

**RURAL READING BEHAVIOR AND LIBRARY USAGE:
FINDINGS FROM A PENNSYLVANIA SURVEY***

Harold W. Willits
Penn State University
State College, PA 16802

and

Fern K. Willits
Professor, Rural Sociology
Penn State University
State College, PA 16802

*The study on which the analysis was based was supported by the PA
Agricultural Experiment Station as part of AES Project #2980.*

**Rural Reading Behavior and Library Usage:
Findings from a Survey of Pennsylvania Residents**

Research and the Rural Library

Rural librarians interested in improving their services and increasing the acceptance of and support for their facilities need to understand the nature of their communities and the characteristics of the citizenry they service. How do rural people differ from more urban folk? What are the demographic and social characteristics of the rural library's clientele?

The first of these questions can be addressed in a general way by consulting general descriptions of rural and urban demographic and lifestyle differences. These writings suggest that small communities located some distance from the more rapidly changing urban centers tend to be socially and economically disadvantaged. Rural areas in general (as contrasted with urban) have lower incomes and proportionately more families in poverty; lower educational levels; an over-representation of older residents; economic instability; and fewer and less diversified community facilities and services (Johnson and Beegle, 1982; Wilkinson, 1988). Moreover, there is

evidence that the attitudes, values and beliefs of rural dwellers differ from those of urban residents. Overall, rural people tend to be more traditional in their morality and personal values, more orthodox in their religious beliefs, and more resistant to change (Willits, Bealer and Crider, 1982). These general descriptions can and should be particularized by the rural librarians by compiling local data from census records and other public documents to elaborate the specific attributes of the local area, and by attention to local politics, news, and community action.

To address the question of the nature of the library's clientele, the field of library science has, through the years, focused attention on user surveys. These studies typically take the form of surveying patrons who visit the libraries of interest during a specific period of time. Data on the personal characteristics of patrons (gender, age, education, income, etc.), their reasons for coming to the library, and their evaluations of the quality of the services they receive can provide valuable information for understanding clients and general service needs. Such studies done on the national, state, or regional level can provide insights into the problems and promises of rural library management; similar local surveys, targeted to specific community circumstances can directly help to pinpoint operational problems, improve services, and enhance the ability of the library staff to address the local situation. However, user surveys, if they are to provide useful information for evaluation and planning, must draw upon valid, representative samples of the library clientele. Failure to do so can result in erroneous conclusions. To obtain a useful sample, it is important that the selection of respondents be through random process. Sample selection should not be left to self selection as when questionnaires are simply placed in a conspicuous place for patron access. Nor should it be left to the discretion of the library staff. Library workers (almost all female) are most likely to ask other women whom they know, particularly those who come to the desk to check in and/or check out materials. In the context of the patron's transactions, what would be more reasonable than to request the person to complete the survey form? Such a sample, almost certainly does not tap the (sometimes numerous) clients who utilize library facilities without visiting the desk. Nor does the concern or commitment of the staff

members involved in the survey project lessen the problem. Indeed, sample selection by individuals who are intent upon obtaining information only from clients whom they see as "typical" users may exacerbate the bias of unrepresentativeness by eliminating from consideration those users who do not fit their ideas of the norm. One wonders if the extremely high incidence of females reported in many user surveys and the overwhelming importance given to the library's function as a provider of "best sellers" does not reflect, at least in some measure, these types of sampling problems.

How then could a more representative sample be obtained? Basically one needs to avoid conscious or unconscious biases in the selection of the sample members. "If all elements in the population have an equal . . . chance of selection, there is an excellent chance that the sample so selected will closely represent the population" (Babbie, 1989:203). A reasonable approximation to such a sample might be obtained, for example, by enlisting the help of a volunteer (or perhaps local Boy Scout or Girl Scout troop members) to sit at the library entrance for 15 to 20 minutes say every two or three hours over the course of a week during the period of library operation and ask all patrons entering to take a few minutes to complete the survey form.

