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AUTHOR Gourlie, Suzanne K.  
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ABSTRACT

This study sought to identify the reading interests and preferences of older adult public library users in the Oakwood, Ohio community, and also to gauge interest in large print materials within this group. Surveys assessed in this study were completed by 70 adults age 50 or over. The results revealed a wide range of reading interests and identified several strong preferences, similar to the findings of previous studies. A majority of readers indicated a preference for standard print over large type, although women showed a stronger interest in large print with increasing age. Unlike previous studies, the survey results indicated the large print collection is used by those of all ages, and is not of interest only among seniors. Collection management of large print may need to reflect the interests of all ages, while the needs of older adults should be a priority in the development and promotion of both the regular and large print collections. Appendices include the survey and cover letter. (Contains 13 references.) (Author/SWC)

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READING INTERESTS OF OLDER ADULT PUBLIC LIBRARY USERS

A Master's Research Paper submitted to the Kent State University School of Library and Information Science in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Library Science

by

Suzanne K. Gourlie

June, 1996

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## ABSTRACT

This study sought to identify the reading interests and preferences of older adult public library users in the Oakwood, Ohio community, and also to gauge interest in large print materials within this group. The results revealed a wide range of interests and identified several strong preferences, similar to the findings of previous studies. A majority of readers indicated a preference for standard print over large type, although women showed a stronger interest in large print with increasing age. Unlike previous studies, the survey results indicated the large print collection is used by those of all ages, and is not of interest only among seniors. Collection management of large print may need to reflect the interests of all ages, while the needs of older adults should be a priority in the development and promotion of both the regular and large print collections.

Masters Research Paper By

Suzanne K. Gourlie

B.A. Earlham College, Richmond, Indiana  
M.L.S. Kent State University, Kent, Ohio

Approved by

*Mary Machin*

Mary Machin, Advisor

*7/11/96*

Date

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## INTRODUCTION

If demographics are any indication, the baby boom of fifty years ago has evolved into a burgeoning adult population on the threshold of older adulthood. Currently, one out of every four Americans is now older than 50 (*USA Today* 1). Previous stereotypes of older adults have crumbled as this group gains momentum; in comparison to their predecessors, today's older adults are better-educated, healthier, and wealthier, with a zeal for life-long learning. All of these characteristics could and should have a positive impact on public libraries and adult services. The good news, as indicated by a recent study (*U.S. News and World Report* 29) that 53% of those aged 50 or older visited their public library at least once within the last year, must be tempered with the findings of a separate study, which revealed that neither service providers, gerontologists, nor the aging themselves consider the library an important place for satisfying older adults' information needs (Mabry 359).

How can the library change the perceptions of the community and promote itself as a primary resource for older adults? One answer is to reexamine the services and resources we've provided thus far. Since the early seventies, public libraries have sought to focus more attention and service on the needs of older adults, but often these were limited to providing outreach services to the homebound and purchasing large print fiction for the visually impaired. However, while statistics vary somewhat, most studies show that only 5 to 7 percent of older adults are homebound or

reside in institutions; thus the majority's needs are not met by traditional library outreach programs (Van Fleet 109).

In identifying resources to better serve the middle-aged and older adults of the local community, the large print collection can be targeted as a resource developed primarily for their use. Although use of large print is not exclusive to older adults, librarians and booksellers concur that large print books are still read primarily by visually impaired older adults (Havens 32). In previous research, it was found that 1 in 3 seniors do use large print materials (Lawlor 1). Publishers have been very responsive to the rise in the number and diversity of interests of aging adults, expanding publication of large print into widening categories of non-fiction and contemporary best-sellers to meet greater demands for these materials (Havens 32 ; Mantell 46). This provides a growing opportunity for librarians to provide more relevant and interesting materials for their users, especially older adults.

Unfortunately, while most public libraries have at least a small collection of large print titles, these are often relegated to a neglected corner, and must be read over and over again by those who cannot read standard size print. Clearly, the realization of better library service for the older segment of the population must rely not only on providing special services but also on providing necessary, interesting, and relevant resources. This requires not only knowing users needs and priorities but also relies on excellent collection management.

