

more prevalent general literature. Part II begins with Michael J. Prasse and Lynn Silipigni Connaway sharing techniques and methods of usability testing of library Web sites while also addressing studies on usability testing methodology. Finally, Part II ends with Martha Kyrillidou, Colleen Cook, and S. Shyam Sunder Rao reviewing the literature on LibQUAL+, a library service quality measurement tool developed by ARL and Texas A&M University.

In this collection, Radford and Snelson have assembled an accessible, readable work that addresses important theories and practices, providing a helpful guide to an academic librarian looking to supplement his or her own understanding of current research in the field, enhance the theoretical underpinnings of her own practices, collect practical tips and methods applicable in the library setting, and identify possibilities for future research.

If there is a weakness in this work, it might be that its areas of emphasis are disproportionate. Part I has broader coverage, while Part II could stand to be similarly expansive. Libraries are in the position of constantly having to justify their services and programs to the institutions and constituencies they serve and the bodies that accredit them. It is difficult to imagine an academic library not subject to this increasing emphasis on producing tangible outcomes and providing evidence of the usefulness of its services and collections. The body of literature on academic library assessment is important, substantial, and growing, and Radford and Snelson's collection would have been enhanced by more than two chapters on assessment and evaluation. —*Maria T. Acardi, Indiana University Southeast.*

**Mark Bauerlein.** *The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes Our Future (Or, Don't Trust Anyone Under 30)*. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2008. 264p. \$24.95 (ISBN 9781585426393). LC2008-006690.

It would be easy to dismiss this book as the frustrated rant of a Baby Boomer professor, a "curmudgeon's grievance" (Bauerlein's phrase; page 174). After all, doesn't each generation, as it ages, and especially when it descends the slope of middle age, rue the current youth subculture? Don't they fret and moan about how the world is going to hell and that it is being led there by the next generation, or, at least, that the next generation is itself gleefully skipping down the rocky way, deep into the nine circles? It would be easy to dismiss Bauerlein (Professor of English at Emory and former Director of Research and Analysis at the National Endowment for the Arts) and his book.

And it would be wrong.

Bauerlein's thesis is simply stated in the subtitle of the book: Digital technologies are stupefying young Americans and are therefore jeopardizing our future as a nation. Anyone who has spent significant time surfing the Web, Googling, or jumping from Wikipedia article to Wikipedia article probably sympathizes with the observation that, after a while, one's attention span seems to diminish, one has less patience for the research process, one starts to avoid longish documents and sustained, lengthy arguments, preferring instead the quick Google fix, the succinct Wikipedia Word. The Web and Web-based technologies are great for information storage and retrieval, they have no doubt revolutionized the world, and those of us who have now spent significant segments of our careers in higher education designing and deploying them know their powers for promoting the Good when appropriately and properly employed. But they definitely have a stupefying effect as well, no matter your age.

Stir these powerful technologies into a narcissistic youth subculture and what you end up with is a largely impermeable demographic bubble filled with teenagers and young adults who use the technologies deftly, constantly, and continuously for intense self-reference and not much else. The technological Indra's Net of

interconnection is no longer cast as wide as the human universe. Rather, each jewel in the Net now simply reflects every other jewel, each one an adolescent with a cell phone welded to his head and a chat room burning on his screen.

I remember being a high school junior, sitting in Mr. Ford's geometry class when he admonished us guys in the back of the room, snapping his fingers, "Let's please be quiet back there and pay attention. We are not here to socialize." And I think we genuinely, though tacitly, understood this. Our socializing was at best an adjunct to what we were sitting there for: to learn geometry. At worst, it was a deterrent. In both cases, our socializing was beside the point, and deep down we knew it. The whole point of being in school was to study, to learn, and to somehow transcend our mundane, ignorant, adolescent selves—not to amplify them. The whole point was to grow beyond the narrow bounds of our individual, idiosyncratic comfort zones—not to crawl into them so far that we were beyond reach.

As Bauerlein points out, it used to be that a teenager's social life ended at his parents' front door. Once inside, the only connection to the outside was a single land line ("Don't tie up the phone!") and three channels on TV, preprogrammed for broadcasts we didn't always want to see. And yet, isn't frequent solitude and confrontation with the Other ("Do we *have* to watch *60 Minutes*?") at the very root of education and enlightenment?

Now, though, the adolescent social life is a mere click away, any time of day or night. It's even accessible via the Wii in the living room. And it's never been easier to simply stare at the screen and let the world around you—the world of adults, and books, and nature, and sports, and musical instruments, and maybe even TV shows you don't want to watch—fade away. After all, your friends are sitting at that very moment, just like you, staring at the other side of the screen, your mirror image reflected to infinity.