But user surveys (no matter how well conducted) tell only part of the story. Needed also to understand the rural library situation are studies which allow for comparisons between rural and urban persons in regard to library usage and reading behavior and descriptions of non-users as well as users of rural libraries. Research to meet these needs has been limited, at least partially reflecting the greater cost and presumed technical expertise needed to carry out general population surveys. Those studies which have been reported have dealt with the nation as a whole, but have not looked specifically at rural libraries (Yankelovich et al., 1978; Harris, 1979; Wood, 1985). Moreover, the samples, while of sufficient size to allow for general descriptions of national patterns have been too small to permit regional or state-level characterization.

Purpose

The availability of data from a recent statewide survey of Pennsylvania residents provided some information to address the subjects of rural/urban and user/non-user differences in a specific geographic area. The following research questions were addressed:

- 1) How do rural and nonrural people differ in regard to their library usage and reading behavior?
- 2) Among the rural residents, how do users and non-users of library services differ in regard to their personal and social characteristics and their reading behavior?

The Data

During the summer of 1988, a statewide telephone survey of Pennsylvania residents was conducted by the Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology at Penn State University (Willits et al., 1989). More than 95 percent of all households in the northeastern United States have telephones (Thornberry and Massey, 1988). The survey used random-digit dialing to assure contact even with those households that had unlisted numbers. Within each household, one respondent 18 years of age or older was randomly selected to be interviewed. In all, 1881 subjects agreed to participate in the telephone survey. At the end of the interview, each person was asked if he/she would be willing to answer a follow-up mail questionnaire. A total of 1670 persons (89 percent of those interviewed) agreed to participate in the mail survey. Of these 1241 (74 percent) completed and returned the survey form.

The purpose of the overall study was not to assess library usage or reading behavior. As a result, measurement of these ideas were neither as specific nor as comparable to other library research as might be desired. However, the survey instrument did contain a number of items which commented upon these matters, and the sample was both large enough and sufficiently heterogenous to allow for rural/urban comparisons.

To compare rural and urban required a decision as to what should be designated as "rural." While the U.S. Census Bureau defines a "rural" community as one of 2,500 or fewer inhabitants, population sizes of 25,000 or even 50,000 have also been used as the rural-urban delimiter, and some have utilized simply the Census Bureau's Metropolitan and Nonmetropolitan Area distinction. For his rural library survey, Vavrek focused on libraries in Nonmetropolitan Areas which were also located in towns with a population of 25,000 or less (Vavrek, 1989). In the present study, data on the sizes of the respondents' residence communities were used to classify them as "rural" or "urban/suburban." Persons living beyond the suburbs of cities of 50,000 or more in towns with a population of 25,000 or less were classified as "rural" for this analysis. The remainder were classified as "urban/suburban."

Frequency of library usage for each subject was obtained by asking: "How often in the last 12 months did you visit or otherwise use the services of a library in your community?" Answer categories of never, 1-4 times, 5-9 times, 10-19 times, and 20 or more times were provided. Frequency of reading behavior was assessed by the item: "How many hours each week do you spend reading books or magazines?" (less than 2 hours, 2-4 hours, 10-14 hours, 15-19 hours, and 20 or more hours). Subjects were asked to indicate whether they "liked to read" fiction and nonfiction books. In addition they were given a list of eight specific types of books and asked to indicate which they like to read. The list consisted of the following: history, romance, western, military, classics, gardening, crafts, and religious.

The differences between rural and urban/suburban respondents in regard to reading frequency and tastes and the relationships of frequency of library use to reading behavior and selected personal characteristics were examined and tested for statistical significance using chi square analysis. The .05 level was used to determine statistical significant.

Rural--Nonrural Comparisons

Rural people were somewhat less likely than their urban/suburban counterparts to have used the services of a library in their communities.