Sharon Baker, in *The Responsive Public Library Collection*,

identifies the three primary tasks of collection management as selection, promotion, and evaluation. As she points out, in selection efforts, librarians sometimes fail to perform a totally rational or systematic analysis of patron needs for materials (40). She also observes that "librarians have performed these three collection management tasks in good faith...but generally as isolated exercises rather than as an integrated program of interrelated tasks" (40).

#### PROBLEM STATEMENT

Management of Wright Library's large print collection presents some unique difficulties. Baker's analysis fairly accurately describes previous efforts to maintain the large print collection. While extensive weeding conducted in the summer of 1994 created more space for new titles, this process was especially difficult because all the titles circulated well, so low usage was not a possible indicator in determining what to discard. Selection also proved problematic; choices of new titles had been based on the notion (from past readers advisory efforts) that readers gravitate to those authors they already know; thus, the same authors were often relied upon when choosing new titles to add to the collection.

#### JUSTIFICATION FOR RESEARCH

In order to (1) better develop the resources available to older adults; (2) identify basic characteristics of the large print audience; and (3) determine the parameters and priorities



of older adult reading interests and needs, a study targeting users aged 50 or older was proposed. An analysis of current information from those served can then be applied to future decisions in developing and evaluating the current collection. This will allow the collection to accommodate a broader spectrum of patron needs over time, and emphasize those subjects and genres of greatest interest as identified by the users themselves. As part of an effort to develop an integrated collection management approach, this survey will provide one means of evaluating current materials and selecting new materials to provide a more relevant and interesting collection for all older adult users.

#### LITERATURE REVIEW OF RELATED RESEARCH

Noteworthy earlier studies of older readers have investigated several aspects of this topic. Many have emphasized documenting the need for special services and programs for older adults, while others have sought to establish what unique information needs older adults may have. In order to establish the reading interests and choices of the retired adult reader, Moshy conducted individual surveys of 50 adult readers. She found 74% of those surveyed preferred biographies, 68% preferred travel books, and 62% preferred fiction.

Duncan conducted a survey of 21 older active readers to describe behaviors of older good readers as well as ascertain their reading interests. Her questionnaire listed several categories of literature. She found a close correspondence of preferred categories to those reported by others, who found that

lifetime readers tend to enjoy biography, history, travel, historical fiction, and mystery (12).

A study which closely parallels that which is being proposed was conducted by Anderson, Luster, and Woodridge. They used a 3 page, 12 question survey, administered in eight different senior citizen centers throughout the greater Pittsburgh area to 217 respondents, 167 of which were usable. Anderson et al. noted that by choosing to visit senior citizen centers, they hoped "they would find a broad spectrum of older adults...giving a better perspective on the typical attitudes older adults have toward libraries... and give access to a large group of active adults." (41). The survey was composed of 12 multiple-choice questions, one open-ended question, and a section of fill-in-the-blanks entitled "Background Information." (A number of respondents opted not to write anything in the background section; perhaps, as the authors posited, "the respondents felt that the request for personal information was invasive, or it may have been simply that they were tired of the survey at that point" (40).

A summary of the survey results indicated interests covering a broad range of topics, especially current events and health and fitness. Other interesting findings include the respondents' wide range of education levels (from grade school to graduate school) and high proportion (74%) who indicated they read every day. Although Anderson et al. "found the questionnaire's format to be appropriate" some problems associated with the survey were briefly discussed. Some respondents were confused about how to mark their answers; also, they noted "an important problem we hadn't

anticipated was that a number of adults had difficulty reading and understanding the questionnaire. A basic assumption of our questionnaire was that our respondents could read. The actual literacy level of these adults is not clear, but it seems low" (98).

Anne M. Ring, in *Read Easy - Large Print Libraries for Older Adults*, presents a survey form for large print readers which was initially developed and used by Marilyn Ring-Nelson, Coordinator of Mobile Services for the Seattle Public Libraries. Ring-Nelson found that, in gauging reader wants and interests, "the participants gave us a very specific list. We found interest in what we expected - mysteries, romances, western - but also strong interest in biographies, art, music, cooking, science, poetry, and books of local interest. An overriding theme was that readers of large print books want to read what everyone else is reading. We are finding that the population now starting to use large print books is better educated, with higher expectations." (quoted in Ring 39). Because the Seattle Public Libraries survey so closely matched the intentions of this study, it was used as the basis for developing the survey instrument, a copy of which is located in Appendix 1.

#### RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

These previous studies provide important insights into the interests, preferences, and needs of older adult readers. This study attempted to specifically identify the reading interests and needs of the population of older adult library users in the

Oakwood community in particular, and also to compare these findings to those of previous research efforts.

Specifically, this study objectives were:

1. To identify a range of reading interests among the local population of library users 50 years of age or older
2. To identify this populations' preferences for specific topics of nonfiction, and specific genres of fiction
3. To relate these findings to those of previous studies, in order to identify similarities and differences.

In the context of this study, "Older Adult" refers to anyone aged 50 or older. Within the literature on older adults, the age threshold can vary from 50 to 65. "Older adult" is often broken into subgroups of "young old" "middle old" and "elderly". Also, a primary assumption of the study was that nearly all users of Wright Library's large print collection are older adults, and thus users of the large print collection in the near future will be well represented by those aged 50 - 59.

#### RESEARCH DESIGN

A sample was drawn from the entire population of older adult library patrons who use Wright Library. The size of the current population served is estimated at 22,000; based on national figures, 25 percent of the population is 50 years older or more, so the population of older adults is estimated to be about 5500.

Survey forms were made available to patrons in several areas of the library for six weeks, from April 29 - June 9, 1996. Because participation in completing the survey was by self-assignment (i.e. whoever is willing to fill out a survey) the

results will not be drawn from a truly random sample of the population. It is hoped that enough surveys will be completed to suggest at least preliminary trends in preferences and interests; a longer time frame would likely produce a more reliable representative sample of the population of older adult readers.

#### METHODOLOGY

The survey instrument is a modified version of that provided by the Seattle Public Library in *Read Easy - Large Print Libraries for Older Adults*. A very important modification was made after consultation with members of the library staff. They indicated an expected difficulty in collecting data only from those aged 50 or over from the larger population of all adult users. To simplify collection, the survey was opened up to all adults (aged 18 or older) who wished to respond to the survey. The modified version of the cover letter is included in Appendix 2.

Data from the survey were tallied, and the results then ranked to determine preferences for specific topics and types. These results were compared to the findings of previous research to identify similarities and differences in findings. Respondents were also grouped according to age ranges, gender, and interest or non-interest in large print, to analyze any significant differences among sub-groups. This study did not seek to determine WHY the population makes the choices they do. (An excellent discussion of this topic is covered in Baker's *The Responsive Public Library Collection 56-64*).

The short span of time in which the study was conducted biased participation towards those who frequently use the library;

those who visit infrequently or are unable to come to the library in person as well as non-users are thus poorly represented. The needs and interests of these persons are very important and remain to be addressed.

## RESULTS

250 survey forms were distributed, 152 of which were completed by adults, the remainder of which were either not returned, incomplete, or completed by a minor (these were discarded). Of the 152 completed, 70 were by those aged 50 or older (46%). The following results and analysis sections are based on the responses of these 70 completed surveys. (The results of the remaining 82 surveys will be used as part of the ongoing collection management program.)

Completed surveys, by age and gender, indicate females represent 55.7% and males 44.3% of total respondents (Table 1). Due to the small number of completed surveys, it cannot be determined if this is an accurate representation of the gender distribution for all users. Respondents aged 50 - 69 for both males and females are likely overrepresented among the entire population distribution of older adults (78.5% of all respondents); again, a larger sample size would be necessary to determine whether or not this is a true reflection of the age distribution of the population of library users as a whole.

