THE SOVIET READER: DATA FROM SIP

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Russians have always been perceived as avid readers, and Western observers have often commented on the importance of literature in the Soviet Union. In a society where communication and expression are restricted, literature plays a crucial role as a channel for the exchange of ideas and as an outlet for social criticism—a tradition that has carried over from nineteenth century Russia into contemporary Soviet life. The special status of literature has been reinforced by the Soviet authorities, who seek to turn its didactic potential to their own advantage. This combination of cultural tradition and official policy has contributed to a deep respect for books and writers and generated an interest in the events of the literary world that is unparalleled in the West.

Unfortunately, it has never been possible to systematically examine specific aspects of reading in the USSR. Is it true that Russians read a great deal? What kinds of personal reasons do Russians give for their interest in reading, and how can their literary tastes be characterized? Do certain factors influence an individual's choice of books or the amount he reads? If so, we should be able to identify readerships. How important is samizdat? Is the average educated Russian motivated to read by lofty intellectual concerns and an appreciation for literature's traditional critical function, or does he read purely for entertainment? Using data collected by the Soviet Interview Project (SIP), we have attempted to explore some of these questions in order to create a more complete and accurate portrait of the Russian reader during the late Brezhnev years. After a brief review of the existing literature on the subject and a discussion of the relevant methodological issues, we will present the results of our research.

Studies of Soviet Reading Patterns

Research on Soviet reading habits has been severely limited by the scarcity and unreliable nature of data, and only a few Western studies of reading and readerships in the
Soviet Union have been conducted. Maurice Friedberg's two books, *Russian Classics in Soviet Jackets*¹ and *A Decade of Euphoria*,² are probably the most well-known. They provide excellent discussions of particular authors and works, both those which have been found acceptable and those which have presented problems for the Soviet publishing and censorship authorities. Friedberg's work has also contributed some thoughtful insights into the reasons for the popularity of certain books and authors among Soviet readers, and he has incorporated Soviet data into his work to support his conclusions. However, his research differs from ours in that it deals primarily with the ways in which issues of policy and ideology affect publication and censorship; in addition, his discussions focus on non-Soviet (i.e., foreign and pre-Soviet Russian) fictional literature, while we have attempted to study a variety of types of fiction and non-fiction.

In *The Russians and Their Favorite Books*, Klaus Mehnert attempts to identify the twenty-four most popular Soviet authors.³ His research is based on an informal survey (consisting of a list of authors' names to be pared down or added to, depending upon the respondent's preferences) which he administered to various individuals he encountered during his visits to the Soviet Union. His conclusions are also derived from visits to libraries and discussions with librarians. These efforts, while commendable, are somewhat unsystematic, and the issue of specific readerships is not addressed at any length. In addition, he does not treat the Russian classics or foreign literature in any detail. However, his book offers a good overview of many popular Soviet writers and their work.

Two other important studies are Jenny Brine's work on reading as a leisure activity⁴ and Gregory Walker's consideration of Soviet readerships.⁵ Both are thorough examinations which rely on Soviet statistics for their conclusions; however, as Walker points out,

> The methodological information furnished by even book-length accounts of research is often insufficient to allow the reliability or representativeness of responses to be gauged. The problem is naturally even greater in the many cases where results are summarized or simply recounted impressionistically in journal articles.⁶

Several large-scale Soviet studies of reading have been conducted in recent years; two important ones are *Kniga i chtenie v zhizni nebol'shikh gorodov*,⁷ and *Kniga i chtenie v zhizni sovetskogo sela*.⁸ *Chelovek posle raboty*⁹ is an examination of time budgets and leisure time which also includes some information on reading. Unfortunately, these and other surveys focus on specific sub-populations, and therefore their results cannot be generalized to the Soviet population as a whole. Other Soviet data, including some earlier studies, suffer from the problems to which Walker has referred. On the whole, there has been very little data with which the Western researcher can work.

We believe that this paper represents a significant contribution to the study of Soviet reading habits. Our data have been collected and analyzed using the most accurate and sophisticated methods available. We can control for potential sources of bias in the sample in

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⁶ Ibid., p. 162.


order to generalize our findings as broadly as possible. The results of our research provide
guidelines for judging the reliability and validity of Soviet data; but our research also goes
beyond Soviet work by offering the first systematic study of issues which Soviet researchers
cannot tackle, such as less-than-desirable reader preferences, or the extent of samizdat
reading.

Data and Methods

The data used below are the final product of the Soviet Interview Project General
Survey, an undertaking which involved interviews with almost 2,800 Soviet emigrants during
the second half of 1983. Most of the emigrants selected for interviews were between the ages
of 21 and 70 at the time of their arrival in the US. All had arrived between January 1, 1979,
and April 30, 1982. The National Opinion Research Center (NORC) was responsible for
carrying out the field work, and great care was taken with the development of the
questionnaire, formulation of survey questions, translation of the surveys into each
respondent's native language (Russian in all but ten cases) and training of the interviewers.

The "core" section of the interview was administered to the entire sample of 2,793
respondents, and each respondent also completed one of three "supplement" interviews
containing questions on various specific topics such as crime, foreign policy, standard of
living, birth control, religious practices, media, and leisure activities. Because information on
reading patterns was gathered through one of these "supplements," it is available only for
about one-third of the entire sample, about 1,000 respondents. For most purposes, this

10 The following discussion of methodology is not essential to an understanding of the
remainder of the paper, and some readers may choose to skip ahead to the discussion of
results. However, we believe it is important to be as explicit as possible about the nature
of the data, their reliability, and the extent to which they can be generalized, and we have
therefore provided this section for any interested readers. More detailed information on
the development of the survey and collection and use of the data is available in the set of
Working Papers written by researchers associated with SIP; see references.
sub-sample is large enough to ensure statistically reliable results.

Statistics in general must be treated with caution, and it should be made clear from the very beginning that both selection and response bias are potentially significant problems with this data set. Obviously, one cannot hope to draw conclusions about the entire population of the USSR on the basis of these data; but even when the referent population (that is, the population to which data from the sample can be generalized) is defined as "the adult European population in large and medium-sized Soviet cities," several difficulties remain. These problems and the ways in which we have attempted to deal with them will be outlined below.

The first difficulty is that emigrants are not necessarily representative of even the referent population as defined here; among other things, emigrants are more likely to be Jewish and better educated. This discrepancy has been rectified to some degree by the sampling procedure, which involved deliberate oversampling of non-Jews as well as of those whose education, city size, and region matched more closely those of the general Soviet population. The resulting stratified random sample has characteristics that are closer to those of the referent population than would be the characteristics reflected in a probability sample, which would accurately represent only the frame, or emigrant, population. It should be pointed out, though, that this stratified sample was not intended to match the Soviet referent population exactly; rather, the purpose of stratifying was to ensure that subgroups of the Soviet population who do not make up a significant proportion of the emigrant population were nevertheless adequately represented in the sample.

A second problem is the fact that emigrants as a group are likely to differ from the

Soviet population as a result of their decision to emigrate, the experience of the emigration process, and their exposure to foreign cultures and countries. In other words, even if emigrants are no different from the rest of the Soviet population before their decision to emigrate, it is at least possible that they have been affected in important ways by the consequences of their decision. Once again, a conscious effort has been made to correct for this kind of bias: during the interviews, respondents were asked a series of questions in order to define their "last normal period," that is, the period of five years preceding either the month in which they applied to emigrate, or the month in which plans to emigrate actually changed their lives, if that occurred before the application was made. During the remainder of the interview, respondents were instructed to refer to their "last normal period" and to answer questions on the basis of their experience during that time. Research has demonstrated that memory decay does not seem to be a significant problem; members of the same household (interviewed separately and often simultaneously) were discovered to agree closely in their answers to both objective and subjective questions.12

It is also heartening that SIP sample respondents were found to correspond closely to the Soviet population in a comparison of economic data from SIP with Soviet data.13 Moreover, the sample population can by no means be regarded as a group of true dissidents. Very few reported that they participated in any unorthodox political activity during their "last normal period"; the majority gave the emigration of family and friends, rather than a political motivation, as their main reason for emigrating; and a series of "control" questions, included as a check for bias, revealed that most respondents attempted to be objective in discussing

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their experiences in the Soviet Union and were not reluctant to identify ways in which they were disappointed with life in the US, as well as ways in which the US might learn from the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{14} It is also worth mentioning that most emigrants were not solely responsible for their decision to emigrate: two-thirds declared that they only shared in or played no significant role in the decision.