Approximately 56 percent of the rural respondents reported using the library at least once during the year, and 17 percent were regular users, having had done so ten or more times. Comparable figures for the urban/suburban sample were 65 and 21 percent, respectively. Rural people also spent somewhat less time than urban/suburban residents reading books and magazines each week, with more than one in five indicating that they spent less than two hours reading. Analysis not reported here showed that the relatively low reading and library usage reported by rural dwellers results almost entirely from their overall lower educational level. Rural respondents were more likely than urban/suburban subjects to report that they had failed to complete high school and less likely to have attended college. Less than 1 in 5 of the rural persons sampled were college graduates; while more than 1 in 3 urban/suburban residents had finished college.

Reflecting their lower reading level, rural residents were less likely than others to report that they liked reading fiction (64 percent versus 72 percent) and less likely to indicate that they liked nonfiction (60 percent versus 71 percent). Moreover, there were some differences in the specific types of books rural and nonrural respondents said they liked. Rural residents were less likely than those in urban/suburban areas to report that they liked to read the classics. On the other hand, rural people were more likely than others to read books dealing with religious topics, gardening, crafts, and westerns. There were no significant differences between the two residence groupings in regard to reading history books, romances, and military books. Indeed, except for the classics and gardening books, the percentage of rural and nonrural persons indicating that they liked to read the various types of books did not differ by as much as ten percentage points. History books, crafts books, romances and religious books were named by sizeable proportions of both residence categories; westerns and military books were considerably less popular. Thus, while there were some differences in the types of books liked by rural and nonrural residents, there was also a great deal of similarity between the expressed tastes of rural people and their urban/suburban counterparts.

Regular, Occasional, and Non-Users of Rural Libraries

However, more relevant to the rural librarian than a description of overall rural/urban distinctions in reading frequency and tastes, is a consideration of the differences between those who use rural libraries regularly and those who do so only occasionally or never. Any understanding of these differences may facilitate reaching the non-users or enhancing the frequency of library usage.

Respondents who indicated that they used the services of a public library 10 or more times a year were classified as "regular users," while those indicating one to nine times a year were termed "occasional" in their usage. Only those who said that they had "never" used the library in the last 12 months were classified as non-users. Using these categories, 17 percent of the rural respondents were classified as "regular users," 39 percent were "occasional users," and 44 percent were non-users. The incidence of rural use of library facilities was not only lower than the urban/suburban respondents in the present sample, but also somewhat less than that found in a recent general population survey (Wood, 1985). Moreover, since library use is likely viewed as a socially desirable activity, it may tend to be over-reported in any survey. Hence usage would be expected to be even somewhat lower than these figures suggest.

As expected, hours spent reading was positively related to frequency of library usage, Table 2. Only 37 percent of the non-users, compared to 58 percent of the occasional library users and 78 percent of the regular users indicated that they spent 5 or more hours a week reading. Similarly, regular and occasional users were more likely to say that they liked to read nonfiction. When users and non-users were compared in regard to their liking for specific types of books, only history and the classics showed significant differences by user frequency. In both of these cases, regular library users were the most likely, and non-users the least likely to report liking to read these books. However, there was no significant differences among regular, occasional, and non-users in regard to the proportion of respondents who reported that they liked to read romances, westerns, military, gardening, crafts, or religious books. Such a finding underscores the fact that people in rural communities

(as elsewhere) are not dependent upon libraries to meet their reading interests. The availability of books is so widespread in American culture that, for many types of reading materials, library use is not associated with reading interest. The exception to this idea involved history and the classics--books which would likely be perceived as being both more expensive and less widely available than current offerings in mass outlets.