(continues on next page)

Table 1. Number of completed surveys, by age and gender

Age	Female	Male	TOTAL
50 - 59	14	14	28
60 - 69	17	10	27
70 - 79	7	6	13
80+	1	1	2
TOTAL	39	31	70

#### INTERESTS

The range of interests for both gender and age subgroups were substantial; although there were definite preferences, all categories of nonfiction listed were checked at least once by female respondents (see Table 2) and all but one category were chosen at least once by male respondents (Table 3). Likewise, Biography and Fiction interests indicated a wide range of tastes among both females and males (Tables 4 - 9). Not all respondents indicated an interest in biography and fiction; only 31 of 39 women and 26 of 31 men marked the Biography area, while 35 of 39 women and 28 of 31 men showed an interest in fictional works.

#### PREFERENCES

Strong similarities in nonfiction preferences among men and women were indicated by the results of the survey (Tables 2 - 4). Both genders most frequently chose History as an area of interest, as well as Travel, Art, Finance, and Best Sellers. Women also indicated a strong interest in Cookbooks, Humor, and Current

Events (Table 2) while men favored Science and Technology/Innovations (Table 3). When both groups' responses were collapsed, the following categories received the highest number of marks among the 70 respondents:

History (56%), Travel (41%), Art (39%), Best Sellers (36%), Finance (33%), Cookbooks (30%), and Humor (30%). Surprisingly, both Health and Medical categories were rated relatively low; perhaps this is a reflection not so much of disinterest in the subject, but a disinterest in reading or browsing on the topics without a specific informational need.

Table 2 Nonfiction Interests of 39 Women by Age Groups

	50 - 59	60 - 69	70+	TOTAL
History	7	6	5	18
Cookbooks	6	9	1	16
Travel	6	7	3	16
Art	4	7	3	14
Best Sellers	4	6	3	13
Humor	1	6	6	13
Current Events	5	4	2	11
Finance	2	8	1	11
Gardening	4	4	1	9
Nature	2	2	4	8
Religion	2	4	2	8
Family/Relationships	5	2	0	7
Business	1	4	2	7
Health	3	3	1	7
Local History	4	2	1	7
Politics	4	1	2	7
Home Decorating	1	4	1	6
Self Help/Psychology	4	1	1	6
Sewing/Needlework	0	5	1	6
Psychic/Paranormal	3	1	1	5
Medical	1	2	1	4
Police/Crime	0	3	1	4
Home Improvement	1	2	0	3
Philosophy	1	1	1	3
Science	0	2	1	3
Sports	0	2	0	2
Music	1	0	0	1
Poetry	0	0	1	1
Technology/Innovations	0	0	1	1



Table 3 Nonfiction Interests of 31 Men by Age Groups

	50 - 59	60 - 69	70 - 89	Total
History	9	6	6	21
Art	6	4	3	13
Science	5	2	6	13
Travel	4	7	2	13
Best Sellers	6	3	3	12
Finance	5	4	3	12
Technology/Innovations	5	1	6	12
Business	3	1	4	8
Humor	4	2	2	8
Local History	3	2	2	7
Philosophy	3	2	2	7
Politics	4	1	2	7
Current Events	3	2	1	6
Home Improvement	4	1	1	6
Music	2	2	2	6
Cookbook	3	2	0	5
Family/Relationships	5	0	0	5
Gardening	2	3	0	5
Medical	1	2	2	5
Nature	1	1	3	5
Police/Crime	2	1	2	5
Religion	3	1	0	4
Self Help/Psychology	3	1	0	4
Sports	2	1	1	4
Health	1	2	0	3
Poetry	1	1	0	2
Psychic/Paranormal	0	1	0	1
Sewing/Needlework	1	0	0	1
Home Decorating	0	0	0	0

Table 4 Nonfiction Preferences of 70 Respondents, by Age Groups

Age	50 - 59	60 - 69	70+	TOTAL
History	16	12	11	39
Travel	10	14	5	29
Art	10	11	6	27
Best Sellers	10	9	6	25
Finance	7	12	4	23
Cookbooks	9	11	1	21
Humor	5	8	8	21
Current Events	8	6	3	17
Science	5	4	7	16
Business	4	5	6	15
Gardening	6	7	1	14
Local History	7	4	3	14
Politics	8	2	4	14
Nature	3	3	7	13
Technology/Innovations	5	1	7	13
Family/Relationships	10	2	0	12
Religion	5	5	2	12
Health	4	5	1	10
Philosophy	4	3	3	10
Self Help/Psychology	7	2	1	10
Home Improvement	5	3	1	9
Medical	2	4	3	9
Police/Crime	2	4	3	9
Music	3	2	2	7
Sewing/Needlework	1	5	1	7
Home Decorating	1	4	1	6
Psychic/Paranormal	3	2	1	6
Sports	2	3	1	6
Poetry	1	1	1	3