Caution should be exercised when working with these data, but the results of various tests for possible biases are encouraging and efforts to control for them seem to have been successful. It is also important to note that, for the purposes of the present study, the problems of response and selection bias are perhaps of less concern than they might be for other types of research. First of all, as will be demonstrated below, our data on reading habits are consistent with the results of previous, less systematic studies and impressions. Second, while some degree of response bias can be expected when respondents are unwilling to discuss or to be candid about certain matters, it is hard to imagine why respondents would have felt that they could not be candid in discussing their reading habits.

Third, while unorthodox political views might be expected to influence an emigrant’s reading habits, such views, as mentioned above, are not particularly pronounced in our sample. Moreover, judging from a series of tests we performed, there does not appear to be a statistically significant difference in either type or number of books read between those who emigrated for clearly political reasons and those who did not. (We defined political reasons as "political dissatisfaction," "freedom of speech and the press," "general lack of freedom," and "political attraction to the US"; nationality problems and religious discrimination were not considered political reasons.) Fourth, while the sample is probably better educated than the referent population, and while this factor does influence reading habits, it is possible in many cases to control for the effects of education. Finally, part of the present research relies on

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., p. 28.
linear regression analysis; despite discrepancies between the sampled population and the referent population, this statistical technique will more accurately reflect features of the latter by measuring relationships among variables rather than univariate distributions.

Researchers working on the Soviet Interview Project have devised a system of weights in an attempt to make the sample "look" more like the referent population. However, many statisticians are reluctant to use weights because their effect on the statistical results is not well understood. This problem is particularly severe in the case of the SIP data set where the exact dimensions along which the emigrant population differs from the referent population are not known; consequently any weighting scheme designed to render the sample representative of the Soviet referent population will be quite speculative. In contrast, weighting to the frame population is not speculative because the ways in which it differs from the sample are known exactly. With this in mind, analyses other than regressions were conducted using data weighted to the frame. Regressions, on the other hand, were first run using the unweighted data, and the results were then checked using each of the weighting systems. The fact that the results corresponded closely in all cases suggests that they are quite robust despite possible selection biases.

In order to draw conclusions about the referent population, we have tried to indicate ways in which it can be expected to differ from the frame. When the direction of bias can be predicted, we can generalize to the referent population by setting a probable upper or lower limit on a particular variable. For instance, if only 20 percent of respondents reported attending unofficial cultural events such as poetry readings, and less than 5 percent of those who attended took a leading role in the activity, it is reasonable to conclude that an even smaller percentage of the referent population would have participated in or led such activities.

We hope that this brief discussion has illuminated not only some of the problems encountered when working with the data, but also ways in which they can be overcome. The intention here has been to alert the reader to potential difficulties, while at the same time arguing that valid results can be obtained by using the data with caution. The fact remains that knowledge of all aspects of life in the USSR is limited, and any attempt to obtain more information must be regarded as worthwhile.

"[T]he problems of sampling and bias were enormous," remarked Joseph Berliner, referring to the similar 1950-53 Harvard Project, "but the hungry man does not refuse to eat because the food is not what he would have ordered." 

Extent of and Reasons for Reading

Soviet writers and researchers never seem to tire of reminding us that theirs is a nation of readers, and Western observers are always amazed by the number of Muscovites who can be seen riding the subway engrossed in books, or by taxi drivers who pick up Tolstoy or Pushkin while waiting for passengers. Western discussions of Soviet reading habits likewise report that reading is an important activity for most Russians; they read a great deal and are proud of it. Over time, such claims and observations have combined to create an image—particularly intimidating for culture-wary Americans—of Russians as avid readers, hunched over the well-thumbed pages of War and Peace or Crime and Punishment, or selling prized possessions for a barely legible samizdat manuscript. The evidence provided by our research demonstrates that this traditional image does hold up under careful scrutiny—but only in part.

When asked whether or not they read books or "thick journals" (these are an important source of contemporary fiction in particular) for pleasure during their last normal period, 86.8

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percent of respondents in the sample said that they did. This finding is consistent with the results of a Soviet study, which demonstrates that 81.6 percent of respondents with complete secondary education, and 82.5 percent of those with higher education (groups that correspond closely to our sample in terms of education, since over 83 percent of the SIP respondents have secondary or higher schooling) are regular readers of books.\(^\text{17}\)

Further confirmation of the SIP data is provided by an examination of figures obtained in the 1975-6 survey of towns in the Sverdlovsk region;\(^\text{18}\) Table 1 shows a close correspondence in the average number of books read by respondents in both surveys.

See Table 1, p. 43

In contrast to the popularity of reading among Russians, the Harris Survey conducted in 1973 reveals that only 38 percent of American adults reported reading as a leisure time activity; even among the college-educated adults surveyed, only 46 percent listed reading.\(^\text{19}\) It may be that Russians simply enjoy reading more than Americans; however, it is also possible that the popularity of reading reflects a lack of quality, variety, or accessibility of other leisure time activities. Friedberg argues that reading may offer a kind of individual, intellectual privacy that is particularly valuable in a society where conformity and the

\(^\text{17}\) B. Grushin, *Svobodnoye vremya: aktual'nye problemy* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Mysl,") 1967), p. 81. Cited in Brine, p. 247. This is obviously not a precise comparison, since reading for pleasure is not necessarily "regular" reading (occurring at least several times a month). However, we think that the categories are close enough to warrant the comparison.


\(^\text{19}\) *Harris Survey Yearbook of Public Opinion, 1973*, (New York: Louis Harris and Associates, Inc., 1976), pp. 442-43. The Harris Survey question is worded somewhat differently from the question in the SIP interviews, but the intent and substance are similar enough that this general comparison is justified.
collective are emphasized.\textsuperscript{20}

We were curious about which factors influenced whether or not a person read books for pleasure in the SIP sample. Predictably, education had the strongest effect: as education increases, there is a greater likelihood that an individual will read for pleasure. Occupation, too, has an effect: leaders, managers, engineers and other professionals are very likely to read, while semi-skilled laborers and service workers, and industrial and agricultural workers are somewhat less likely to do so. However, occupation as a variable seems to be a proxy for education: when the effects of education are controlled, there is little variation among occupational categories in the percent who read for pleasure.

Gender has a small effect: females are very slightly more likely to read for pleasure than males. The effect of age is also interesting: for each age group, the percent who read for pleasure remains consistently close to the overall percentages, except for a peak in the 30-39 age group and a drop in the 60-74 age group. Like occupation, this is largely a reflection of the effects of education: the 30-39 age group is the best-educated, and the 60-74 group has the overall lowest level of educational attainment. However, the difference in education between the 30-39 age group and the 40-49 age group is not commensurate with the difference in likelihood of reading for pleasure, implying that age may have an independent effect. Soviet researchers have arrived at the same conclusion; they suggest that the effect of age may in part be accounted for by a transfer of interest from books to newspapers.\textsuperscript{21} Age may also bring a decline in health or eyesight, making reading more difficult.

The impressively large percentages of people who read for pleasure led us to wonder about the reasons respondents themselves might give for their interest. Unfortunately, the

\textsuperscript{20} Friedberg, \textit{Russian Classics}, p. 151.

scope of the survey did not permit the inclusion of specific questions on motivations for reading; but respondents were asked about their attitudes toward culture and the arts in general, and their responses may shed some light on the subject. Only about 29 percent of respondents thought that the purpose of the arts and culture was to entertain or give pleasure; almost 50 percent believed that the arts should make people aware of moral and social issues, and the rest responded that the purpose of the arts was a combination of the two. From these figures, one might conclude that interest in the arts is motivated by fairly serious reasons, with entertainment playing a secondary role.

However, a comparison of these responses with the answers to a slightly different question yields some revealing results. When asked about their own personal reasons for being interested in the arts, over 60 percent responded that cultural activities were entertaining or helped them to get away from the worries of daily life. Only about 30 percent said that their interest was due to the fact that the arts can show life as it is or help to deal with moral and social problems. In view of the fact that the Soviet authorities constantly stress the importance of the educative and formative potential of the arts, and of literature in particular, it is noteworthy that a majority point to entertainment as their primary reason for interest.