The relationships of frequency of library use to a number of personal and social characteristics were also assessed, Table 3. More than 7 out of 10 regular users were women, supporting the often observed tendency for women to outnumber men in library usage. However, non-users were also disproportionately female and occasional users were about equally divided between men and women. Thus, with the exception of the small proportion of those who used the library 10 or more times in the last year, gender showed little relationship to library use. Indeed, when the sample was divided into the two categories of users and non-users, there was no statistical difference between male and female rates of usage. The failure to find the profound gender differences reported in most user surveys may reflect the types of sampling problems suggested previously. Certainly the nature of the differences is that which would be anticipated from such sampling bias. It seems reasonable to expect, moreover, that the gender bias in library use historically noted in surveys of the general population may diminish across time. Carpenter (1979:348) noted nearly a decade ago that: "it is possible that some shift in the sex ration [of users] is occurring." Women, because they traditionally did not work outside the home, were seen as having more time for reading and, because they were often the "errand runners" for the household, were likely to visit the library to obtain materials for other family members. The increasing entry of women into the labor force and changing gender-roles within the family may be altering the traditional patterns even in rural areas.

It also seems likely that the nature of the question used to delineate users and non-users may have lessened the gender differences observed in our sample. Most studies ask about the number of visits to the library during a specified period. Our

data asked about the number of times the subject had visited or otherwise used the services of a library. Thus, presumably, household members who utilized materials which were obtained for them should have been classed as "users", even if they never personally visited the library.

Education was highly related to library usage. About three fourths of the non-users had no more than a high school education, and nearly 1 in 5 was a high school dropout. Conversely, 65 percent of the regular users and 48 percent of the occasional users had attended college. Since educational level and reading frequency were expected to be linked with the more highly educated the most likely to spend time reading, reading frequency was controlled to determine whether education had a separate or direct effect on library use in addition to that accounted for by reading. It did not. That is, the impact of differences in education on library use resulted solely from the fact that education was itself associated with more time spent in reading.

There were statistically significant but slight marital status differences in frequency of library use, with regular users having a disproportionate number of single, never married persons, and proportionately fewer marrieds.

Age was also significantly related to usage level. With persons less than 50 years of age over-represented in the regular and occasional user categories, while those 50 years and older (especially those 65 years and older) are over-represented in the non-users. This negative relationship between age and patronage has been reported by other research (Carpenter, 1979; Wood, 1985). Since older citizens are likely to have less formal schooling than do younger ones, part of the effect of age was due to educational differences. However, even when the effect of education was controlled, persons 50 and over were significantly less likely than those younger persons to use the library. Particularly for the elderly, access to library facilities may be a problem and home-based or neighborhood delivery via bookmobile or courier may enhance usage.

Other research has noted that the presence of children in the home is related to the frequency with which adults in the household visit or otherwise use the library

(Wood, 1985). The present analysis elaborated upon that idea in terms of rural people by considering the presence of children in different age categories. The presence of young adult children in the household (18 years of age and older) was not associated with library usage, while the presence of younger children was. This relationship was particularly strong for persons with at least one child between 10 and 17 years of age. This strongly suggests that the adult respondents "used" the library, at least partly, in discharging their parental roles. Indeed, it is possible that their reported "use" of library services did not reflect their own personal recreational or information needs at all but simply the exigencies of their children's school or other obligations. Women were only slightly more likely than men to have their library use affected by the presence of children under 18 in the household.

These data also suggested that regular users do not fit the popular stereotypes of "bookworms" who spend their time alone hunched over the printed page. Library users were found to be significantly more likely than their non-user counterparts to be involved in community organizations, and the frequency of usage increased with increasing participation in such activities. Such a finding is congruent with that reported in a recent nationwide user survey by Vavrek (1989). He found that people belonging to community organizations had greater information needs and were more dependent on the library to satisfy those needs.

Discussion

What can be concluded from these data? For one thing, it seems clear that overall, the residents of rural communities had lower educational levels, read less frequently and used the library less frequently than did their urban/suburban counterparts. Moreover, library usage among rural residents was found to be selective not only for frequent readers, but also for persons under 50 years of age, families with minor children at home, persons with some college training, and individuals who are active in community organizations. While females were not more likely than males to use the services of a library, they were more likely to be "regular" users. Other researchers have reported similar results using national

and/or urban samples. The present study both updates these findings (by focusing on recent data) and particularizes them to rural areas.

