

Why Amish Romance Novels Are So Popular

In the “New and Popular” section of my local public library, there are multiple shelves dedicated to Amish romance novels.

Yes, you read that correctly: *Amish romance novels*.

As it turns out there’s quite a market, especially among evangelical Christians, for what’s also waggishly known as [“bonnet-ripper” fiction](#). The three most popular authors of Amish romance—Beverly Lewis, Cindy Woodsmall, and Wanda Brunstetter (none of whom are Amish, by the way)—have between them sold around 30 million books.

To be honest, the success of the genre isn’t that much of a surprise to me. Humans are innately attracted to mystery, and in an age that increasingly leaves *nothing* to the imagination in the realm of sexuality, it’s understandable that many people would desire to be virtually transported to a religious culture that still has taboos.

There’s also the intrigue surrounding the Amish’s more tech-free lifestyle, which is what I want to focus on in this blog.

In recent years, a growing number of Western men and women have become disenchanted with the monoculture created by modern technology, and are becoming more sensitive to its social costs. The Amish—who immigrated to America in the early 18th century—are the most famous and impressive holdouts to many of the modern technologies that have been speedily integrated into mainstream life in the West over the past one hundred years. Though acceptance of technology varies by community, the majority of Amish still do not own cars, do not have telephones inside their homes, and are not connected to the electrical grid. They are thus a natural source of fascination for contemporary readers who long for some of

what's been lost in our increasingly artificial world.



[Amish views toward technology vary among communities.]

Amish romance authors are well aware of their audience's nostalgia. As Wanda Brunstetter [acknowledges](#):

"When people read my books, it takes them to a simpler way of life. Hanging clothes on the line, cooking meals from scratch, turning off the television and mobile phones and just visiting. We've lost that way of life. I think my readers are craving that."

Interestingly enough, however, the Amish haven't always been associated with a limited acceptance of technology. According to [The Amish](#), the book companion to the PBS *American Experience* series of the same name:

"Amish identity was not closely linked to technology in the nineteenth century because Amish farm and household technologies were similar to those of their rural neighbors. In fact, some Amish farmers were among the first in their regions to purchase new styles of horse-drawn machinery... Distinctive Amish responses to technology began to emerge only in the twentieth century as the fruits of the late Industrial Revolution—driven by electrification and advanced transportation—moved into rural America."

There's a tendency to assume that the Amish's disapproval of certain technologies is an irrational and reactionary form of Luddism. After all, that's our conditioned response to those who seem to display any hesitancy to accepting the latest symbols of modern progress.

But as it turns out, the Amish's selective rejection of technology is largely driven by prudent concerns about the

impact it will have on their traditions, cultural values, and relationships.

“Their fundamental fear is that a particular technology will alter the bonds of community over time... They do not contend that anyone who drives a car is going to hell, but they are leery that car ownership could eventually demolish their community.” (The Amish)

I think most of us would be hard-pressed to say that the Amish concerns are unfounded. It's axiomatic that technologies such as electricity, the car, the internet, and now smartphones, have played a large role in dramatically altering human traditions, values, and relationships over the past one hundred or so years. And concerns similar to the Amish's about the negative effects of technology are echoed in articles and op-eds throughout the Western world on a daily basis.

A difference between the Amish and those who live in the mainstream world, however, is that the latter typically feel powerless to curb the harmful impact that certain technologies have on their lives.

So they read romance novels instead.