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Group Munin – Empathize

Due 1/30/2022

Our group chose adult reading as our problem space; specifically reading books. The task of reading is an important part of everyday life. From road signs to e-mail, reading helps us get through our days. However, even with the pandemic boom in reading the percentage of adults who read books is trending downward (Price, 2022). While we had some pre-conceived notions around problems concerning reading and why fewer adults in the US are reading year over year, we wanted to go into our interviews with an open mind. We developed a list of 12 questions as guide points but were not required to ask all of them and to let the conversation with our interview participants guide the conversation. These questions were:

1. How long ago was the last book you read?
2. How would you describe your relationship with reading?
3. Tell me about the last book that you read that you loved.
4. For what purpose do you use reading? Fun, personal growth, work, learning, etc.
5. Was there ever a time that discouraged you from reading? If so, explain.
6. How do you find your next book to read?
7. Are there any tools, apps, services, that you use for tracking? If so, describe.

8. Are there any tools, apps, services, that you use for recommendations? If so, describe.
9. What is your preferred reading format? Why? (like audio book, e-reader, physical book)
10. What is something that would keep you from reading a particular book?
11. What challenges do you face when reading?
12. Have you found yourself sticking to a particular genre? Multiple Genres? All Genres?
Why?

Each of our group members interviewed at least 2 people. We conducted these interviews separately and logged the results. We categorized each participant into one of 3 categories: non-reader, reader-enthusiast, and avid reader. During our weekly team meeting, we each went through our findings and found some common problems that each of our interview participants faced. Some of these problems were faced by a specific category and some were faced by all. These common problems included:

1. Non-reader
 - a. Feels like reading is a chore
 - b. No interest in prioritizing reading, despite the recognized benefits
 - c. Too many alternative activities to reading
 - d. Often were discouraged from reading at a young age – stating issues with slow reading or ADHD
2. Reader-Enthusiast
 - a. Limited access to reading resources – may not live near a library with an extensive collection, Libby app does not provide enough time for them to read a book
3. Avid Reader

- a. We did not find any major problems in the experiences of participants in this category
4. All/Most
- a. Difficult to focus and use mental energy on reading
 - b. Hard to find good recommendations outside of people they have relations with
 - c. Hard to find time and make reading a habit and stay consistent

After reviewing these common problems, we picked one that we thought was most experienced, which was – people found it difficult to focus and use energy on reading. We then asked “why?” until we got to the underlying problem. What we found was that, despite the health benefits to reading, there is no societal drive to motivate adults to personally prioritize reading in their life. If there is no motivation, then only a few will perform the activity and experience the benefits.

Adults in the United States experience a wide variety of problems related to reading. To truly understand these problems, we need to look at their overall experiences with reading. We had 12 total interview participants, including a group of 3 that participated in a focus group. Most of the interviewees were of the ages 25-30, with one the age of 40. From the readers, 3 fell into the non-reader category (Jenna, Scarlett, and Krank), 4 into the reader-enthusiast category (Alice, Harry, Marie, and Kevin), and 5 into the avid reader category (Jessica, Jared, Sabrina, Cindy, and Pep). For those that read or listen to audiobooks, we found that when looking for a recommendation, that readers will often use recommendations from people they know over a recommendation from an app or recommendation service. Some of the differences amongst the participants, other than reading frequency, includes – varying interest in genres, the degree to which representation in the stories matter, why they read (escapism, personal growth,

entertainment, etc.), and priorities in their lives. Each of our team members approached the interviews from different perspectives and sought to gain empathy in different ways.

For our non-readers, they often were discouraged by reading whether it was an external force as in Krank's situation or an internal influence such as feeling like they are a slow reader, as in Jenna's situation. Two out of three non-readers that tried to read stated they felt reading was a chore while the third lacked interest in even attempting to read. This reader category shared the most problems that prevented them from reading. In general, gamification is a tool that is often used to motivate and encourage participants to complete certain tasks. What we found interesting was that J's interviewee, Krank, was discouraged from reading when it was gamified. Krank describes their experience where the participants earned more points depending on the difficulty and number of books they read in a given year. Krank was expected to read as part of a curriculum. However, the primary issue with the gamification was that it motivated them to read books that Krank did not find interesting and led to a decreased interest in reading. While many of the interviewees cite focus as a challenge to reading, interest seems to be a driving force in the non-reader group. When lack of interest is compounded with conflicting priorities, mental exhaustion, and not enough time reading can become non-existent in one's life. Despite the lack of interest and motivation, these participants recognized the many benefits to reading. Jenna mentioned that the benefits to reading could include increased imagination and creativity and that it can be beneficial for learning and increased competency. Next, we discuss the reader-enthusiast group.

