

Younger readers prefer print over e-readers

By Aron Chilewich, *New Republic*

A study from the Pew Research Center on young Americans' library habits defies the conventional narrative of today's youth as a generation who has abandoned print. Despite being heavy Internet users, the press release states that "Americans under age 30 are strong supporters of traditional library services," including in-person assistance and – yes – books.

Pew found that Americans between the ages of 16 and 29 were actually more likely to have read a book in print in the past year than their 30-and-up counterparts; the breakdown was 75 percent to 64 percent, respectively. (Americans in this younger age bracket were also more likely to have visited a library in the past year, about as likely to have received assistance from a librarian in the past year, more likely to utilize a library's quiet space and more likely to be "strongly opposed" to the idea of automated check-out services than older Americans.)

And, despite growing popularity of e-books among all age ranges, Americans aged 30 to 49 are more likely than Americans aged 16 to 29 to own an e-reader or tablet computer.

So what's going on here? In part, it's that young people who are still in school tend to stick to pretty conventional research methods.

As Kathryn Zuckuhr, one of the authors of the study, told me in an email, "The need to do reading and research for school are definitely part of what's keeping print the base of many younger Americans' reading habits." (The same team of researchers found in 2011 that between ages 16 and 29, 81 percent of readers gave school or work as their reason for

reading, 76 percent said they read for pleasure, 73 percent to keep up with current events and 81 percent to research a topic of interest.)

Another possible reason is that schools have not switched over to e-readers and e-books. Cost is likely a major factor here – and also probably explains why adults are more likely to own e-readers. Young people who are reading e-books were “more likely to read their e-books on a computer (55 percent) or cell phone (41 percent),” Zuckuhr said.

Perhaps, then, the continued prevalence of print books has less to do with their popularity than with the ease with availability. Young people may be in the process of transitioning to e-books and e-readers, only at a slower pace due to their more limited resources. For now, at least, we have paper.