Respondents strongest interest in history, as indicated in the tables above, is again reflected in Biography and Fiction preferences. Tables 5,6 & 7 indicate the relative ranking of preferences in biographical works, with historical and political figures receiving the most frequent preferences (70% and 44%). Women indicated a strong interest in authors' biographies as well

(see Table 5). Overall, not as many respondents indicated an interest in biographies (57 of 70) as in the other two types of materials.

Table 5 Biography Interests of 31 Women by Age Group

	50 - 59	60 - 69	70+	Total
Historical Figures	8	9	6	23
Authors	6	7	3	16
Political Figures	4	5	4	13
Entertainers	5	4	3	12
Royalty	4	5	2	11
Artists/Musicians	3	1	2	6

Table 6 Biography Interests of 26 Men by Age Group

	50 - 59	60 - 69	70 - 79	Total
Historical Figures	9	5	3	17
Political Figures	7	2	3	12
Artists/ Musicians	3	5	1	9
Entertainers	1	2	3	6
Authors	2	3	1	6
Other: Scientists	2	1	3	6
Royalty	1	1	1	3

Table 7 Biography Preferences of 57 respondents, by Age group

Age	50 - 59	60 - 69	70 +	TOTAL
Historical Figures	17	14	9	40
Political Figures	11	7	7	25
Authors	8	10	4	22
Entertainers	6	6	6	18
Artists/Musicians	6	6	3	15
Royalty	5	6	3	14
Other: Scientists	2	1	3	6

Interest in fiction among the respondents was high, but not all inclusive (63 of 70 respondents). By far the greatest number liked Mysteries (63% of all women and men indicated an interest in

these, see Table 10). Far below Mysteries, a cluster of several types of fiction of high interest included Best Sellers, Crime/Suspense, Historical Fiction, Classics, and English Mysteries. (44 - 38%) In a third cluster, 27% of all respondents liked Spy/Espionage, and 25% liked Contemporary Fiction (Table 10). Not surprisingly, interest in Romance titles was moderately high only among women, especially for Historical Romances (20%, see Table 8). Overall, differences between genders seem more prominent in fiction rather than nonfiction. While women prefer Family Sagas and Animal Stories, men indicated more interest in Occult/Horror stories, War stories, and Science Fiction. Neither group seemed that keen on Inspirational Fiction or Innocent Romances.

Table 8 Fiction Interests of 35 Women By Age Group

	50 - 59	60 - 69	70 - 89	total
Mysteries	8	9	5	22
Best Sellers	7	9	3	19
English Mysteries	5	8	4	17
Classics	5	6	3	14
Crime/Suspense	6	5	3	14
Historical Fiction	4	5	4	13
Family Sagas	5	2	1	8
Spy Stories/Espionage	4	2	2	8
Contemporary Fiction	3	3	1	7
Romances, Historical	3	1	3	7
Animal Stories	2	4	0	6
Romances, Contemporary	3	2	0	5
Short Stories/Collections	2	2	1	5
Gothic/Romantic Suspense	2	2	0	4
War Stories	3	0	1	4
Science Fiction/Fantasy	1	1	1	3
Inspirational Fiction	0	2	0	2
Romances, Explicit	1	0	0	1
Romances, Innocent	1	0	0	1
Westerns	0	0	1	1
Occult/Horror Fiction	0	0	0	0

