earlier age. Consequently, there is less stigma associated with being Amish.

Other factors which cannot be tested by the data in the directories include issues such as conflict within a family or a community. Sources of tension which may lead to a break with tradition include psychosocial factors such as personality conflicts between parents and children or the desire to pursue higher education. Some find irreconcilable theological differences between themselves and their home communities. For example, a small minority left the Old Order in Elkhart and LaGrange counties in the 1940s and '50s to establish two Amish-Mennonite congregations (allowing automobiles, electricity, telephones, and modern machinery while retaining Amish dress and other distinctives). Among the issues which led to this break was the desire to be part of a church which emphasized evangelistic outreach.<sup>37</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

The data presented in this paper suggest that sibling position and marital status may have an impact on the decision to remain or leave the Amish. There is a tendency toward defection among older children and those who remain single. On the other hand, the non-farming occupation of the father does not appear to relate directly to defection.

Males have continued the historical pattern of defecting at higher rates than females: however, the gender difference in these rates is greater in recent decades than was the case earlier in the twentieth century. Reasons for this trend, may well include the lack of a threat of a draft and more opportunities to cross the boundary line between the Amish and the non-Amish worlds.

Living in or near towns, and variations in severity of Ordnung, also affect the decision to leave the Amish. Those who live at the edges of small towns (or even within town limits) and those who are part of congregations with the least restrictive Ordnung are most likely to leave the Amish.

Amish schools appear to be an important factor in maintaining the Amish way of life. Persons who have attended these schools are less likely to defect than are those who have gone to public schools. Amish schools surely reinforce values that are at the core of the Amish way of life. Schools are also important boundary-maintenance institutions.

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<sup>37</sup>. For a recent description of an Old Order minister's reasons for leaving his church, see Elmo Stoll, *Let Us Reason Together* (1990). Like the Amish-Mennonites, one of Stoll's objections to the Old Order is their reluctance to more actively bring "seekers" into the church.

Further research will help to determine which factor or combination of factors are most significant in determining whether an Amish youth joins the church or defects. From the evidence presented here, the profile of likely defectors would include males who are in early sibling positions, did not attend an Amish school, grew up in communities that to some extent have relaxed the *Ordnung*, and/or were in close proximity to urban areas and hence in frequent contact with the dominant culture during their childhood years. Furthermore, if these males remain single and opt to leave the farm and begin their occupational lives in industry, they may have a tendency to become even more involved in "English" society. Yet it is not work in the factory itself that may be the problem for these young men. Rather, industrial employment provides much more access to an income which makes exploration of the world more possible.

Ultimately, the data suggest that boundary maintenance continues to be vital for the Amish. When an individual is pushed out of the mainstream of Amish culture (as in the case of the unmarried person) or is thrust into regular contact with the dominant culture (for example in a public school), then defection is more likely.