One might argue that the respondents in our sample are too disillusioned by censorship and the generally limited availability of interesting, intellectually provocative material in the Soviet Union to believe that books can offer anything other than entertainment, and that a survey of Russians still living in the USSR would produce different results. In this context, however, it is useful to recall that the sample is by no means a group of disaffected dissidents. It should also be remembered that, while publication of innovative Soviet and modern foreign fiction may be curtailed, Russian and foreign classics as well as non-fiction can be obtained in Soviet libraries, if not in bookstores. Thus, it seems unlikely that individuals would have been unable to find any reading material that they felt would enrich
them morally and intellectually—had this been their main concern.

An analysis of reasons for interest in the arts in terms of several demographic variables showed that age, occupation, and education had little effect on the reason given. However, gender does have an effect: women are slightly more likely than men to view the arts as a means of escape. This may reflect the fact that their burdensome daily routine leaves them little time for themselves; it is logical that getting away from daily life would be a more important concern for women than it would be for men, who have more leisure time and thus can more easily satisfy their intellectual as well as personal and recreational needs. This difference in attitudes might also explain why women are somewhat more likely to read fiction.

It seems reasonable to assume that attitudes toward literature and reading would be similar to those toward culture in general; in other words, people may think that they ought to read for a "serious" purpose which will further their intellectual development, while in fact they probably read more for sheer pleasure and entertainment. This is not to say that they do not read for reasons related to their intellectual and moral development, but merely that this is not necessarily their primary goal.

The percentages of those who read fiction and non-fiction support this idea: of those who read books for pleasure, almost all read fiction, while the non-fiction readers are a significantly smaller, though still substantial, proportion. In addition, detective and mystery novels and science fiction were quite popular, despite the fact that these types of literature are generally considered light and entertaining, not "highbrow" or intellectually stimulating. All of this suggests that, while Russians may read more than other people, their reading does not necessarily constitute "high culture"; even though, as we will see, literary classics enjoy great popularity, they are probably being read as much for relaxation and escape as for

literary appreciation. Thus, while the Russian passion for books may be as consuming as the traditional image suggests, it is evidently motivated by factors more mundane than a thirst for great literature or a desire for personal development. Although little work has been done on the topic of mass culture in the Soviet Union, and the orthodox view is that it does not exist, it seems clear that such a mass culture has developed and that reading is an important part of it.

Readers' Preferences for Fiction and Non-fiction

The Soviet censorship and publishing institutions are characterized by a cautious approach and a general reluctance to experiment. This means that the reader is restricted in his choice of books to standard, tried-and-true fare. As a glance at the shelves of any Soviet bookshop will show, good, interesting works are in short supply, while the reader muddles through piles of the dull, tedious, and unimaginative contemporary fiction and non-fiction that is constantly being turned out. The current "book hunger" (knizhnyi golod) is a clear indication that the Soviet reader is dissatisfied and frustrated with the material available to him.\(^{23}\) anyone who has spent time in the Soviet Union will recall the crowds that instantly materialize when a bookstore receives a few copies of some choice reading material. Taking into account this state of affairs—which seemed to be entirely at odds with readers' desires for books that provide entertainment and escape—we examined preferences for individual categories of fiction and non-fiction.

The results of the Harvard Project, a similar study of Soviet emigrants conducted in the early 1950's, demonstrated that during the 1940's "Russian classics were the most popular category among the belles-lettres."\(^{24}\) Referring to the 1950's and 1960's, Friedberg remarks


\(^{24}\) Friedberg, *Russian Classics*, p. 156.
that "Conversations with scores of Westerners who have visited the Soviet Union since Stalin's death support the conclusion one reaches from an examination of the Soviet publishing statistics--the Russian classics continue as the favorite reading of Soviet citizens."25

Describing a visit to a Soviet school in the mid-1950's, Mehnert notes that he was greatly impressed by the vast amounts of time and effort put into the teaching of Russian literature. He writes that by endorsing the Russian classics, the authorities hope to awaken the patriotism that develops out of a reverence for national tradition; they also seek to exploit literature as a means of inculcating certain moral standards--humanism and obedience--that are necessary to the smooth functioning of the state. However, Mehnert points out that for the individual, literature fulfills an even more important function, and one which is in fact at odds with the aims of the state: it acts as an antidote to the "materialistic and utilitarian atmosphere" that prevails in the USSR. Concerted efforts to set even the classics into a Marxist-Leninist framework cannot block the direct communication that occurs between author and reader "when the teacher finally shuts his mouth and the pupil opens the book for himself."26

Similarly, Friedberg argues that the popularity of the classics can be explained by the fact that they offer the reader emotional and intellectual sustenance which cannot be derived from Soviet works. Foreign literature, he notes, also fulfills this function:

[F]or tolerance, love, sympathy, solace, for advice without moralizing, the Soviet reader has no alternative but to turn again to the old classics of Russian literature and to foreign belles-lettres in translation. For, from the point of view of the Soviet reader, foreign belles-lettres...in essence resemble the Russian classics. The foreign authors, too, sympathize with the underdog and hate the oppressor; they also defend the individualist and the non-conformist in his conflict with intolerant society; they, too, affirm the tragic


element in human lives.\textsuperscript{27}

Despite the fact that Soviet literature has improved a great deal in both variety and quality since Friedberg made this observation, our data show that both Russian and foreign classics continue to play an important role in readers' lives. Table 2 displays the percentages of respondents who read each of various categories of fiction (respondents could choose more than one).

See Table 2, p. 44

This list underscores the popularity of the Russian classics, but even more striking is the popularity of foreign fiction. The reasons that Friedberg offers to explain the popularity of the classics still seem valid. Given what we now know about motivations for reading, we might add to his comment the more prosaic fact that both the Russian classics and foreign literature satisfy the reader's desire to escape from contemporary Soviet reality—as well as from the orthodox depictions of that reality that are an essential feature of socialist realist literature.

In contrast to Friedberg's findings, though, our data demonstrate that the Russian classics may no longer be the most popular type of fiction.\textsuperscript{28} This is borne out by the

\textsuperscript{27} Friedberg, \textit{Russian Classics}, pp. 165-66.

\textsuperscript{28} One might conclude that an emigre sample such as ours would be particularly interested in the West, and that foreign literature would not be as popular in a sample of non-emigre Soviet citizens. This is an important concern, and we have attempted to test for such bias to the extent possible. We compared respondents whose main reason for leaving was that other family members were emigrating with those who left because of a particular interest in the West or because of dissatisfaction with life in the USSR, under the assumption that the former group would behave more like a group of ordinary Soviets. We discovered that they were slightly less likely to read foreign literature, but this difference disappeared when age and education were controlled. In other words, the observed difference in behavior resulted from differences in age and education, and not from a different attitude toward the West. We also checked whether or not differences in reading behavior were correlated with varying degrees of participation in the decision to emigrate; they
popularity not only of the foreign classics but also of modern foreign fiction and, as will be seen below, by the desire for more of both of these types of fiction.

Two explanations for these differing results are possible. The first is that the gradually increasing availability of translations of foreign literature and general information about the West that has characterized the period since Stalin's death has served to intensify interest. Journals such as *Innostranniaia literatura*, founded during the "Thaw," have excited a great deal of interest. Original foreign works have become more readily available since the 1977 decision to import for retail sale books from Western and Third World countries. In addition, many translations of foreign works are published in the USSR, but there are never enough to meet demand.

With this in mind, we might speculate that the Soviet reader of the 1970's and 1980's is motivated to choose foreign literature not only by a quest for truth and for a more human perspective, but also by a curiosity about the West—a curiosity no doubt heightened by the tantalizingly inadequate trickle of information. It is likely that the increased availability of Western literature has been both a response to demand and a factor contributing to that demand; it is difficult to determine which is the more important process.

On the other hand, we cannot ignore the fact that respondents in our sample are, on the whole, better-educated than the average Soviet citizen; thus, the second explanation for the greater popularity of foreign literature among SIP respondents centers on sample selection bias. And, indeed, our analyses show that reading of both foreign classics and modern foreign literature is related to educational level. However, across the four highest educational categories (in other words, once a respondent has obtained an attestat or has completed his

were not. All of these results are encouraging, but of course we cannot maintain that the sample as a whole is not biased; even those emigrants who left for family reasons and were not involved in the decision to emigrate may nevertheless have been more interested in Western culture than ordinary Soviet citizens.