The reader-enthusiast group is the group in which the individuals read either occasionally or are trying to make reading a habit. This group may not read as their primary hobby but recognize the advantages to reading and have an interest in using reading to benefit their life.

Both Kevin and Alice mentioned that they read for fun and for personal growth. Additionally, they both use Amazon as their primary means of acquiring books and face acquisition challenges when it comes to their library systems. Kevin has a library with a limited selection. Alice has tried the Libby app, which offers library books electronically, and found it difficult to complete a book in the allotted time of 2-3 weeks. If the book check-out expires and there is a waitlist, then Alice must forfeit the book and get back in the virtual line. This could mean this group is more averse to spending disposable income on reading and is more selective when choosing what to read. Additionally, many of the participants in this group found that it was more difficult to find a book to read and tended to be less exploratory. Alice, for example, noted that she chooses books by their cover and sticks to specific genres. Marie, another one of the participants in this category, stated that she tends to re-read old favorites and struggles to find new books. While this group is motivated to read, they have varying levels of reading and face the biggest challenge of exploring different genres and acquiring book recommendations.

Finally, we explore our largest reader category – the avid readers. This group does not have any issue with finding time to read, read frequently, and may even attribute their favorite hobby to reading. This group typically knows what books they like to read and is most open to exploring new books and genres. When picking their next book to read they are the most likely to use recommendation services and apps like – BookTok, Goodreads, LGBTQreads.com, and Bookstagram. They also are the only ones that mentioned writing reviews and tracking their reading. One of the avid readers, Jessica, is a BookTok-er. As a BookTok-er, Jessica reads, and reviews books and posts them to TikTok's #booktok channel. BookTok is a way to help provide other readers with recommendations for reading. Cindy, on the other hand, does not post her reviews on any public services but does record her experiences for personal use. The avid readers

were also ‘okay’ with not finishing a book when they did not like it. Sabrina stated that she had no problem with stopping reading a book if she did not like the author’s tone. The only time she did not like finishing a book is if she was far into it or had to give the book back (like check-out on Libby expiring). Overall, this group has experienced the least challenges with reading but did note that they still experienced time and priority challenges. This challenge seems to be the main challenge experienced by each participant group.

Our team’s interview protocol helped us empathize with our interviewees but that is not the only way we empathized with them in the process. Our post-interview actions, based on the problems our interviewees encounter, helped us put ourselves in their shoes. The post-interview actions which involved, listening to podcasts, watching YouTube videos, downloading apps, and trying different reading experiences, helped us try to experience the users’ perspective and learn more about why people may have certain experiences surrounding reading. One of the common experiences faced amongst many of the participants was that social media deterred them from reading. It is much easier to watch a short video or read a meme than it is to read a book and keep track of characters and story lines. As TikTok is a popular social media application that is used by both J and Lauren’s interviewees, they both discussed ‘BookTok’ in their reflections. J specifically researched the BookTok movement. They found that, despite social media being seen as a foe to reading, BookTok is driving the sales of books (Zarroli, 2021). According to TikTok, the #booktok has 37 billion views and counting as of January 2022 (*#booktok hashtag videos on TikTok*). While this is positive, the majority of TikTok users are below the age of 30 and BookTok is not one of the topmost consumed categories (Dean, 2022). In the least, the usage of BookTok does provide our design team with some indication of how adults may find interest in engaging with reading. Unfortunately, it does not provide us with statistics about how many

BookTok users read and complete books they discovered through the platform. In order to understand the end-to-end experiences of reading we looked at two aspects – focus and motivation.

For these aspects Megan stumbled upon a podcast relating to focus and Lauren shared a YouTube video about why people stop reading. Both contributed to the understanding of the ‘problem as given’ that we are going to try to solve. Pew Research shows that as individuals age, they are more likely to read less. Using data from 2021 that shows the percentage of readers in the United States by age 18+, the most significant drop in percentage of readers occurs from the age of 18-29 (83%) and 30-49 (77%) or -6% (Faverio & Perrin, 2022). In the YouTube video that Lauren shared, a once avid reader wanted to figure out why they had stopped reading or in general why people stop reading. The YouTuber on the show *Answer in Progress*, known as Sabrina, helped us understand why some readers may stop reading as they get older. Sabrina found 4 theories as to why people stop reading. They are – not enough time, not enough energy, out of practice, and reading the “wrong” books for you (Cruz et al., 2022). Many of these reasons are problems that our interviewees, both current readers and non-readers, face. As we get older, our responsibilities increase, and our schedules become more inflexible. For the non-readers, reading is easy to deprioritize as the small amount of time an individual may have to themselves will probably go to something else, like watching TV or exercising. Even if someone was an avid reader in the past, it can be easy for someone to put their hobbies on the backburner due to other priorities. Many of our interview participants mentioned reading as requiring mental energy that they do not have or have little of by the end of the day. The increase in demands can be a contributing factor to mental exhaustion and lack of energy. Megan, who classifies herself as a reader-enthusiast and tries to regularly read before bed, decided to try to read at various times of

