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Review of Serving the Amish: A Cultural Guide for Professionals by James A. Cates

Carol A. Leibiger

University of South Dakota, C.Leibiger@usd.edu

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Serving the Amish: A Cultural Guide for Professionals.

By James A. Cates. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014. xi + 234 pp. \$34.95.

James Cates is a certified clinical psychologist and licensed addictions counselor, who has worked closely with Amish clients and helping (i.e., psychological, medical, social-service, and legal) professionals that interact with the Amish in northeastern Indiana. His purpose in writing this book is to communicate “hard-won principles for care and interaction with Amish people in human service and health care settings—interactions that often fall uncomfortably outside the daily routines of the Amish and the professionals who serve them” (viii). While “[t]he primary principles of this [work] rest on a foundation of treatment, care, and professional interaction that are germane to working with any group...many standard protocols and professional procedures need to be modified to respect Amish spiritual beliefs and cultural practices in order to achieve successful interventions” (viii, xi-x). Cates seeks to acquaint his readers with the “distinctive needs and cultural patterns” of the Amish and to equip practitioners with strategies to deal sensitively and effectively with this target group (viii). He accomplishes his task using a combination of personal anecdotes and information gleaned from research and professional experience, offering a well written and extremely helpful manual for interactions with the Amish.

Cates divides his book into four parts. The first, “Culture and Context,” provides a one-chapter overview of Amish society, focusing on the social and cultural factors that influence the Amish worldview and interactions with “English” mainstream society. He emphasizes three “principles essential to understanding the role of human services for the twenty-first-century Amish”: God and the church-community (*Gmay*) are “primary, essential, and integral” in Amish life; individuals rank in importance after God, the *Gmay*, and the family and must submit themselves to their collective authority. Additionally, “no humanly sanctioned organization can usurp the authority of this religious order”; professionals seeking to work effectively with the Amish must understand “the fundamental church loyalty that is entrenched in their culture and minds” (4-5).

Part II, “Life Experience,” actually contains two different kinds of information. The second chapter, “Changing Views of Human Services,” discusses the dynamic relationship between the Amish and Human Services, tracing a growing openness to helping professions, mediated by a given community’s degree of conservatism, the openness of clergy to English helping professionals, and the community’s ability to deal effectively with given problems. The third chapter, “Building and Maintaining Rapport,” introduces another factor that affects helping professionals’ ability to engage with the Amish. Cates emphasizes the need to be knowledgeable, sensitive, and respectful of Amish beliefs and practices in order to serve them effectively; this “genuineness” is more highly valued by the Amish than professional credentials or trappings of mainstream authority. The fourth through eighth chapters (“Across the Life Span,” “Women’s Issues,” “Sexuality,” “Violence and Abuse,” and “Death and Loss”) focus on different aspects of Amish life and the problems associated with them that might necessitate interactions with human-services professionals. Cates addresses issues unique to Amish culture (e.g., the roles of patriarchy, separateness, and women’s enculturation in submissiveness in the shrouding of abuse) while also situating Amish life stages and concerns within a universal human context.

Cates' Parts III ("Professional Interactions") and IV ("Practical Considerations") apply the information provided in Parts I and II for practitioners of helping professions. Part III provides profession-specific advice in five individual chapters ("Counseling and Psychotherapy," "Substance abuse and Addictions," "Law Enforcement and the Judiciary," "Healthcare Professions," and "Social Work and Social Services"). The author summarizes his recommendations in Part IV, offering sixteen guidelines to working with the Amish. These comprise recognition of and respect for the high-context, communal, church- and clergy-dominated Amish culture and its ways, especially regarding the idiosyncrasies of communication; the need to build trusting relationships with the community when dealing with any of its members, the increased value and potential longevity of collaborative community-based programs, and the value of research, both scholarly and anthropological, when dealing with clients and attempting to establish and maintain human-services programs within Amish communities. Appendices provide information on other Plain groups, Amish mental-health issues, and recommended readings on Amish life, religion, and culture. This book provides extremely valuable lessons, not just for those serving the Amish, but for other professionals such as educators who seek to serve diverse members of high-context minority cultures.

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Carol A. Leibiger