Walker, p. 170.
secondary specialized training), there is little difference in the extent of interest in foreign literature. It may be incorrect to impute an overwhelming preference for foreign literature to the Soviet population as a whole, particularly in view of the nature of our sample (see note 28). But since Soviet studies of citizens with a basic education also attest to the popularity of foreign literature, the preferences for foreign fiction observed here may not be peculiar to emigrants; among Soviet citizens with a secondary education, foreign literature may well rival the Russian classics in popularity.

While the popularity of foreign literature may be surprising, preferences for specific foreign authors were not. The perennial favorites of Soviet citizens appeared to be no less popular among SIP respondents: the fifteen or so most popular authors included London, Dreiser, Hemingway, and Feuchtwanger at the top, followed by Remarque, Dumas, Zola, Maupassant, O. Henry, Balzac, Shakespeare, Twain, Dickens, Victor Hugo, and Conan Doyle. The ranking of authors differs somewhat from the rankings reported by Friedberg, but the authors are mainly the same. The list also serves to show that, as was true in the 1960's, readers identifying favorite foreign authors overwhelmingly choose Western European or American ones. Of course, availability influences the choice of authors as much as actual preferences.

What was striking about the list of favorite foreign authors—as well as about the list of favorite Russian or Soviet authors—was the sheer diversity of preferences. Respondents

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30 This is not to suggest that the same kinds of foreign fiction will appeal to readers at each educational level. For example, the circulation of Innostrannaya literatura soared as a result of the journal's decision to publish Arthur Hailey's Hotel; but when William Faulkner's Light in August was published the following year, readers complained to the editor and cancelled their subscriptions. (Garrard and Garrard, p. 80.)


32 Friedberg, A Decade of Euphoria, pp. 65-66, 352.
Table 3. Favorite Russian and Soviet Authors Identified by Ten or More Respondents, in Order of Popularity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Number of respondents who chose each author</th>
<th>Percent*</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lev Tolstoy</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>28.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pushkin</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>17.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chekhov</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>8.4</td>
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<td>Dostoyevsky</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.8</td>
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<td>Esenin</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gorky</td>
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<td>2.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bulgakov</td>
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<td>2.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lermontov</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexei Tolstoy</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pasternak</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1.6</td>
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<td>1.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ehrenburg</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turgenev</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*N = 768 (number of fiction readers)
identified a total of 100 different foreign authors and 82 different Russian and Soviet authors as their favorites. Both lists contain many contemporary authors, including some fairly obscure names, in addition to the more frequently identified and well-known authors. Nevertheless, preferences for Russian and Soviet writers center on the great authors of the nineteenth century and on a few highly respected Soviet names. Table 3 shows the actual ranking of the most popular authors.

Americans generally regard Dostoyevsky as the greatest Russian writer; they are usually surprised to learn that, as the data show, he tends to be less popular in the USSR than Pushkin and Tolstoy. Gogol is conspicuously absent (chosen by only three people in our sample), but otherwise the rankings for nineteenth century authors displayed here closely resemble those reported by Friedberg. There is less consistency in the ranking of Soviet authors, but Gorky, Bulgakov, Alexei Tolstoy, Paustovsky, and Ehrenburg are all mentioned by either Friedberg or Mehnert as being among the top favorites. When it comes to specific authors, the prevailing tastes of Soviet citizens are traditional and unadventurous even in our unusually well-educated sample; we can expect the referent population to be even more predictable and traditional in its preferences.

Returning to the list of types of fiction read by SIP respondents (Table 2), we can see that works about the Revolution and the Great Patriotic War are relatively unpopular. Yet these are probably the most readily available of all the types of literature on the list; writers are encouraged to incorporate these topics into their work and readers are exhorted to read

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33 Ibid., pp. 350-51.
such books. Since these subjects provide an excellent background against which Soviet values and virtues can be displayed in an unambiguous, black-and-white manner, books that deal with them are often published in very large quantities. Their lack of popularity among SIP sample respondents may well be a comment on their general quality.

Table 4 compares the popularity of specific types of Soviet fiction for two Soviet samples and the SIP respondents.

See Table 4, p. 46

The table confirms general conclusions about the Soviet population based on the SIP data. It also serves to reveal features of groups that cannot be studied using the SIP data alone. None of the groups shows a pronounced interest in fiction dealing with the Revolution, although it is somewhat more popular among rural readers. World War II novels are significantly more popular among rural readers. These preferences may point to a generally lower level of educational attainment among inhabitants of rural areas, since these types of fiction are often more accessible to those with less sophisticated literary tastes; or, such preferences may be attributed to a lack of variety in the literature available outside urban areas.

On the other hand, SIP respondents read substantially more detective fiction, science fiction, and poetry than the respondents in the other surveys; their preference for at least the latter two categories can probably be traced to their relatively higher level of educational attainment. This supports Brine's conjecture—based on the impression that science fiction is indeed popular in the Soviet Union, despite the low figures for reading of science fiction that appear in the two Soviet surveys—that reading of science fiction is "concentrated in particular groups—particularly younger people, the better educated, and people with a training in science
Non-fiction preferences, like those for fiction, seem to center on works which provide information about the West (Table 5).

See Table 5, p. 47

A total of nearly 50 percent of respondents read materials dealing with foreign culture, current events, or history, while only about 29 percent read about the culture, history, or current events of the Soviet Union. The lack of interest in Soviet government and Party affairs is particularly striking, if not entirely surprising, given the fact that material on this subject tends to be dry and dogmatic and provides little real information.

The large proportion of readers of scientific and technical material can be explained by the fact that this category includes "popular science" as well as sophisticated technical material. Our data show that almost anyone whose academic background included some study of engineering, medicine, or the natural sciences is likely to read this type of non-fiction. Also, reading material of a scientific and technical nature is readily available: as Table 6 shows, only 3.4 percent of non-fiction readers were dissatisfied with the amount of scientific material they were able to read.

See Table 6, p. 48

The figures presented in the table above underscore the importance of books on foreign culture and current events to readers of non-fiction: not only are these two of the most popular types of non-fiction, but readers are also the least satisfied with their availability. In

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35 Brine, p. 263.
contrast, books on scientific subjects rank close to books on foreign culture in terms of popularity, but, as mentioned above, they rank near the bottom of the table in terms of dissatisfaction.

Readers also seem quite satisfied with the availability of books on Soviet culture, history and political affairs. On the other hand, readers of books on religion and philosophy constitute only a small proportion of readers in general, but a rather large proportion of dissatisfied non-fiction readers. This suggests that availability of these materials is so inadequate that some people who would like to read books on religion and philosophy are entirely unable to do so. The ratio of those wanting to read more books on religion and philosophy to those who already read such books was 1.5 to 1; in comparison, the ratio of those wanting to read more books on Soviet culture to those who already read them was 0.1 to 1.

The information presented in this table is useful because it confirms previous assumptions about reader dissatisfaction, based on knowledge of Soviet publishing policies. Clearly, the supply of books on ideologically safe subjects such as Soviet culture, politics, and history, or science and technology, is sufficient to meet reader demand; other evidence shows that publication of these books is a priority, and that they are indeed available in large quantities. However, discussion of religious and philosophical issues, foreign culture, and international current events is ideologically problematic. The consequent scarcity of books on such topics is reflected in reader dissatisfaction.

Similar conclusions can be drawn from Table 7, which displays the percentages of dissatisfied readers for each category of fiction.

See Table 7, p. 49

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36 Garrard and Garrard, p. 79.
The figures confirm expectations. Foreign literature, especially modern foreign literature, is very difficult to obtain; it tends to be published in smaller quantities, probably because the ideas and information it contains pose problems for the tight running of the Soviet ideological ship. Demand for these works is not being met: the ratio of those wanting to read more modern foreign fiction to those who already read it was 0.65 to 1; satisfaction with the availability of fiction on World War II was considerably higher, as indicated by the ratio of 0.03 to 1.

Dissatisfaction with availability of mysteries and detective novels is much less marked, but still significant. Mysteries or detective novels—except for approved books about KGB heroes who foil capitalist plots—are generally frowned upon by the authorities, who view them as insubstantial and frivolous, particularly because they adapt themselves poorly to the illumination of Soviet ideals. Since they are not viewed as ideologically harmful, which is the case with some foreign literature, they can be fairly easily obtained; but because they do not serve any positive ideological purpose, they are nevertheless published in restricted quantities. The reasons respondents gave for their interest in culture suggest that it is precisely the inadequacy of such works from an ideological viewpoint that is responsible for their broad appeal; they release the reader not only from his or her daily worries, but also from the constant—if halfhearted—efforts at political socialization that are a pervasive feature of Soviet life. The authorities’ position on this issue is revealed in the answer given by Novy mir’s editor-in-chief Sergei Zalygin to a question on the journal’s publication plans for 1987.