The six chapter titles of the book accurately indicate its content and progression:

- Knowledge Deficits
- The New Bibliophobes
- Screen Time
- Online Learning and Non-Learning
- The Betrayal of the Mentors
- No More Culture Warriors

Bauerlein is in a good position to judge the decline in basic knowledge among young people, both anecdotally as a professor at a prominent American university and more rigorously as a senior administrator at one of our most important cultural funding agencies. He begins the book with a quick chapter detailing the recent research and statistics in this area. The numbers are sobering and provide the backdrop for all that follows. Declines in knowledge of basic facts, declines in scientific and mathematical competencies, declines in rates of reading for pleasure and a surge in illiteracy, all with concomitant increases in "screen time" of one form or another—such is the educational milieu in which a significant number of Americans under age 30 find themselves. Particularly alarming is the attitude that often accompanies this, as Bauerlein relates in the most entertaining and edifying chapter in the book, "The Betrayal of the Mentors." Dues paying is for chumps; rigorous training obscures one's grand, idiosyncratic Vision; tradition is to be ignored because it has nothing new to offer; and impertinence is, so it appears, now a key virtue—and all this, as Bauerlein illustrates, with the complicity of the mentors themselves.

It's fairly obvious how this might impact higher education and academic librarianship: These are our new clients; they comprise the student body. If what Bauerlein says is true, then, especially with respect to technology addiction and intense peer-focused socializing, we should expect to see a drop in monographic circulations along with a corresponding rise in use of library-provided electronic resources, the library's wireless

network, and library social spaces such as common study areas, cafés, etc. So question: Do the statistics at your institution bear this out? They do at mine.

Why is this a bad thing? It's not, necessarily. Provision and usage of our resources and services is what we are here for. But when that usage becomes, perhaps abruptly, perhaps through a sea change, significantly lopsided, at some point it does become a bad thing. When the monographic and special collections lie fallow, their value comes into question. We as librarians know their value, many of us still wander the stacks in wonder and awe, many of us take it all for granted. Others do not.

I suppose it is the same with any cultural institution. End your patronage of the local museum, and the treasures of beauty, sublimity, and genius housed there may eventually fall from the walls.

What is to be done?

Is it ironic that I think we should applaud those librarians among us who communicate with the under-30 crowd using their preferred technologies, in their native habitats? Increased library usage of MySpace, blogs, and Twitter does not necessarily herald the end of civilization; rather, it is the first step in communicating with our clientele on their own terms. These are perfectly good tools to use to lure them in to witness for themselves the rest of what we have to offer. These tools can and are being used to promote the Good, where "Good" stands for the full and rich range of services and resources we provide. And just as I, here at mature middle-age (although we all know 46 is the new 25), much prefer e-mail to the telephone, so too do the under-30 crowd prefer Facebook to anything else.

So be it. Let's meet them where they live and lead them from there back to the stacks. Maybe Virgil, the reference librarian, can guide a sophomore through the reference stacks, pointing out important works along the way, before delivering him upstairs in time for his 2:15 appointment with Bea in Special Collections?

And maybe that appointment was made through Google Calendar?

Twitter feed #865217: Tpmost flr library, lavender latex gloves, paging thru old Hieronymus Bosch reproductions. Drk & scary like Diablo 3. Incred. Who knew?! BTW Bea looks angelic...

This message sent from T-Mobile Sidekick™ {ts '2009-10-07 14:37:23'}

(I think I just heard an English professor groan, all the way from Atlanta.)

I remember standing in the grocery checkout several years ago, enduring the young woman in front of me speaking loudly into her cell phone for all to hear:

"Yes. Yes. I painted them last night. I clipped them, then I painted them. Bright red."

All this technology and she's reporting on the current condition of her toenails? There are appropriate uses of technology and inappropriate uses of technology and surely one inappropriate use is to magnify inanity.

Precisely Bauerlein's point.

It would be so easy to label Bauerlein a grouchy fuddy-duddy and to dismiss his warnings as Henny-Penny overreactions. But then you realize how true to life his picture of the current situation is.

You realize this when your darling new fourteen-year-old stepdaughter picks up her cell phone and starts texting—at the dinner table.—Mark Czyzyk, *The Sheridan Libraries*, Johns Hopkins University.

**Jack Simpson.** *Basics of Genealogy Reference: A Librarian's Guide*. Westport, Conn.: Libraries Unlimited, 2008. 176p. alk. paper, \$40 (ISBN 9781591585145). LC2008-010596.

Jack Simpson's new book succeeds in meeting the needs of two distinct audiences: those seeking a very basic starting strategy for genealogical research and those seeking to understand the basics of