

Richard A. Stevick, *Growing up Amish: The Rumspringa Years*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2014. Pp. ix + 370. Softcover, \$24.95.

Richard A. Stevick is a professor emeritus of psychology at Messiah College in Pennsylvania. He has used his years of professional involvement and personal friendships with Amish youth from all across the United States to produce this informative second edition of *Growing Up Amish – The Rumspringa Years*. Stevick’s descriptive account provides an authoritative, respectful, and “true-to-life” view of the fascinating period of transition to adulthood known as Rumspringa as it is experienced by today’s Amish youth. Rumspringa is a stage of exploration– literally translated as “running around”.

Stevick informs the reader that after Amish children complete their education (at age 14 or 15) Amish parents ardently focus on preparing them for adult roles within the Amish culture. During the next few years most of the girls will work at home. Likewise, some of the boys will work on the home farm or in the family shop. However, many of the boys will work away from home in various paid labor professions for, or beside, non-Amish. Here they are exposed to many of the enticements of the modern world, enticements forbidden in the Amish community (i.e. power tools, radio, television, cell phones).

Stevick does an excellent job of explaining that it is at this time of transition between adolescence and young adulthood that Amish parents grant their youth the freedom to investigate and experience the outside world. Following the custom of their culture, it is during this period of their life that all Amish youth must make an important decision. To either publicly commit themselves to the Amish faith and lifestyle via adult baptism in the church, or to choose not to be baptized and leave the Amish to “join the world”.

As has been the case since their arrival in the United States two centuries ago, today’s Amish (both the conservative Old Order and the liberal New Order) hope to instill in their children the desire to maintain a level of separateness from the modern world. As their parents before them, today’s Amish parents are concerned with the lure of automobiles, parties, and the fast pace lifestyle that Amish youth may experience during Rumspringa. Stevick explains that since its invention, Amish parents and elders have worried that use of the telephone would only serve as a distraction that “reduced

face-to-face communication, could disrupt family life, and most likely would lead to time wasting and gossiping” (195).

Stevick clarifies that this particular concern regarding the enticement of telephone usage has recently become a larger worry with the advancements in modern technology. Specifically, the invention of smart phones, the Internet, and the ease of involvement in social media sites such as Facebook creates such anxiety. It is here that Stevick provides a unique insight into the world of today’s Amish youth.

Through current technology Amish teens can effortlessly engage in aspects of the modern world that many parents (Amish and non-Amish) naturally find distressing. Stevick reports that thousands of Amish youth are now proficient in the use of smartphones and active Internet users. This places Amish youth in the precarious position of trying to interpret unfamiliar information and fit it within a developmental schema that was previously shaped almost exclusively by their parents, their church, and their Amish culture.

A previously unexplored dilemma that Stevick aptly considers is the very real possibility that this use of new electronic media may profoundly change traditional Amish practices. Smartphones could easily impact long standing traditional dating rituals, youth group behaviors, and leisure and work activities. Perhaps the most concerning question that Stevick’s work puts forth is how this new technology may affect church membership and retention rates.

Throughout this book Stevick does an excellent job in providing a scholarly description of Amish life. The writing style he employs makes the academic discourse of this book an easy and enjoyable read for anyone interested in Amish and Anabaptist studies. I believe this book will become a valuable and often cited resource.

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