[F]irst and foremost, we address ourselves to the serious reader of serious realistic prose and poetry. We refuse to print detective stories, and have decided to print science fiction only in very limited quantities. There was some apprehension that our journal might not find a reader.37

The last sentence of Zalygin's statement underscores both the preference among readers for literature-as-entertainment, as well as the authorities' concern with the lack of "serious" readers. The overall tone is one of disapproval for the shift in reading preferences that has inevitably occurred as reading has become a form of mass entertainment.

Measures of reader dissatisfaction reflect a basic conflict between reader demand and Soviet publishing policy: "It has never been officially accepted since the October Revolution that Soviet publishing should respond exclusively to reader demand, either expressed or anticipated." However, there is some evidence that the discrepancy between supply and demand is increasingly being perceived as a problem. While specific instances of inadequate supply are usually not explicitly addressed (particularly in the case of mysteries or science fiction), in more general terms the issue has received substantial attention in the Soviet press. Throughout 1986, Literaturnaia gazeta invited and responded to reader comments on the fact that the supply of books is not geared to reader demand, a problem one reader formulated as "Books, books everywhere, and not a single one to buy." The weekly acknowledged that while the shelves of bookshops are packed with books, "native and foreign classics, children's literature, historical-biographical works, memoirs, science fiction and detective novels" are in short supply. An article in Sovetskaia kultura called attention to the same problem in libraries, noting that rows of books gather dust on the shelves while requests for others go unsatisfied.

Some critics point an accusing finger at poorly organized distribution, which allows books to sit in warehouses, out of the reach of eager readers. Others, however, note that the

38 Walker, p. 163.
39 Literaturnaia gazeta, 17 December 1986, p. 3.
41 Literaturnaia gazeta, 10 September 1986, p. 7.
problem is even more fundamental:

In the already complicated book [supply] chain, there is still practically no place for the reader... [Publishing houses'] economic indicators do not depend on the sale of books or on reader demand. The booksellers? They always have the possibility of sending unpopular goods off to the libraries...By the way, the reader has his own voice, his own clear and well-defined judgments about all the facts and events of the book industry. Let's listen to what he has to say.42

It is possible that this increased awareness of the supply-demand conflict may eventually lead to publishing decisions based on consideration of the reader's needs and desires.

Censorship and Samizdat

Censorship presents another obstacle to the publication of good, interesting literature. The Soviet censorship organization, Glavlit, relies on the assistance of editorial staffs of publishing houses and journals to guard against ideologically unacceptable material. Before a book can be published, it must be approved; even if it receives initial approval, publication is often contingent on substantial cuts and revisions. Thus, the editor may reject a manuscript, or the author may reject the proposed revisions; in either case the manuscript remains unpublished. More frequently, the author agrees to the revisions; as the work is transformed into a publication that conforms to prevailing standards in terms of ideas and style, it loses the mark of the individual author and becomes instead the product of a collective enterprise. From the artist's point of view, the insidious operation of the "internal censor"--the author's tendency to censor his own work in anticipation of official requirements--is even more dangerous.

There are, of course, certain ways to circumvent censorship, many of which rely rather successfully on the censor's lack of intelligence and literary sophistication; two examples of this strategy are the use of "Aesopian language," and treatment of subjects which appear to

42 Sovetskaia kul'tura, 29 July 1986, p. 6.
have no political implications. Nevertheless, the responses from our survey show that censorship is a concern. Most respondents identified the time of Stalin as the most oppressive in terms of censorship, but they also noted the relative lack of freedom of the Brezhnev era compared to the Khrushchev years. They felt that, of all forms of media and the arts, newspapers and books were censored the most.

Despite their experiences with censorship, respondents in our sample were by no means uniformly opposed to it: a majority felt that censorship was entirely appropriate for books (or other media or art forms) containing explicit portrayals of sex (58.8 percent) or depictions of brutality or violence (84.8 percent). However, far fewer (about 10 percent) believed that abstract art or works containing "political ideas contrary to government policy" or ethnic stereotypes should be censored. These percentages indicate that, while our respondents tended to be quite conservative in their approach to portrayals of sex and violence (and the referent population can be expected to be even more conservative), they nonetheless do not agree with the authorities on the need to censor other subjects.

Availability, rather than censorship, is probably the key concern for most people, in part because the extent and exact nature of censorship are difficult to estimate, while edition sizes are not. However, censorship certainly plays a role in determining the availability of books and does nothing to increase the supply of readable and interesting material.

In view of this unsatisfactory situation, where the books people want to read are subjected to censorship and published in restricted quantities, it would hardly be surprising if people turned to the alternative of samizdat,\(^43\) both as a means of publishing more of the material desired and as a way of gaining access to it. Because the reader of samizdat is also the publisher, this would seem to be an ideal way--other limitations of the method aside--to ease the "book hunger" brought on by the authorities' refusal to recognize satisfaction of

\(^{43}\) The term samizdat is used throughout this paper to designate both samizdat and tamizdat, since the survey questions addressed them as a single phenomenon.
reader demand as a legitimate priority.

The role *samizdat* played in the dissident movement during the 1960's and 1970's gave it a great deal of publicity, which contributed to the impression that it had potential significance for the population as a whole. According to our results, however, *samizdat* does not appear to be a viable alternative to official methods of communication or publication. The survey data demonstrate that even among the sample respondents—who, as well-educated inhabitants of larger cities, are far more likely to read *samizdat* than are ordinary Soviet citizens—*samizdat* reading is not widespread. Nevertheless, we will attempt to focus on the few who did read *samizdat* in order to learn about this unusual group.

Only 22.3 percent of the sample respondents reported ever reading *samizdat*; in fact, several respondents unfamiliar with the term had to be provided with a definition. Of *samizdat* readers, only 17.8 percent reported being involved in the distribution of *samizdat*, and only a tiny proportion of readers—0.5 percent—acknowledged playing a leading role in *samizdat* distribution. The figures representing various reasons why respondents did not read *samizdat* are even more revealing.

See Table 8, p. 50

As the table shows, the primary reason for not reading *samizdat* material is simply lack of availability, and a significant number of people were even unaware of its existence. The problem of availability seems to be more severe for respondents in smaller cities (population under 100,000) than for those in medium and large cities, although this result should be treated with caution since the sample included very few respondents from small cities. Interestingly enough, the danger associated with reading *samizdat* material does not seem to be a motivating factor in the decision not to read it; most people who deliberately choose not to read *samizdat* do so out of lack of interest. This does not mean, however, that people are
unaware of the danger involved; when asked "Did you feel you were taking a risk by reading samizdat?" over 80 percent of readers responded that they did. About 40 percent of these respondents said they felt it was "very" risky, 43 percent said it was "somewhat" risky, and 17 percent felt it was "only a little" risky.

Samizdat readers exhibit distinctive demographic features. Males are almost twice as likely as females to read samizdat. Samizdat readers also tend to be younger: most fall into the 20-39 age group. Not surprisingly, the likelihood of reading samizdat is directly correlated with education, and this is reflected in the breakdown by occupation as well.

The survey provides information on the distribution of samizdat, and the findings tend to confirm previous assumptions. The overwhelming majority (82 percent) of readers obtain samizdat materials from Soviet friends; about 10 percent obtain them from other Soviets, and a few obtain them from family members. Only 0.2 percent mentioned receiving samizdat from foreigners. Most readers (72 percent) said that they usually borrowed samizdat material; a significant proportion (24 percent) reported that the material was simply given to them.

Payment for samizdat, either in money or through some form of exchange, is extremely rare; this is important in that it underscores the cooperative nature of the network.

The survey also included questions on the type of samizdat read by respondents; the percentages are displayed in Table 9 below.

