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The modern society is characterized by rapid technological advancement accompanied by changes in behavior of people across the world, especially youth. This makes it very hard for traditional societies to thrive hence perpetuation of conventional cultures is at stake. For one North American community known as the Amish however, modernization has been met with resistance as the society continues to practice its traditional culture, especially the Rumspringa, a rite of passage that initiates youth into adulthood. Having had a sufficient experience of life outside church boundaries, the fear of being shunned by the society and a sense of responsibility regarding continuity of the Amish culture makes most Amish youth return home and to the Amish church after the Rumspringa period is over. As Shachtman indicates, Rumspringa is a word that has Pennsylvania Dutch origin, whose interpretation means ‘ running around’ (Shachtman 5). It also has German roots, implying ‘ space’. Rumspringa period begins as soon as boys and girls reach sixteen years of age and it goes on for about five to ten more years. It is a time when girls and boys have complete freedom from their parents and the entire community.

The two groups have to put up with the outrageously immoral characters displayed by some youth in the Rumspringa age such as girls smoking cigarettes and even consuming alcohol. It is common for the youth to converse in the loudest of voices with members of the opposite sex. Such conversations are usually characterized by flirtatious words and sexy hints at each other. Eventually, these groups of youth end up in dances and thereafter, indulge in sex. Most common is the indulgence in first time use of modern fast cars, rock and rap music. One leading reason as to why most of the youth revert back to normal Amish lifestyle, settle and decide to join the church after the occasion is over, is the experience they have during Rumspringa. Rumspringa lasts for at least five years within which boys and girls have an ample time to do all the worldly things that they so much desire.

The period marks a transition between childhood and adulthood hence whatever youth do during Rumspringa is completely up to them hence after they have had enough of it, they settle down and join the church. From the mode of dressing to boundless freedom from the entire society, youth engage in all activities that they had ever thought of such that when the season comes to an end, they will have matured to become all round people. During Rumspringa, the dressing mode changes tremendously and most youth use cell phones publicly for the first time in their life. The manner of speaking, walking and other behavior tends to resemble that of the English people. A number of girls lose their virginity during the occasion and some of them even bring boys to their parents’ home and majority of the boys engage in meaningless fist fights. Consumption of illicit drugs such as marijuana and cocaine increases during ‘ Rumspringa’. Youth who never know how such drugs feel like, have a chance to try out for the first time. This marks the turning point in the lives of many youth who even after Rumspringa ends, begin to officially and publicly consume such drugs in large amounts.

Watching movies is the most common practice. Many parties are held on weekends in deserted and semi-deserted locations and are attended by a large percentage of Amish youth in their teenage years. Hair styles change: boys brandish long hair and crew cuts (Shachtman 4). During Rumspringa, youth feel less obliged to explain their behaviors to parents. They may spend many hours away from their homes without permission from their parents and upon coming back home, most of them do not bother to explain what they were doing, where they were and with whom. Initially before the occasion, the trend of most Amish families is that youth have to obtain permission to go out and in case they delay for several days, it is in the teen’s best interest that the parent will request to know where they were and if necessary, be warned about the same. Rumspringa is however, not all about indulgence of youth in activities that are wayward or weird. Most of them engage in activities and things that they had never taken part before; not all of them do drugs, partying, dancing, sex and other culturally unwarranted activities.

The biggest percentage of Amish youth usually take part in activities that grant them full freedom for the first time in their lives but they do so within socially and morally accepted boundaries of the family and the church. The church is very important to the youth during the Rumspringa as it marks their spiritual transformation from youth to adults both socially and spiritually. Majority of the youth usually take part in Sunday singings and a variety of sports ranging from volleyball and swimming to ice skating. Picnics accompanied by outdoor parties are common especially during weekends. Activities that most groups of youth engage in remain socially and spiritually upright as they bound the youth to the church thereafter (Kraybill et al 197). Upon successful completion of the Rumspringa period, most youth regardless of what they engaged in, usually settle down, marry and join the church fully. The fear of being shunned is also a contributory factor in the high number of youth who come back home after Rumspringa.

An Amish youth who chooses to stay away from the family and church after Rumspringa festival is over, is usually shunned by the community, an aspect that stimulates fear and isolation which most people will not like to face since most youth opt to comply with what the society states: they rejoin the community and get baptized in church soon after the Rumspringa period. When an Amish youth refuses to join the church after Rumspringa, there are higher chances of interacting closely with the media. As Umble and Weaver-Zercher assert in ‘ The Amish and the Media’, the media likes reporting about the Amish culture, a culture that has stood the test of time. The media is never welcome in the Amish society since Amish elders consider it as a means of exposing and negatively portraying their culture and religious practices which ought to be preserved as it has been since the sixteenth century. Members of the Amish community who make the decision of freely speaking to the news media are perceived to receive a frown of God apart from the guilt that their own conscience will subject them to and the anger they will face from the church.

This combination makes it hard for an Amish to welcome a news reporter when he or she approaches them, as they do not want to be interviewed; only to face the wrath of the community and supposedly, that of God (Umble and Weaver-Zercher 168). Elders of the church are an authority in the Amish society. The church has a set of rules and guidelines called Ordnung which although not written down, is culturally binding. Dressing mode, use of technology and individual contribution to public life are clearly elaborated (Umble and Weaver-Zercher 168). Activities that tend to promote Amish life in public such as posing for photographs or even appearing on television are considered to violate the society’s established norms and are a defiance of cultural obligations. Engaging in such activities will earn the individual criticism from members of the church. They will then be reprimanded by church officials but if the offense is considered to be severe, then the individual must confess publicly before the church. Otherwise, they will be ex-communicated and later be shunned by the entire Amish community. Even though youth have a choice between joining the church and staying away from it after Rumspringa, the Amish society naturally compels them to join the larger community of believers.

