The Growth of E-Reading

- 28% of American adults read an e-book in the last year (Pew: 2016)
- 32% of Americans owned an e-reading device in 2014
- Amazon announced in 2011 that its e-book sales had surpassed print sales
- In FY 2012, academic libraries added over 52 million e-books (27 million print items)
- Academic library print circulation rates have substantially declined in last 25 years
Do We Still Need (Print) Books?

- Concept of digital/”bookless” libraries

- Growing belief that e–reading can replace print reading

- Growing debate between “digital skeptics” and “digital enthusiasts”
• Growing evidence that screen reading is NOT the same as reading off a printed page (N. Carr, M. Wolf, N. Baron)

• Argue that the human brain responds differently to screen-based reading than to print reading
Supporters of digital reading over print fall into two main categories:

- Continuity: Format is unimportant, text is interchangeable (C. Thompson, N. Bilton)

- Change is good: digital reading does differ from print, will lead to a superior information environment (C. Shirky, K. Kelly)
Reading experience has been profoundly affected by the shift in media. Until a generation ago, reading and print culture were virtually synonymous.

The PDF file provided reassurance to the reader looking for familiarity and stability, and harkened back to the fixity of the print environment (and created its own problems).

Many types of information literacy co-existing today – data literacy, video literacy, media literacy, etc.

Meaning is shaped and blended across different media, so that the impact of text, images, sounds, and video complement each other, creates multiple perspectives and a multisensory experience of information.
The Materiality of Reading

- Reading doesn’t occur in a physical vacuum

- There is no container-neutral experience; every container influences the reading experience; the possibilities, expectations, limitations, and sensory impact

- Words on a screen are detachable, malleable, and not inherently associated with any container. Our experience is affected by the flexible ways we absorb information today

- Swiping, tapping, scrolling, and similar navigational actions have become inherent to the reading process. This has become automatic

- The hands now play a very active role!
The Science of Reading

- Reading is learned, not innate

- Humans developed the ability to read due to neuroplasticity, the brain’s ability to adapt and rewire itself

- The brain “rewires” itself as it engages in various activities or uses technologies – forming new pathways of connection
The Science of Reading (cont.)

- The more one reads, the more deeply the neural pathways that facilitate reading take hold

- The opposite is also true
The Science of Reading (cont.)

- Two main forms of reading (from Christopher Rowe):
  - Linear: sustained, focused
  - Tabular: ad hoc info seeking
Linear Reading is . . .

- Fixed
- Solitary
- Focused, sustained attention/reflection
- Facilitates memorization and knowledge formation
Tabular Reading is . . .

- Nonlinear
- Short passages/skimming/browsing
- Fosters rapid decision making/filtering
- Visual ability/pattern recognition
Screen reading tends to foster tabular reading at the expense of linear.

Print offers better comprehension for texts >500 words (Singer & Alexander, 2017).

The more your brain rewires itself to accommodate screen reading, the harder it becomes to read off a printed page.
E–Reading Characteristics

- Impatience/desire for immediate gratification/stimulation
- Distractions/multitasking
- Absorbing information in small bits
- Browsing or skimming (F–shaped pattern – Nielsen)
F–Shaped Reading Pattern

What About E-Readers?

- Unlikely that e-readers are a long-term solution
  - Dedicated e-readers (Kindle, Nook) vs. multipurpose devices (iPad, Laptop)
  - Multipurpose devices bring a variety of distractions
  - Multipurpose devices tend to supplant dedicated devices (iPhone/digital camera)
  - Drop in e-reader sales/ownership
Concerns of Digital Skeptics

- If we become overly reliant on screen reading, we risk gaining vastly greater access to information in return for the ability to turn that information into knowledge.

- Enormous impact on our institutions and our society.
What will happen to Linear Reading

- Unlikely to disappear, stabilization of reading trends (i.e. “return of print”)

- Greatly reduced in cultural resonance

- Likely to become the exclusive property of an elite “reading class” (W. Griswold).
  - Women, college-educated, young adults
  - Slow Reading Movement
  - “Digital Fatigue”
In fiscal year 2012: 52.7M e-books acquired by US academic libraries versus 27.6M print books and other print materials.

As academic librarians we need to find ways to preserve access to deep reading even as we adapt to the values and needs of the digital age. Complementary formats for different purposes and interests.

The precise balance between electronic and physical holdings should be a reflection of each library’s unique mission and the needs of the institution it supports.

Some level of open-stack access to print monographs, depending on circumstance and strategy, is an important goal. This is especially relevant for humanities and social sciences libraries.
A commitment to literacy and learning is a core value of librarianship. We play a key role in partnering with faculty in understanding the impact of new forms of reading on scholarship, learning, and communication of ideas.

Various studies indicate that students still prefer print books to digital, for various purposes.

By preserving print collections in concert with providing access to digital materials, libraries are preserving a way of thinking and interacting with research that is complementary to other uses of scholarly information.

Regional initiatives (WEST, Hathi Trust, CDL, ReCAP, EAST) are very important for preserving the printed scholarly record (ie strategies for last copy retention).
Librarians can incorporate questions around the reading experience and best practices in our conversations with publishers and vendors. Often we focus on pricing, content, licensing models, and discoverability.

Reading research is a rapidly evolving area of interdisciplinary study, involving sociology, psychology, communication studies, neurobiology, education, and linguistics.

The mission of libraries is predicated on a reading culture. We need to offer the broadest possible access to the corpus of scholarship in an array of reading forms.

Reading and writing are intimately connected and develop together. We need a balanced, thoughtful approach to the new reading culture.
Conclusion

- Written culture is still vital for our intellectual development; our personal well-being; our sense of shared culture (Naomi Baron)

- Print and digital are complementary formats, not interchangeable

- Academic libraries must understand that different formats fulfill different needs, and different styles of research

- Avoid self-fulfilling prophecies about the ‘digital library”

- Commitment to serving the full spectrum of user needs
Readings


Readings


Readings (cont’d)


Thanks very much. Any questions?

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