See Table 9, p. 51

These figures suggest that samizdat's primary function is to provide information of interest to those involved in the struggle for human rights. This is supported by the fact that the likelihood that a respondent will read samizdat is strongly correlated with his level of interest in political affairs. However, samizdat clearly also serves as a means for helping to satisfy the demand for Russian and Soviet fiction.
It is noteworthy that these figures seem to reflect a reduced level of interest in foreign materials: neither samizdat dealing with international politics nor foreign fiction samizdat commands a particularly large readership relative to the readerships for similar, officially published materials. In view of the fact that readers rarely obtained samizdat materials from foreigners, this may reflect a scarcity of such materials rather than a lack of interest.

Our data are particularly valuable in that they permit us to examine phenomena which, like samizdat, are entirely off limits to Soviet sociologists. Unfortunately—for samizdat is an important part of the struggle for freedom of creative expression in the USSR—our conclusions in this case must be pessimistic. While samizdat is undoubtedly of great importance to those who participate in the network, our results suggest that its audience is severely limited in terms of size and composition, and that it is a phenomenon of little significance among the population as a whole. There is no evidence to suggest that it is or could become an effective means of providing the average Soviet reader with the material he desires.

Readership Characteristics

Should the Soviet authorities decide to pay more attention to reader demand and to attack problems of supply and distribution, systematic research will probably play an important role in any reforms of publishing policy that are undertaken. Studies of readerships for specific periodicals and specific types of literature and non-fiction may be extremely valuable in developing optimal publishing and distribution strategies. Our results demonstrate that readerships for particular kinds of books can be discerned, and that the primary factors determining what an individual reads are age—as a generational effect—and education. For certain types of reading material, gender also has an effect. These findings agree with overall results reported in Soviet research, but detailed and generalizable studies of specific readerships have yet to be conducted in the USSR.
Among the different kinds of non-fiction, two types stood out as having distinctive readerships. Books on scientific and technical subjects were read primarily by those with complete secondary specialized training or higher education. However, a breakdown by occupation shows that it is not just the extent but also the emphasis of an individual's education, as well as his work experience that determines his interest in scientific and technical material. For instance, semi-skilled laborers and service workers are only about one-third as likely as industrial and agricultural workers to read scientific material, despite the fact that they tend to be better-educated.

Males are about one-third more likely than females to read such material; this gender difference probably reflects the fact that males are more likely to be well-educated and to hold jobs in those categories that exhibited more interest in scientific texts. Older people (aged 60-74) are the least likely to read scientific material; this is probably a generational rather than a life-cycle effect since it may reflect this age group's relatively low level of educational attainment. Thus, the readership for books on scientific and technical subjects can be defined as the predominantly male group of well-educated, young-to-middle-aged working people who hold jobs with some scientific or technical emphasis.

While readers of religious and philosophical literature constitute a much smaller group, they are strikingly similar: they tend to be male, young (20-39), very well-educated, and to hold jobs as leaders or engineers or technical professionals. In this case, occupation is probably a proxy for education, since people in these particular job categories are by far the best-educated. On the other hand, it is worth noting that a majority of dissidents have scientific or engineering training and are rewarded with certain privileges (such as travel abroad and access to goods that are hard to obtain) for the valuable work that they do. It may be that similar privileges among people with comparable backgrounds contribute to their exposure to and interest in non-Soviet ways of thinking and enable them to gain access to books on religious or philosophical subjects.
The readership for books on Russian and Soviet history and culture is quite different; it includes primarily those who have incomplete or complete secondary schooling, as well as those who have earned an attestat. Interest in these subjects was also concentrated among semi-skilled laborers and service workers; they are nearly twice as likely to read about Russian and Soviet history and culture as are other occupational groups. In fact, for semi-skilled laborers and service workers, books on Russian and Soviet history and culture rank second and third in terms of popularity, just below books on foreign culture or history. Other groups adhere closely to the overall pattern, where scientific and technical material and books on foreign current events are the second and third most popular types of non-fiction (see Table 5).

Most readers of Russian and Soviet historical and cultural material are female; this is probably due to the fact that females make up a majority of the occupational and educational groups just discussed. Interest in Russian and Soviet cultural material peaks among respondents aged 50-59, and for books on Russian and Soviet history, the peak occurs in the 60-74 age group. In fact, for this last age group, books on history replaced books on scientific and technical subjects as the second most popular type of non-fiction. In terms of the variables used here, the readership for material on Russian and Soviet history and culture is the reverse of the readership for scientific and technical material: mainly female, older, with a lower level of educational attainment and lower occupational status.

Why might people with less education tend to be more attracted to books on Russian and Soviet history and culture than others? It is possible that their horizons are simply somewhat narrower; it may also be that they prefer to read about subjects that are more legitimate from the authorities' point of view and on which books are more readily available (as evidenced by respondents' relative satisfaction with the availability of books on these subjects). Also, age is negatively correlated with education; people with a lower level of educational attainment tend to be older and therefore may have a greater interest in reading about historical events.
Readerships for fiction are not quite so polarized. This is to be expected, since choice of a particular type of fiction is somewhat less dependent on an individual's educational and occupational background. Nevertheless, differences can be observed, and many of them are attributable to education. The readership for science fiction resembles quite closely the readership for scientific non-fiction: it comprises younger, fairly well-educated people (aged 20-49, with at least complete secondary schooling), a majority of whom are male.

As indicated above, both foreign and Russian classics are very popular, so much so that it is hard to find a group that does not read them. It can be said, though, that foreign classics are most popular among those with complete secondary or higher education, and among younger people, especially those aged 20-39. Neither gender nor occupation exerts any effect independent of education. Similarly, modern foreign fiction appeals primarily to younger age groups (20-49), and is correlated even more strongly with higher education. Reading of drama and poetry is also correlated positively with education and negatively with age. On the other hand, Russian literature classics hold a uniform appeal for people of all ages, and the correlation with education is weaker, though still important. Gender does have an effect here: Russian classics are clearly more popular among females than among males.

Some education-related preferences for particular authors, both foreign and Soviet, could be discerned: Bulgakov, Solzhenitsyn, Hemingway, Shakespeare, Balzac, and Remarque were found to enjoy particular popularity among readers with at least some higher education. Esenin, Bulgakov, Zola, Dumas, and Hemingway were most popular among younger readers. In general, younger people read a more varied selection of fiction; those in the 20-29 age group read almost twice as many different types of fiction as those in the 60-74 age group.

Despite differences among the readerships for science fiction, Russian and Soviet classics, and foreign literature, readers of these types of fiction clearly share some basic characteristics: they tend to be middle-aged or younger, and generally have complete secondary schooling, if not higher education. The readerships for fiction dealing with the
Second World War and for mystery or detective novels are quite different in composition. Books on World War II were most popular among respondents aged 50-74 and among those with incomplete secondary education; in fact, the least educated and the oldest groups were more likely to read war novels than any other type of fiction. War novels were also extremely popular among industrial and agricultural workers, and among semi-skilled laborers and service workers—the occupational groups with the lowest level of educational attainment.

There are clear reasons why Soviet novels about the Second World War would appeal to these groups. First, to the extent that age has an effect independent of education, older people are understandably more eager to read about events that form a part of their own historical experience. Second, the less-educated groups probably have not progressed much beyond the materials used in secondary school, which include heavy doses of World War II propaganda. Finally, Soviet war novels tend to have simple, unsophisticated plots and morals which make them more accessible to those with undeveloped literary tastes.

Mysteries and detective fiction present a different case. On the one hand, these books appeal to those with less education; for example, only among workers do mysteries rank first in popularity. A breakdown by education shows that detective fiction is most popular among those with complete secondary education, but without any higher education. On the other hand, while mysteries may not be the most popular type of fiction among the best-educated groups, they are nevertheless very popular: nearly 50 percent of respondents with complete higher education reported reading mystery or detective fiction. Thus it can be seen that mysteries appeal to both of the broad educational groups distinguished above. Well-educated readers like them, probably because they offer light, entertaining reading that is relatively free of propaganda; those with a lower level of educational attainment probably enjoy them for similar reasons, as well as for the accessibility of style and content they share with war novels. The only people relatively unlikely to read detective fiction are those aged 50 and older. As Friedberg points out, "intellectual laziness" is a major factor in the consumption of
trashy novels: reading of such works is by no means limited to the poorly educated.\textsuperscript{44} The popularity of mysteries and detective fiction among people of all educational strata is further evidence for the transformation of reading into a mass cultural phenomenon.