Table 9 Fiction Interests of 28 Men by Age Group

	50 - 59	60 - 69	70 - 89	total
Mysteries	6	9	3	18
Crime/Suspense	5	8	1	14
Historical Fiction	4	5	3	12
Classics	7	4	0	11
Best Sellers	3	3	3	9
Contemporary Fiction	3	4	2	9
Spy Stories/Espionage	4	3	2	9
English Mysteries	1	4	2	7
Short Stories/Collections	4	0	2	6
War Stories	2	2	2	6
Science Fiction/Fantasy	3	0	2	5
Romances, Explicit	2	1	1	4
Occult/Horror Fiction	0	2	1	3
Family Sagas	0	1	1	2
Westerns	1	1	0	2
Animal Stories	0	1	0	1
Gothic/Romantic Suspense	0	1	0	1
Inspirational Fiction	0	0	0	0
Romances, Contemporary	0	0	0	0
Romances, Historical	0	0	0	0
Romances, Innocent	0	0	0	0

Table 10 Fiction Preferences of 63 respondents, by Age Group

Age	50 - 59	60 - 69	70 +	TOTAL
Mystery	14	18	8	40
Best Sellers	10	12	6	28
Crime/Suspense	11	13	4	28
Historical Fict.	8	10	7	25
Classics	12	10	3	25
English Mystery	6	12	6	24
Spy/Espionage	8	5	4	17
Contemporary Fiction	6	7	3	16
Short Stories	6	2	3	11
Family Saga	5	3	2	10
War Stories	5	2	3	10
SciFi/Fantasy	4	1	3	8
Animal Stories	2	5	0	7
Romance, Historical	3	1	3	7
Gothic	2	3	0	5
Romance, Contemp.	3	2	0	5
Romance, Explicit	3	1	1	5
Westerns	1	1	1	3
Occult/Horror	0	2	1	3
Inspirational	0	2	0	2
Romance, Innocent	1	0	0	1

## STANDARD AND LARGE PRINT PREFERENCES

The following preferences for type of print were indicated:

Table 11 Type of print preferred

Gender	Standard only	Large Print Only	No Preference
Female	22	2	15
Male	24	3	4
TOTAL	46	5	19

Clearly, reliance on large print only is not indicated by the respondents in the majority of cases (only 7 % indicate a preference for large print); however, 24 respondents (34%) indicate they do not have an aversion to it. This closely matches Lawlor's similar measure of 1 in 3 seniors actually using large print materials. Womens' responses indicate that with age, they increasingly prefer stand and large print or only large print. Results from men's responses show no preference for large print at any age; in fact, 76% of all respondents only like standard print. Of those men indicating no preference or a preference for large print, all were in the 50 - 69 age categories. Thus, where women's and men's reading interests differ significantly, these factors should be considered when choosing large print books.

## DISLIKES

In response to the open-ended question concerning topics which are avoided, some interesting responses were given. Many women indicated a distaste for "lots of sex" and "four-letter words", while their male counterparts who marked an interest in Romance specifically circled the word "explicit". Also, several

women indicated a dislike for what they termed "hard-boiled" fiction. Finally, many respondents, both male and female, mentioned avoiding "anything P.C." (politically correct), but did not mention any titles or authors in particular.

#### ANALYSIS

The purpose of conducting this study was to define and prioritize the informational and recreational reading interests of those Wright Public Library users who are near or have entered the second half of adulthood, i.e. aged 50 or older, in order to help in collection development and management. Results of the study were targeted in particular at evaluating the development and management of the large print collection, which was assumed to be of interest primarily to those over the age of 50 who could not use standard print. However, one primary assumption of this study was found to be in error, based on the results of the survey. Many large print readers who chose to respond and indicated a preference for large print were adults under the age of 50. It appears the assumption that large print books are primarily used by older adults was in error, at least for the Wright Public Library population. An additional 9 female patrons who liked large print were between 18 and 49, and 4 males were under age 50. Actual use by these adults was not measured, but it opens the door to reexamine previous assumptions about the population of users of large print books.

Both males and females were well-represented using the self-assigned participation design of this study, since there was

a roughly equivalent number of responses from both genders (Table 1). Age groups, however, were not well distributed; nearly all fell into the lower ranges, i.e. 50 - 69. A more aggressive approach for reaching the elderly who are not homebound or institutionalized may be necessary to gain input from this segment of the population. Despite the under-representation of those aged 70 or more, at least a few respondents represented this subgroup. Based on everyday observation of the circulation desk, many more elderly adults use the library than the survey results suggest, indicating a flaw in sampling design. Perhaps making person-to-person contact with older individuals would garner a higher sample of this subgroups' preferences.