Moreover, it provides some information on the reading tastes and preferences of rural and nonrural respondents. Rural residents were less likely than those living in urban/suburban areas to indicate that they "liked to read" both fiction and nonfiction, reflecting their lower reading frequency. However, in some specific content areas, rural respondents expressed higher rates of interest than did nonrural people. Thus, rural residents were more likely than those living in urban/suburban areas to indicate that they liked to read about gardening, crafts, religion, and western adventures; urban/suburban dwellers were more likely to indicate an interest in the classics. There were no significant differences between rural and nonrural respondents in their liking of history, romances, and military books.

However, the most noteworthy observation from these data is not the nature of regular rural library users or their reading preferences, but the low percentage of regular library users and the relative high proportion of non-users. While more than half of the rural respondents in the sample reported that they used the library at least once during the preceding 12 months, only 17 percent were classified as "regular users." Moreover, it should be recalled that "regular users" were defined as people who reported that they used the library "10 or more times" in the last year--an average of less than once a month. Only one in every ten rural respondents were truly "frequent" users, reporting that they used the library 20 or more times in the year. The low incidence of regular (of frequent) use was underscored when the data in the preceding tables were recast. The previous analysis compared the percentages of regular, occasional, and non-users who had certain social characteristics or reading interests. This is the procedure usually used in the library literature to describe the differences among persons in various user categories. However, this method masks the differences in the number of persons in each user category. It is also useful to examine the percentage of each type of person who is a regular, occasional, or non-user, i.e., to calculate the percentages for each cell in the table based on the "row" totals. The same relationships of frequency of use to personal characteristics and

reading behavior are observable, but the low incidence of regular use and the relatively high proportion of non-users in all categories is highlighted. In only two instances (college graduates and those who indicated they spent 15 or more hours a week reading) was the percentage of "regular" users greater than the percentage of non-users and even here the 10-times or more a year users was never a majority of those surveyed. In every other category non-users outnumbered regular users, often by ratios of 2:1 and 3:1; sometimes even more.

Given the fact that libraries are supported by public funds, the limited and selective nature of the user group is troubling. Perhaps the suggestion of Campbell and Metzner (1950:45) voiced nearly four decades ago continues to reflect the current state of affairs:

So far as public response is concerned, it is apparent that the library suffers from being a quiet voice in an increasingly clamorous world. A great many people have virtually forgotten that the library exists. They may have used it extensively during their school years but as adults they rarely think about it.

If this is the case, the question can be asked: What is the rural librarian to do? Some have answered this query by simply dismissing the problem of non-users, arguing that libraries are for people who want to use them (Gaines, 1980; Ballard, 1981). Since user surveys have repeatedly shown that book use and book circulation is the overwhelming reason why people go to libraries, why not focus attention on accumulating books and better serving the current user's needs and interests? Moreover, these people argue that efforts to reach the non-user are doomed and should be avoided as a costly waste of the public treasure.

But isn't the purpose of library service caught in the following statement?

All information must be available to all people in all formats purveyed through all communications channels and delivered to all levels of comprehension. If any of these five qualities is compromised, the whole is enervated, and the national enterprise as a consequence suffers (Kaser, 1978:546).

If this grand goal is taken as policy, the incidence of library non-use serves as a challenge. Rather than simply turning inward to look only at its users, the rural library needs to look outward to those who it does not currently serve, with a wholehearted commitment to outreach, information and referral, and other

nontraditional services (Harris and Sordt, 1981). To do so effectively, there is a need within the field to supplement our knowledge of library users, gleaned from surveys of current patrons, with data from the larger population to obtain information on citizens who frequent the library only rarely or not at all. This current study comments in only a cursory fashion on these ideas. Needed is research to gather detailed data on the motivations, perceptions, values, and personal circumstances of the majority of the rural population who are non-users of library services. Such knowledge should help us to understand this important target group and to enhance services to attract them to the fold of library users.