Number of Books Read

Clearly, education is the most important factor in predicting the types of books an individual will read. We discovered that it is also an extremely important determinant of the number of books read by respondents. In order to study the number of books respondents read in the course of a year—a variable with hundreds of categories which cannot be dealt with using ordinary crosstabulations—we used the technique of regression analysis. This method allows the researcher to study the simultaneous effects of several variables, since it can control for one while examining the effects of another. In other words, it can reveal whether a variable such as occupation affects reading habits only because of its relationship to education or whether it has an independent effect.\textsuperscript{45}

Table 10 displays the results of the analysis for number of non-fiction books read per year.\textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{44} Friedberg, \textit{Russian Classics}, p. 153.

\textsuperscript{45} Regression analysis is often used to create a causal model; that is, to identify specific factors which cause variation. Our study, however, has attempted to exploit its predictive potential in order to learn about the characteristics of various groups of readers, and our model emphasizes predictive rather than causal factors. Thus, for instance, reading of \textit{samizdat} is certainly associated with reading a greater number of books per year, but this can by no means be interpreted as a causal relationship.

\textsuperscript{46} For purposes of clarity, we have interpreted the regression coefficients as percent changes in the dependent variable; see Appendix for actual regression coefficients and standard errors. We used the natural logarithm of the number of books read; this is a standard technique for reducing potentially skewed distributions of the dependent variable. Also, several cases were excluded because of their unreasonably high values on the dependent variable; such outliers are normally excluded from regression analysis because they can cause serious distortion of results.
The variables listed in the table are those that were found to have a significant relationship with number of non-fiction books read; in all cases the effects were positive. (In all but two cases, the coefficients were significant beyond the .05 level; the remaining two coefficients were significant at the .09 level.) Men tended to read more non-fiction books than women—in fact, they read 17.2 percent more per year. Education, as mentioned above, proved to be an excellent predictor of number of books read: Soviets can be expected to read 10.5 percent more non-fiction books with each unit increase in education. Both of these results are supported by Soviet findings, which point to the influence of both gender and education on the amount of time individuals spend reading.47

The effects of parents' education were closely related to those of the respondent's education, but mother's education actually had an independent effect of its own, increasing the number of books read by 4.2 percent with each unit change. This is logical since mothers in general play an important role in a child's development; in the Soviet Union in particular, mothers are responsible for most of the care of children, and thus can be expected to have enormous influence on their early intellectual development.

Whether or not a respondent read books in another language was related to the number of non-fiction books read, while whether a respondent spoke another language was not. This suggests that the effect derives not so much from the fact of facility with another language, but from the intellectual curiosity that allows that language to be used for a particular purpose.

Frequency of attendance at various cultural events had small but significant effects.

47 Gordon and Gruzhevskaya, pp. 50-51.
Respondents who attended concerts and the theater read, respectively, 0.7 and 0.9 percent more books per performance attended than those who did not. No significant relationship was observed between frequency of visits to the cinema and non-fiction reading. Surprisingly, there was no relationship between the number of hours spent watching television and non-fiction (or fiction) reading. We had expected that television viewing would replace reading as a leisure time activity and thus tend to reduce the number of books read. In fact, our results are confirmed by Soviet studies which report that the influence of television viewing on reading is weak.\(^{48}\) One scholar asserts that television has the greatest negative influence on reading among those who read very little to begin with, while it actually increases interest in reading among those who are regular readers.\(^{49}\) If this is indeed the case, then the absence of an effect in our regression may indicate that these two effects tend to cancel each other out. Also, the same researcher claims that television viewing generally replaces such less desirable activities as "hooliganism," playing cards and chatting with friends, rather than diminishing the amount of time spent reading.\(^{50}\)

The relationship between *samizdat* and number of non-fiction books read was striking: *samizdat* readers read 42.9 percent more non-fiction books than respondents who read no *samizdat*. It may be that respondents who read *samizdat* are motivated to do so as much by an especially strong interest in reading—reflected in the large numbers of books they read in general—as by a specific interest in dissident affairs. In view of the fact that *samizdat* readers read not only more books, but also more different kinds of books than non-*samizdat* readers, it seems reasonable to conclude that *samizdat* is not necessarily a major focus of their reading. Interest in politics has an independent effect: respondents read more

\(^{48}\) Ibid., pp. 61-2.


\(^{50}\) Ibid., p. 106.
non-fiction books as their level of interest in politics increases. Of course, samizdat reading and interest in politics are highly correlated, but since the model controls for interest in politics, samizdat readers' higher level of reading activity must be attributed in part to causes other than their political involvement.\footnote{It seems unlikely that the large effect of samizdat is due only to the addition of samizdat material to the number of books read, simply because there is probably not enough samizdat available to account for the entire effect. Rather, the increase in number of books read due to samizdat reading probably reflects a keener interest in reading in general. That is, people who read samizdat read a greater number of officially published books as well.}

The same analysis was conducted for fiction reading, and the results are provided below.

See Table 11, p. 53

These results are particularly interesting when compared to the results for non-fiction. Most of the variables that were found to have a significant relationship with the number of non-fiction books read were also related to the number of fiction books read. The exception is the variable for whether or not a respondent read books in another language, which was not significant for fiction reading.

The effects of education and mother's education are consistent in terms of strength and direction for both kinds of reading. The slightly stronger effect of education on non-fiction reading is in line with Soviet findings.\footnote{Kh. E. Khansen, \textit{Vzaimosvyaz' chtenia spetsial'noi, nauchno-populyarnoi i khudozhestvennoi literatury} (Tallin: Izdatel'stvo "Valgus," 1981), p. 16. Cited in Walker, p. 168.} Frequency of theater and concert attendance, interest in politics, and samizdat reading also had similar effects on fiction and non-fiction reading. As was the case for non-fiction, frequency of attendance at movies had no significant effect. As noted above, the number of hours spent watching television was not related to the number of fiction books read.
The most surprising effect is that of gender. In the case of non-fiction, being male was associated with reading more books, while in the case of fiction, being male was associated with reading fewer books; the effects are similar in strength, but they occur in opposite directions. This may imply some sort of trade-off: women may be choosing to read fiction instead of non-fiction, while men may choose non-fiction over fiction. (The reader will recall from the earlier discussion that women were more likely than men to read fiction.)

The table reveals one more important result. Occupation had no effect at all on the number of non-fiction books read, but one occupation did influence fiction reading: engineers and technical professionals read 18.1 percent fewer fiction books than people in any other occupation. Since the model controls for education, this must be due to some other factor. Two explanations are possible. The first is that they are less interested in reading in general and whatever interest they do have is oriented toward non-fiction material (this accounts for the fact that they read fewer fiction books and no more non-fiction books than anyone else). The other explanation is that their jobs may be more demanding or time-consuming, and they simply have less time to spend reading. In either case, however, they clearly prefer non-fiction to fiction.

What do all these results tell us about predicting reading and readerships among the referent Soviet population? Most importantly, they demonstrate that readership characteristics can be identified, even when using data that are less than ideal. Unfortunately, interesting as the effect of samizdat reading may be, it must be regarded as irrelevant for predicting reading among the Soviet population as a whole. This leaves education (in various guises) as the most important and reliable predictor of both the number and type of books an individual will read. Gender, age, occupation, and level of interest in political affairs play a secondary role. A more thorough understanding of these and other factors which determine extent of reading and interest in particular subjects could contribute substantially to the efficiency of Soviet book production and distribution.
Conclusions

In this paper, we have tried to develop a basic profile of the Soviet reader. Our research has shown that standard assumptions about Russian readers seem to be supported by the evidence: Russians do read a great deal, and their tastes—revealed in their preference for the classics, both Russian and foreign—tend to be conservative. On the surface, they seem to be serious readers, who believe that art should be a source of moral guidance and a means of intellectual development.

At the same time, though, we have seen that there are more fundamental ways in which readers do not fit this traditional picture. Whatever views they may hold about the functions that literature ought to fulfill, their own reading—even of serious works—seems to be motivated primarily by an escapist impulse. This is reflected in their reading preferences: they choose to read foreign books of all kinds, nineteenth century Russian fiction, mysteries and science fiction—in short, anything but Soviet fiction with its orthodox perspective. Reading offers entertainment and a means of escape from contemporary existence, but only to those who look beyond most Soviet literature.

It would seem that the Soviet novel has lost touch with the reader, and that literature in general has lost some of its traditional importance as a forum for the discussion of social and ethical issues. Even in our highly educated sample, readers consistently turned to books for entertainment rather than enlightenment.