Most youth as Kraybill, Nolt and Weaver-Zercher illustrate, turn out to obey the church standard and eventually the church community as a whole (Kraybill et al 197). Rumspringa is a period that church leaders, elders of the Amish community and parents expect will enable the youth to undertake two vital decisions in their lives: to find a mate within the Rumspringa season and to later join the church fully and be baptized. Participation in church activities is an essential element of the Amish youth, and accomplishment of the two activities listed above is considered by elders as a successful completion of the Rumspringa period. Furthermore, there is need for youth to oversee the perpetuation of the Amish Culture. Shachtman quotes the words of one old man in Shipshewana, where the practice is commonly practiced, “ We don’t give our young folks leave to go out and sin just to get it out of their system, What we give them is a little space so they can be with people their own age and find a partner” ( qtd. in Shachtman 9).

This implies that Rumspringa is meant to allow youth to perpetuate the Amish religious culture. The church expects that upon utilizing the freedom that they have during Rumspringa, youth will grow up to be responsible adults as they will already have known what the world is all about by interacting freely with each other and participating in activities that they had never engaged in before. Up to eighty percent of the Amish youth do come back and rejoin the church and undertake community activities (Shachtman 9). This percentage trend could as well be a contributory factor in decisions made by youth in subsequent Rumspringa festivities as they do not want to be seen as stray individuals in the community hence face the risk of being shunned. Greaves indicates that out of every five youth, four often choose to return to the Amish society and there after live under the directions of the church. He disputes that as much as the Amish people isolate themselves from behaviors exhibited by the mainstream ‘ American’ cultures such as fancy cars, exclusive housing and modern outfit fashions among other forms of posh lifestyle, their reasons for refusing to indulge in modern cultural practices are pecked on strong cultural background that the community holds onto dearly and it perpetuates the same from generation to generation (Greaves 188).

Certain practices are prohibited from the Amish culture. For instance, the use of cell phones is considered to create loop holes in the community by linking people of the Amish culture with the outside world; which goes against the cultural stipulations of the Amish society which intends to remain isolated from the other communities. Elders of the Amish society consider other communities outside the Amish society as posing a danger to the Amish society as it can teach bad habits and behaviors to members of the latter society. Mobile phones are thought to bring new, unapproved technologies to the Amish society. So, community booths have been installed to be used by the whole community in case there is an emergency such as medical issues. Farmers hardly use tractors for plowing their farms but they use combustion engines in powering farm machinery, which are then hauled by animals (Greaves 185). This ensures that Amish farms are tilled without using modern technologies such as tractors which the Amish elders consider as a part of modernization which propagates practices that the Amish culture does not approve of.

The internet on the other hand, is considered to influence youth in the wrong way and Amish elders restrict the entrance and spread of the internet in the Amish society. The Amish culture imposes many restrictions on its members. However, for most of the prohibitions imposed, there is an alternative solution. Again, cell phones are prohibited but there are communal telephones; the internet is prohibited but there are newspapers, tractors are not commonly used but there are combustion engines that are pulled by animals. This illustrates the Amish community’s attempts to remain as far as possible from the practices and mannerisms of other societies in order to avoid the influence of those communities to the Amish, religious-oriented culture. Since there are alternatives for every thing that is considered unfit by the Amish society, be it technology-oriented such as electricity or otherwise, Amish youth do not see themselves as prohibited from living a normal, complete life. All that is necessary is catered for although not as fully as the other American youth who enjoy lots of entertainment, latest technology among other luxuries.

In this respect, most Amish youth prefer returning to their society and later after, they get married and live a normal, independent and complete life as they will have undergone the vital stage: transforming from childhood to adulthood. In analyzing the ‘ Devil’s Background’, a movie on Rumspringa, Tim Stopper focuses on Rumspringa as both a rite of passage and a temptation to the faith of Amish youth in standing up to the expectations of the Amish religion (Stopper 1). It is also shapes the behaviors of youth, who are expected to perpetuate the Amish culture to the forthcoming generations. Stopper says, “…. for Amish, they need to find their answers in the wilderness of the soul. They subject themselves most intentionally to temptation and find out about their strength of character on the other side” (1). Temptations that youth go through during Rumspringa eventually help them to not only grow to be all round people but to also differentiate wrong from right; morally, culturally and spiritually.

Youth who finish the Rumspringa season and thereafter fail to neither return to their homes nor carry on with the expectations of the community of joining the church and getting baptized, are usually shunned. Since the church is a central force in the Amish society, being shunned by the church implies being shunned by the entire society, which could only make future life of the victim even harder hence most youth will after Rumspringa, comply with the expectations of the society by getting married and thereafter, be baptized. Moreover, a sense of responsibility that the society endows to Amish youth commits them to perpetuating the culture as is expected hence they return home and take an active role in the church. Usually, the Rumspringa may last for about five years within which youth have a sufficient time to experiment whatever they desire and as a result, most of them later return home and carry on with life under guidance from the church.