

La Crosse Medical Health Science Consortium

Amish Culture

Special thanks to...

- Gundersen Health System
- La Crosse Medical Health Science Consortium (LMHSC)
- LMHSC Cultural Competency Committee

for their assistance in developing this cultural competency module

Disclaimer

Caution on Stereotyping

- The material in this program is generalized and is not intended to perpetuate stereotypes of diverse individuals or groups of people
- Cultural traits may vary based on individual preference and level of acculturation – someone may have physical attributes of a specific heritage, but it does not mean he/she practices the traits of that culture
- Bottom line: Never Assume, Always Ask!
 - ▶ Never assume that every member of any culture holds the same beliefs and ideals
 - ▶ Use this background information to ask culturally sensitive, informed questions

Background

- Known as farming people who live in rural areas
- Amish model their lives after their Christian faith
- They attempt to live simple lives
- The Amish value the Christian standards derived from the Bible

History

- 16th Century – Protestant reformation in Europe
- The Anabaptists were formed
 - Considered “radical” Christians by others
 - Were persecuted by Church of Rome and reformers
- The Anabaptists believed:
 - In separation of church and state
 - Followers should be group of voluntary adults
 - Baptism should take place upon confession of faith

History Continued

- 1536 – Anabaptists became known as Mennonites
 - Renowned leader was Menno Simons
 - Practiced mission work to help others and recruit new members
 - Have followers on 6 continents
- 1693 – Amish were formed from Mennonites in Switzerland
 - Renowned leader was Jacob Amman
 - Thought church was losing purity
 - Amish became more conservative than Mennonites
 - Do not practice mission work

Interaction 1 of 4

- The Amish consider themselves:

(Select one answer)

- Hindu
- Christian
- Muslim

**Caution on
Stereotyping**

Interaction 1 of 4 (Answer)

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(Select one answer)
 - Hindu
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 - Muslim

Immigration Influences

- Early – mid 1700's
 - Fled to U.S. to avoid religious persecution
 - William Penn invited all persecuted Europeans to U.S.
- Moved to areas with fertile farmland
 - Initially settled in Pennsylvania
 - Migrated to Midwest

Statistics

- 150,000 Amish in U.S. (1994 census)
- Wisconsin has 4th highest Amish population in U.S.
 - Ohio – 54,000
 - Pennsylvania – 50,000
 - Indiana – 36,000
 - Wisconsin – 12,000
- The population of those following the Amish tradition has doubled in the past 20 years

Social Structure

- Family is very important and children are valued
- An average family has 6-7 children
- During adolescence, some communities may allow teenagers to take excursions into the “world,” then choose whether or not they want to be baptized and join the church
- Upon retirement, grandparents move into the *grossdawdy* (grandfather house)
 - This is usually connected to an existing home, and the younger family members will take care of the elders

Interaction 2 of 4

- The Amish immigrated to the U.S. for economic opportunity.
 - True
 - False

**Caution on
Stereotyping**

Interaction 2 of 4 (Answer)

- The Amish immigrated to the U.S. for economic opportunity.
 - True
 - False

Values

- Age is valued (elders are deeply respected)
 - Although they pay all taxes, the Amish refuse social security benefits
 - It is their duty to take care of their elders
- As family is valued, divorce is prohibited
- Supportive community
 - “Barn raisings” are held to quickly replace a community member’s barn due to disaster
 - Neighbors will help out on farm if the family has a hardship
 - Community will donate money if an individual has a health need
- Hard work is a necessity
 - Education beyond elementary school (8th grade) seen as unnecessary because it does not teach the living requirements of agriculture and home management

Spirituality

- The Amish practice very traditional Christianity
- There are no churches
 - Every other Sunday, gatherings are held at a different house
- The communities are divided into districts
 - Each district has 1 bishop, preachers, and possibly a deacon (all are chosen by community and have no formalized training)
 - Each district contains 15-30 families
- The service lasts 3 hours and is followed by huge feasts
 - Everyone, except the sick, is expected to attend