As we have demonstrated, the fact that reading in the Soviet Union has become a mass phenomenon has been a source of consternation at high levels in the publishing industry. Two paths are open to the Soviet publishing authorities. The first is to stick to their ideological guns by maintaining current standards and requirements for serious Soviet novels (a guarantee that few people will read them) and by refusing to compromise by making other kinds of books and light Soviet fiction more readily available. If they choose this path, they risk
alienating a sizeable group of younger, better-educated readers and diminishing even further the state's ability to exploit literature for purposes of socialization.

The second option is to reduce the stringent requirements imposed on Soviet literature with a view to making it more readable and appealing; even moderate change might be enough to foster a renewal of interest in the Soviet novel. At the same time, the publishing authorities might consider making certain concessions to reader demand; increased publication and availability of light Soviet fiction might act as an incentive for more respected writers to tackle—and thus legitimate—genres such as science fiction. In addition, by facilitating access to a wider variety of foreign, particularly modern, fiction, the Soviet authorities might stimulate the reader's interest in more serious works. While it is doubtful that the transformation of reading into a form of mass culture can be halted, steps such as these might have the effect of slowing down the process.

There have been some indications that, in line with the policy of glasnost', the present regime may favor this kind of enlightened approach. The section on readerships in this paper, along with the regression analyses, is intended to show that different types of readers can be identified, even with data such as ours. Similar studies could be useful tools for rationalizing Soviet publishing policy. We hope that our work may stimulate more comprehensive research efforts on the part of Soviet social scientists, and more candid reporting of results; perhaps in the long run this may lead to a publishing policy whose goal is to meet the reader's needs and interests. Material dealing directly with the Stalinist period is now being considered for publication, and it was recently announced that Pasternak's complete works and more of Akhmatova's poetry will be published. These are certainly positive steps toward a more liberal atmosphere; whether or not they form a coherent beginning to a fundamental rethinking of policy remains to be seen.
References


Table 1. Average Number of Fiction Books Read Per Year by Respondents in Sverdlovsk (1975-6) and SIP Surveys, by Education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Six years education or less</th>
<th>Complete or incomplete higher education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sverdlovsk</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>29.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIP</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>30.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 2. Percentage of Respondents Who Read Various Types of Fiction or Literature.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of fiction</th>
<th>Percenta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreign classics</td>
<td>54.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian classics</td>
<td>48.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mystery and detective fiction</td>
<td>43.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern foreign fiction</td>
<td>43.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poetry</td>
<td>31.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiction about World War II</td>
<td>28.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science fiction</td>
<td>24.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drama</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiction about the Revolution</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Soviet fiction</td>
<td>31.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of these</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

aN = 914
Table 4. Percentage of Respondents in Each Survey Who Read or Mentioned an Interest in Each Category of Fiction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>SIP</th>
<th>Rural readers</th>
<th>Small towns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Detective/Mystery</td>
<td>43.5</td>
<td>26.0</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poetry</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World War II</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>52.0</td>
<td>24.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science Fiction</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revolution</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Percent who were reading each type at time of survey.

Table 5. Percentage of Respondents Who Read Various Types of Non-fiction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of non-fiction</th>
<th>Percent a</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreign culture or history</td>
<td>37.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientific or technical material</td>
<td>32.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign current events</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian or Soviet history</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soviet culture</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion or philosophy</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soviet Party or government affairs</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other non-fiction</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

aN = 921
Table 6. Percentage of Respondents Who Wanted to Read More of Each Type of Non-fiction, but Couldn’t.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of non-fiction</th>
<th>Percent* who wanted more</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreign culture or history</td>
<td>31.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign current events</td>
<td>26.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion or philosophy</td>
<td>25.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian or Soviet history</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soviet Party or government affairs</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientific or technical material</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soviet culture</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*N = 587 (number of non-fiction readers).
Table 7. Percentage of Fiction Readers Who Wanted to Read More of Each Type of Fiction, but Couldn’t.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of fiction</th>
<th>Percent* who wanted more</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Modern foreign fiction</td>
<td>33.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign classics</td>
<td>25.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mystery and detective fiction</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Soviet fiction</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poetry</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian classics</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science fiction</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drama</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiction about World War II</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiction about the Revolution</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*N = 780 (number of fiction readers)
Table 8. Reasons for not reading samizdat.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>Percent(^a) giving each reason</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>52.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not interested</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Didn't know it existed</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too busy; no time</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too dangerous</td>
<td>.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^aN = 673\) (number who do not read samizdat)
Table 9. Reading Patterns among *Samizdat* Readers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of <em>samizdat</em></th>
<th>Percent who read*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Camp/prison stories</td>
<td>60.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soviet or Russian fiction</td>
<td>50.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human rights material</td>
<td>45.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soviet politics</td>
<td>34.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign fiction</td>
<td>28.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National cultural or religious material</td>
<td>20.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International politics</td>
<td>20.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language texts</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erotica</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional material</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*N = 207 (those who read *samizdat*)*
Table 10. Effects of Variables on Number of Non-fiction Books
Read Per Year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Percent change* in number of non-fiction books read</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reads samizdat</td>
<td>42.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reads books in another language</td>
<td>17.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex of respondent</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational attainment</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of interest in politics</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother's educational attainment</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of theater attendance</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of concert attendance</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The percent change refers to the percent increase or decrease in number of books read that results from a one-unit change in each variable (estimated using the natural logarithm of number of books). Considerable caution should be exercised in interpreting these figures. First, it must be noted that a one-unit increase is not constant across variables. The first three variables are “dummy” variables (coded as "0" if the answer is "no" and as "1" if it is "yes"), for which a one-unit increase merely represents an "on/off" switch: either a respondent reads samizdat or he does not. This should be borne in mind when considering the strength of their effects.

For the second group, a one-unit increase refers to a somewhat arbitrary scale that has been imposed on the variables: educational attainment has been divided into eight categories, mother’s educational attainment into seven categories, and level of interest in politics into four categories. There are methodological difficulties with treating ordinal variables as though they are interval variables; for example, it may be unreasonable to assume that a change from "not interested in politics" to "slightly interested" is equivalent to a change from "slightly interested" to "somewhat interested." Nonetheless, we feel that the categories are legitimate enough, and that the intervals are similar enough to justify their use, as long as the results are interpreted with care.

For the last group of variables in Table 10, a one-unit increase refers to each additional time the respondent attended a concert or the theater; this should be kept in mind when considering their relatively small effects.
Table 11. Effects of Variables on Number of Fiction Books Read Per Year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Percent change* in number of fiction books read</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reads samizdat</td>
<td>51.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineer or technical professional</td>
<td>-18.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex of respondent</td>
<td>-17.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational attainment</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of interest in politics</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother's educational attainment</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of theater attendance</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of concert attendance</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*See note to Table 10.
Appendix

Table A1. Regression Coefficients for Non-Fiction (natural logarithm of number of books read; N = 705).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reads <em>samizdat</em></td>
<td>0.357</td>
<td>0.092</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reads books in another language</td>
<td>0.164*</td>
<td>0.098</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex of respondent</td>
<td>0.158*</td>
<td>0.084</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational attainment</td>
<td>0.099</td>
<td>0.024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of interest in politics</td>
<td>0.095</td>
<td>0.044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother's educational attainment</td>
<td>0.041</td>
<td>0.018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of theater attendance</td>
<td>0.008</td>
<td>0.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of concert attendance</td>
<td>0.007*</td>
<td>0.004</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ R^2 \] = .156

*Unless otherwise marked, all coefficients are significant at the .05 level or beyond.

* \( p < .10 \)
Table A2. Regression Coefficients for Fiction (natural logarithm of number of books read; N = 717).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reads samizdat</td>
<td>0.413</td>
<td>0.079</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineer or other technical professional</td>
<td>-0.200</td>
<td>0.098</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex of respondent</td>
<td>-0.187</td>
<td>0.071</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational attainment</td>
<td>0.094</td>
<td>0.021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of interest in politics</td>
<td>0.085</td>
<td>0.037</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother's educational attainment</td>
<td>0.043</td>
<td>0.015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of theater attendance</td>
<td>0.014</td>
<td>0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of concert attendance</td>
<td>0.008</td>
<td>0.004</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ R^2 = 0.222 \]

*All coefficients are significant at the .05 level or beyond.