the day. She found this challenging as when she read during the middle of the day, she felt distracted by work priorities. When she read first thing in the morning, she found that she was tired and that she felt she was using up some of the energy she needed for work. Overall, while each member of our team varies in how they engage with reading, when we tried to put ourselves in the shoes of our interview participants, we found that the challenges are similar and can see why people are deterred from reading in adulthood.

After completing the empathizing phase, we took the most common challenge our participants faced and framed it. The most common challenge was around time and focus. We started out asking – why do people find it difficult to focus on reading. We found that it is because American adults have many conflicting priorities. After asking why a few more times, we found that society does not motivate individuals to prioritize reading in their lives.

Healthline.com suggests that reading can result in many benefits to a person's wellbeing. The suggested benefits range from improving vocabulary and reducing cognitive decline to aiding in sleep, reducing stress, and lowering blood pressure (Stanborough, 2019). While using reading to improve comprehension is a more obvious benefit, the other benefits are often overlooked.

Oftentimes when an individual is struggling with health ailments such as high anxiety and blood pressure - medications, an increase in exercise, and changes to diet are common prescriptions provided to mitigate these issues. All those things are important methods, but they may not work for everyone. Reading could offer an additional method for improving one's health outcomes. To increase reading amongst adults, they need to be motivated to read. To frame this problem, we looked at the following:

1. Who has this problem? Adults 18 and older living in the United States

2. What is the problem? No societal drive to motivate personal prioritization of reading.
Due to conflicting priorities and increasing responsibilities alongside tools that provide instant gratification requiring low cognitive load, people find it challenging to make it a priority.
3. Where do they experience it? The participants experience this in their everyday life.
The environment in which we live and the technologies we rely on often work against us in the sense of having time and energy to read.
4. Why does it matter?
 - a. Reading improves creativity and competency
 - b. Reading improves focus, which is being hindered by services like social media
 - c. Reading may help you live longer, and statistics show that percentage of readers decreases as people age (Stanborough, 2019)
 - d. Reading improves health outcomes, physically, mentally, and emotionally

Our team feels that this is an important problem to solve to improve society. There are many different angles that we can take when working towards solutions and we recognize that this problem could even evolve as we work through the next phase in the design process.

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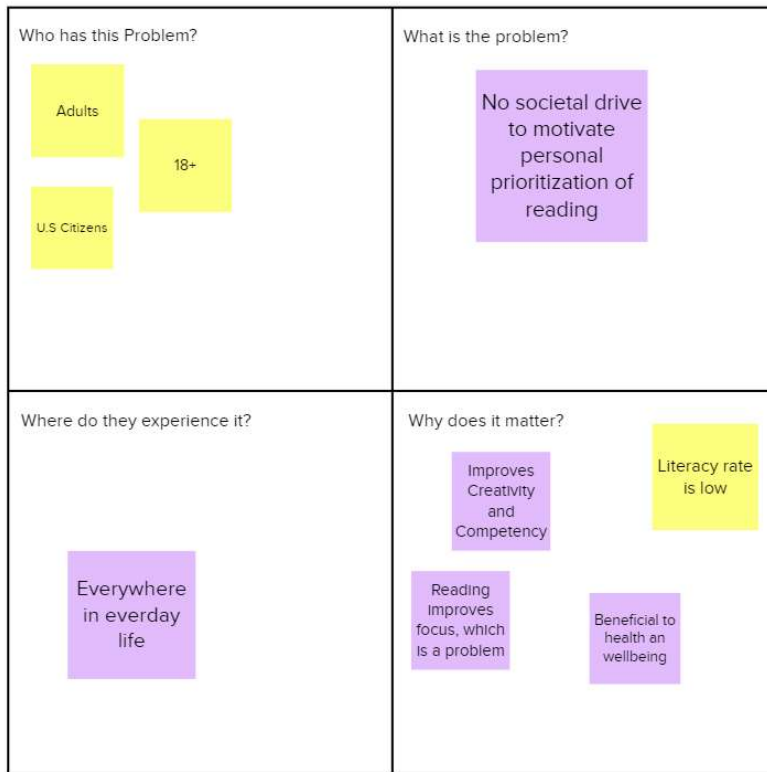
Appendix

- **Team Activities**

- Interview Questions – Semi-Structured

- How long ago was the last book you read?
 - How would you describe your relationship with reading?
 - Tell me about the last book that you read that you loved.
 - For what purpose do you use reading? Fun, personal growth, work, learning, etc.
 - Was there ever a time that discouraged you from reading? If so, explain.
 - How do you find your next book to read?
 - Are there any tools, apps, services, that you use for tracking? If so, describe.
 - Are there any tools, apps, services, that you use for recommendations? If so, describe.
 - What is your preferred reading format? Why? (like audio book, e-reader, physical book)
 - What is something that would keep you from reading a particular book?