Opening this survey to all adults, while simplifying the procedure, created a whole set of data which was not intended to be part of the study. Although the data from those aged 49 or younger will be put to use, it was not a planned part of this study. Again, a more focused and direct approach to soliciting a response from the targeted group would be more appropriate and efficient, albeit more time-consuming as well.

Despite these flaws, overall the design proved successful. A good number of responses were collected within a short period of time, in part due to the enthusiasm of the patrons of Wright Library. In fact, several respondents included a note thanking the library for the opportunity to voice their opinions and desires. Another frequent message was to "keep up the good work." The survey was made available in a very prominent, conspicuous place, adjacent to the main circulation desk, so as many patrons



as possible would see it, which also contributed to a relatively high response rate.

The survey form was successful, and did not seem to pose any confusion to the respondents, judging from the very high rate of completion of the 3 page form. Some persons did not respond to the open-ended questions concerning favorite authors as well as subjects they avoided, so the primary reliance on the "checklist" format was an appropriate decision. Interpretation of the questions seemed consistent, in that no responses seemed odd or off track. Reliability and validity of the survey results appears to be moderately high, given the persistent reoccurrence of preferences across gender and age subgroups, as well as the close similarity of the results to those of previous studies. However, because the sample population is too small to be significant (70 from a population of roughly 5500) actual measurement of reliability was not indicated. As noted previously, validity of the results for the upper age groups especially should be questioned, due to the very small sample of the population that participated in the survey. A retesting of this group quite possibly could result in different trends.

In examining the results of the survey, the range of reading interests indicated by this group was expansive. Subcategorizing responses into gender and age categories did yield slight differences in the ranking of preferences; however, a larger sample might have evened them out. One interesting tendency was the more frequent interest in humor with increasing age among women. Also, many more men than women indicated an interest in

science, technology, and science fiction.

This study's findings are largely consistent with the findings of Duncan, whose readers' preferences included History, Travel, Biography, Mystery, and Historical Fiction. Findings by Anderson et al. were not so closely paralleled, but did indicate a wide range of interest in many categories similar to that study. Moshy's findings also showed a strong preference for Biographies, Travel, History, and Fiction, although the percentages differ somewhat from those of the present study.

Preferences for specific topics were clearly indicated for many of the same categories identified by other studies, including History, Travel, Biography, and Mysteries. Of particular importance to the large print collection, strong preferences for all Romance types were not indicated by the majority of respondents, even among females. Therefore a stronger emphasis on Mysteries, with a relative deemphasis on Romances, should be considered. Also, within the genre of Romance, primary emphasis should be placed on Historical (as opposed to Contemporary and Innocent) Romance. Continued emphasis on Best Sellers, Crime/Suspense, Historical Fiction, and Classics is also indicated.

#### SUMMARY

The findings of this survey must be tempered with observational data and circulation records, which, despite the survey results, indicate a high interest in Romance literature among at least a good portion of the large print users. Likewise,

Westerns should not be ignored, but balanced against the stronger interest in Adventure/Suspense and Classics. The fine tuning of the management and development of the large print collection should continue to rely on many sources of input, and modifications in the collection should be monitored and evaluated. Finally, ongoing promotion of large print materials needs to become a fully integrated part of collection management practice. With the intention of giving as many patrons as possible plenty of what they prefer, this survey brings the library one step closer to identifying and providing the best possible resources and services to serve the patrons' needs and interests - and keep them coming back for more!

## CHECKLIST OF READING INTERESTS

Please help us serve you better by completing this checklist of reading interests and then returning it to the box near the circulation desk marked "SURVEY." The more information you provide, the easier it will be for us to ensure that we are choosing materials you need .

1. I like the following types of non-fiction books:

(Check as many as apply, and include comments to the right of each category if you wish.)