NOTES

- Babbie, E. *The Practice of Social Research (5th edition)*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1989.
- Ballard, T. H. "More Books, Not Market Surveys," *American Libraries* 12 (1981): 76-78.
- Campbell, A. and C. A. Metzner. *Public Use of the Library*. Institute for Social Research. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 1950.
- Carpenter, Ray L. "The Public Library Patron." *Library Journal* vol. 104, no. 3 (1979): 347-351.
- Gaines, E. "Let's Return to Traditional Library Service: Facing the Future of Social Experimentation." *Wilson Library Bulletin* 55 (1980): 50-53, 78.
- Gallup Organization, Inc. *Book Reading and Library Usage: A Study of Habits and Perceptions*. Chicago: American Library Association, 1978.
- Harris, L. and Associates. *The Playboy Report on American Men: A Survey and Analysis of the Views of American Men in Prime Years, Regarding Family Life, Love and Sex, Marriage and Children, the "outer" Man and "inner" Man, Drug Use, Money, Work, Politics and Leisure*. Chicago: Playboy, 1979.
- Harris, M. H. and J. Sordt. "Libraries, Users, and Librarians: Continuing Efforts to Define the Nature and Extent of Public Library Use." Pp. 109-130 in M. H. Harris (Ed.) *Advances in Librarianship Volume II*. New York: Academic Press, 1981.
- Johnson, N. E. and J. Allen Beegle. "The People." Pp 55-57 in D. A. Dillman and D. J. Hobbs (Eds.) *Rural Society in the U.S.: Issues for the 1980s*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1982.
- Kaser, D. et al. "Toward a Conceptual Foundation for a National Information Policy." *Wilson Library Bulletin* 52 (1978): 545-49.
- Thornberry, O. T., Jr. and J. T. Massey. "Trends in the United States Telephone Coverage Across Time and Subgroups." Pp. 25-50 in R. M. Groves, P. P. Biemer, L. E. Lyberg, J. T. Massey, W. L. Nicholls II, and J. Waksberg (Eds.) *Telephone Survey Methodology*. John Wiley and Sons, 1988.

- Vavrek, B. *Assessing Rural Information Needs*. Clarion, PA: Center for the Study of Rural Librarianship, 1989.
- Wilkinson, K. P. "Socioeconomic Trends Changing Rural America." Pp. 3-15 in *Increasing Understanding of Public Problems and Policies--1987*. Oak Brook, IL: Farm Foundation, 1988.
- Willits, F. K., R. C. Bealer and D. M. Crider. "Persistence of Rural/Urban Differences." Pp. 69-76 in D. A. Dillman and D. J. Hobbs (Eds.) *Rural Society in the U.S.: Issues for the 1980s*. Boulder, Co: Westview Press, 1982.
- Wood, L. A. 1985. "The Gallup Survey: Library Use: An Irregular Habit." *Publishers Weekly* vol. 228, no. 21 (1985): 20.
- Yankelovich, Skelly, and White, Inc. *Reading and Book Purchasing*. New York: The Book Industry Study Group, 1978.

Table 1. Differences between rural and urban/suburban respondents in regard to library usage and reading behavior.

Variable	Rural (N=698)*	Urban/Suburban (N=525)	Chi Square
	Percent		
Times Used Library in the last 12 months			
Never	44.3	35.0	13.15
1-4 times	28.4	29.3	
5-9 times	10.7	14.3	
10-19 times	7.2	8.8	
20 or more times	9.5	12.6	
Hours spent reading each week			
< 2 hours	21.4	16.4	9.08
2-4 hours	26.8	24.2	
5-9 hours	24.1	25.8	
10-14 hours	15.5	20.2	
15 or more hours	12.1	13.4	
Read Fiction			
No	36.5	27.7	10.25**
Yes	63.5	72.3	
Read Nonfiction			
No	40.2	29.4	14.93***
Yes	59.8	70.6	
Read History			
No	55.2	51.7	1.34
Yes	44.8	48.3	
Read Romances			
No	63.1	66.5	1.39
Yes	36.9	33.5	
Read Westerns			
No	81.2	87.1	7.32**
Yes	18.8	12.9	
Read Military			
No	83.0	81.3	.53
Yes	17.0	18.7	
Read Classics			
No	73.1	59.9	23.55***
Yes	26.9	40.1	
Read Gardening			
No	65.2	77.3	20.93***
Yes	34.8	22.7	
Read Crafts			
No	55.2	62.2	5.86*
Yes	44.8	37.8	
Read Religious			
No	64.2	71.0	5.99*
Yes	35.8	29.0	