Spirituality Continued

- Beliefs/Values:
 - Submission, humility, forgiveness, suffering, non-resistance, and working in righteousness
- Avoid worldliness
 - Bible states “be not conformed to the world”
 - Avoid: love of money, seeking personal comforts, and self enhancing activities (i.e. fashion, higher education)
- The Amish do not automatically avoid all means of technology; it is decided on by group consensus

Interaction 3 of 4

- Amish children often finish their schooling after the 8th grade.
 - True
 - False

**Caution on
Stereotyping**

Interaction 3 of 4 (Answer)

- Amish children often finish their schooling after the 8th grade.
 - True
 - False

Communication

- The Amish usually speak both German and English
 - Some may also speak other German dialects, including Pennsylvania Dutch
 - There may even be a population in the Western Wisconsin area where Spanish is spoken
 - Boisterous, threatening, or abusive language is discouraged

Spatial Orientation

- Being of European descent, the mainstream personal space of 2 ft. is appropriate
- Modesty is of key importance
- Males and females may have more formalized behavior with each other

Sense of Time

- Overall present orientation
 - Work continually to meet immediate demands
 - Driven by demands, not clock time
- Values are influenced by past orientation
 - Explains general emphasis on tradition and stability

Environmental Control

- Amish believe in doing all that is humanly possible in a given situation, but God has the ultimate control
 - The Lord gives and the Lord takes away

Interaction 4 of 4

- Amish may speak several possible languages including: English, German Pennsylvania Dutch, and Spanish.
 - True
 - False

**Caution on
Stereotyping**

Interaction 4 of 4 (Answer)

- Amish may speak several possible languages including: English, German Pennsylvania Dutch, and Spanish.
 - True
 - False

Question 1 of 5: Identify the correct choice to complete each of the bulleted statements below:

- The Anabaptists believe in
- Estimated population of Amish in Wisconsin
- The amount of times per month the Amish attend three-hour religious gatherings
- A statement that describes how Amish view personal space

Choices:

- a. 12,000
- b. Separation of church and state
- c. Males and females often have more formalized behavior
- d. 2

**Caution on
Stereotyping**

Question 1 of 5: Identify the correct choice to complete each of the bulleted statements below:

(Answers)

- The Anabaptists believe in separation of church and state.

Choices:

- Estimated population of Amish in Wisconsin: 12,000

- The amount of times per month the Amish attend three-hour religious gatherings: 2

- A statement that describes how Amish view personal space: Males and females often have more formalized behavior.

a. 12,000

b. Separation of church and state

c. Males and females often have more formalized behavior

d. 2

Question 2 of 5

- Which of these beliefs are valued by the Amish?

(Select all that apply)

- Submission
- Humility
- Forgiveness

**Caution on
Stereotyping**

Question 2 of 5 (Answer)

- Which of these beliefs are valued by the Amish?

(Select all that apply)

- Submission
- Humility
- Forgiveness

Question 3 of 5

- Upon retirement, elders typically move in with family to be cared for.
 - True
 - False

**Caution on
Stereotyping**

Question 3 of 5 (Answer)

- Upon retirement, elders typically move in with family to be cared for.
 - True
 - False

Question 4 of 5

- The Amish avoid worldliness because:
(Select all that apply)
 - It is advised in the Bible
 - They prefer to live as their ancestors did
 - Most material goods are unnecessary for survival

**Caution on
Stereotyping**

Question 4 of 5 (Answer)

- The Amish avoid worldliness because:
(Select all that apply)
 - It is advised in the Bible
 - They prefer to live as their ancestors did
 - Most material goods are unnecessary for survival

Question 5 of 5

- The Amish believe that they have the power to ultimately control everything around them.
 - True
 - False

**Caution on
Stereotyping**

Question 5 of 5 (Answer)

- The Amish believe that they have the power to ultimately control everything around them.
 - True
 - False

La Crosse Medical Health Science Consortium

We hope you had a good experience using this module.
If you have any comments or ideas you would like to
share about this module, or future modules, please
contact the LMHSC Cultural Competency Committee at:

hscinformation@westernnc.edu

Thank you!



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For additional cultural competency resources,
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References:

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