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Nature/Wildlife           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Best Sellers (non-fiction) | <input type="checkbox"/> Philosophy                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Poetry                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cookbooks                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Police/Crime              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Current Events             | <input type="checkbox"/> Politics                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family/Relationships       | <input type="checkbox"/> Psychic/Paranormal Events |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Finance (Personal)         | <input type="checkbox"/> Religious/Inspirational   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gardening                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Science                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Health/Fitness             | <input type="checkbox"/> Self-Help/Psychology      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> History                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Sewing/Needlework         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Home Decorating            | <input type="checkbox"/> Sports                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Home Improvement           | <input type="checkbox"/> Technology/Innovations    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Humor                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Travel                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Local History              | Other _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Medical Topics             | Other _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Music                      | Other _____  |

2. From the list above, my three favorite types of non-fiction are:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

3. I enjoy Biographies/Life Stories about:

(If you don't read biographies, please skip to question #5, below)

- Movie Stars/Entertainers
- Authors
- Royalty
- Political Figures
- Artists & Musicians
- Historical Figures
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

4. From the list above, my favorite type of biography is:

1. \_\_\_\_\_

5. I like the following types of fiction:

(Check as many as you wish, include comments to the right of each category)

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Animal Stories            | <input type="checkbox"/> Romances, Contemporary     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Best Sellers (fiction)    | <input type="checkbox"/> Romances, Historical       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mysteries                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Romances, Innocent         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> English Mysteries         | <input type="checkbox"/> Romances, Sensual/Explicit |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gothic/Romantic Suspense  | <input type="checkbox"/> Historical Fiction         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Spy Stories/Espionage     | <input type="checkbox"/> Contemporary Fiction       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Crime/Suspense            | <input type="checkbox"/> Occult/Horror Fiction      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Science Fiction/Fantasy   | <input type="checkbox"/> Family Sagas               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Short Stories/Collections | <input type="checkbox"/> Classics                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Inspirational Fiction     | <input type="checkbox"/> War Stories                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Westerns                  | Other: _____  |

6. From the list above, my favorite types of fiction are:

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_  
3. \_\_\_\_\_ 4. \_\_\_\_\_

7. I particularly enjoy the following **authors** (non fiction or fiction):

8. I **don't** like (please give us information about authors, themes, etc. that you avoid):

In order to better understand the general characteristics of our readers, we would like to ask a few more questions about you. If you are uncomfortable with a question, please just leave it unmarked.

9. AGE GROUP (please circle the correct range for yourself)

18 - 29	60 - 69
30 - 39	70 - 79
40 - 49	80 - 89
50 - 59	90 or more

10. GENDER :    Female                      Male

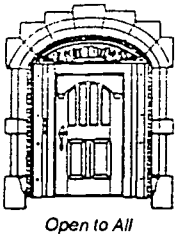
12. I prefer:    Standard Print      Large Print      Both Standard and Large Print

13. I prefer:    Hardcover              Paperback              Both Hardcover and Paperback

A summary of the survey results will be available in the Reference Department after July 15, 1996.

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!**

Code# \_\_\_\_\_



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### READING INTERESTS OF ADULT PUBLIC LIBRARY USERS: A SURVEY

I am a graduate student in the Library and Information Sciences Program at Kent State University. As part of the requirements for my master's degree, I am conducting a research study to gain insight into the reading interests and preferences of adult library users. The results of this study will be used as an aid in evaluating and developing Wright Library's book collection.

Your participation in this survey is invaluable. There is no penalty of any kind if you should choose to not participate in this study or if you would withdraw from participation at any time. Your responses will remain completely confidential and anonymous. Please DO NOT identify yourself on the survey. A summary of the results will be available after July 20, 1996, in the Reference Department of Wright Library.

This research is approved by Wright Memorial Public Library and the Kent State University Human Subjects Review Board, and meets the requirements for ethical research. If you have any questions or comments concerning research at Kent State University, you may contact Eugene P. Wenninger at (330) 672-2851. For further information about this study, please contact me via the Reference Department, 294-7171, or call my faculty advisor, Professor Mary Machin (614) 292-7746.

Suzanne K. Gourlie, Graduate Student

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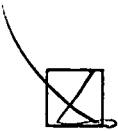


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