* Significant .05
 ** Significant .01
 *** Significant .001

*Number of cases varies slightly due to missing data.

Table 2. Differences in reported reading behavior of nonusers, occasional users, and regular users of rural libraries

Variable	Nonusers (N=309) ^a	Occasional Users (N=273)	Regular Users (N=116)	Chi Square
Percent				
Hours spent reading each week				
<2	31.2	17.3	4.3	79.26***
2-4 hours	32.1	25.1	17.4	
5-9 hours	17.2	28.8	31.3	
10-14 hours	12.3	17.0	20.9	
15 or more hours	7.1	11.8	26.1	
Like to read fiction				
No	43.4	35.9	18.1	23.32***
Yes	56.6	64.1	81.9	
Like to read nonfiction				
No	57.0	28.6	21.6	68.35***
Yes	43.0	71.4	78.4	
Like to read history books				
No	63.4	51.3	43.1	17.03***
Yes	36.6	48.7	56.9	
Like to read romances				
No	63.4	62.3	62.1	.11
Yes	36.6	37.7	37.9	
Like to read westerns				
No	80.9	78.8	87.9	4.54
Yes	19.1	21.2	12.1	
Like to read military books				
No	86.1	78.8	83.6	5.53
Yes	13.9	21.2	16.4	
Like to read the classics				
No	85.8	66.3	54.3	52.21***
Yes	14.2	33.7	45.7	
Like to read gardening books				
No	66.7	60.8	72.4	5.28
Yes	33.3	39.2	27.6	
Like to read craft books				
No	55.3	56.4	53.4	.29
Yes	44.7	43.6	46.6	
Like to read religious books				
No	61.2	68.9	62.9	3.89
Yes	38.8	31.1	37.1	

*** Significant .001

^aNumber of cases varies slightly due to missing data.

Table 3. Difference in personal/social characteristics of nonusers, occasional users, and regular users of rural libraries.

Characteristics	Nonusers (N=309)*	Occasional Users (N=273)	Regular Users (N=116)	Chi Square
Gender				
Male	45.0	49.5	28.4	14.80***
Female	55.0	50.5	71.6	
Education				
< High school grad	19.1	11.0	5.2	74.64***
High School grad	55.7	40.7	29.3	
Some college	16.2	24.5	29.3	
College Grad	9.1	23.8	36.2	
Marital status				
Married	65.4	69.1	55.2	10.25*
Divorced, widowed, separated	21.0	14.7	23.3	
Single, never married	13.6	16.2	21.6	
Age				
< 35 years	26.5	34.2	30.2	43.47***
35-49 years	18.1	32.0	38.8	
50-64 years	31.1	16.9	21.6	
65 years and over	24.3	16.9	9.5	
Children < 10 years at home				
None	82.5	77.3	66.4	12.79**
One or more	17.5	22.7	33.6	
Children 10-17 years at home				
None	90.0	73.6	72.4	30.87***
One or more	10.0	26.4	27.6	
Children 18 years or older at home				
None	86.7	89.0	88.8	.80
One or more	13.3	11.0	11.2	
Participate in community organizations				
Very active	9.8	12.5	17.4	18.21**
Somewhat active	20.3	31.6	30.4	
Not active or don't belong	69.8	55.9	52.2	

* Significant .05

** Significant .01

*** Significant .001

*Numbers of cases varies slightly due to missing data.