- What challenges do you face when reading?
- Have you found yourself sticking to a particular genre? Multiple Genres?
All Genres? Why?
- Finding the Problem by asking “Why?”
 - Why do people struggle to focus on reading?
 - Because people today have to deal with a lot of conflicting priorities...why?
 - So many things actively trying to get attention – products, apps, services. And hard to turn off to focus...why?
 - Money...Why?
 - You only get 3 hours of high productivity time to focus and phones distract and whittles away from energy....Why?
 - Actively choosing to prioritize other things over reading....why?
 - Other obligations and no benefit to prioritizing
 - Outlying factors – mental health – ADHD....Why?
- Framing the Problem



- **Individual Interviews and Reflections**

- **Lauren**

All names have been changed for participants' privacy.

Lauren conducted 2 interviews. One was a solo interview with booktoker Jessica, and one focus group style interview that comprised of a couple and their friend, names Marie and Harry, the couple, and Jared, their friend. The one on one interview took approximately 25 minutes while the focus group took longer. It came in at just around an hour and a half. These two interviews could not have been more different, despite the similarities between the participants. All are around the same age range of between 25-30, all come from similar socioeconomic backgrounds, but the way they participate in reading is vastly different.

As expected, Jessica reads quite a bit more than the three from the focus group. A big part of her life is reading and reviewing books for her Tiktok account and related podcast, as such, she has read more books more recently. In response to our first question of “when did you finish your last book?” her response was “yesterday.” The focus group had answers that ranged from 2 weeks ago to last November.

The one on one interview was very straight forward. We had a good rapport and she was easy to open up to some of our harder questions such what has discouraged her from reading in the past. An unkind teacher who would bully her due to her lack of attention, that was later diagnosed as ADHD, discouraged her. But she was lucky that she had a mother who went to bat for her at school, got her the accommodations she needed, and continued to encourage reading at home.

Finding new books wasn't as much of a challenge for Jessica as it was for the group. She primarily reads books that deal with LGBTQ characters or themes regardless of the greater genre. If it's an interesting story and queer, she'll give it a try. With the help of her wife and websites like LGBTQReads.com she has been able to find plenty of books to keep her interested in the hobby.

The focus group was an entirely different experience from the one on one interview. The group were all familiar with one another, which helped. There was some cross talking, occasionally Jared would ask Marie a question and build on her answer to the one I had provided. But none of them were afraid to disagree with one another. If anything, something someone had said sparked something and they added onto their original answer.

Additionally, this group had a harder time finding new books to read than Jessica. Whereas she's happy with any book regardless of genre if it's queer, Marie's standards are a little higher. She has a much harder time finding new books to read because she feels that books aren't written for her demographic. Most of what she finds is books written for teens or women much older than her and she finds herself lost in the dust with nothing to read but old favorites.

Something that came up more in this interview was book recommendation services. Jared found algorithm based services to be soulless and unhelpful. Marie agreed that they don't account for factors outside of strict things like genre and reading level. Harry felt he had gotten very good recommendations from small talk with librarians or just wandering the shelves of the library, but Marie had the opposite experience. A recent book she decided to stop before finishing had been recommended by a librarian.

Something all participants agreed upon was trigger warnings. They all agreed that specific content or triggers in a book would keep them from reading a particular book. The triggers themselves did differ. Harry stated he would prefer not to read a book marked for graphic violence but Marie said she'd read a book with graphic violence as long as it wasn't boring. However, all of them agreed that trigger warnings for graphic content should be included in the copy of books somehow. They didn't care where, as long as it was there. Marie suggested publishers put them on the back cover instead of the blurbs and reviews from authors that she found useless.

For all of them, reading was a form of escapism. It was a way to get out of the real world for a little while and immerse themselves in something new. While each participant had a different preference for how to get there, different genres or types of writing, they all agreed

that reading was that outlet for them. Harry didn't want to read books about relatable people doing relatable things, Jared preferred reading fantasy and sci fi because he loved the world building and commentary on human behavior, Marie just didn't want to read a book about a woman in her thirties living alone and having it all, and Jessica wanted to read books about people like her getting to have extraordinary adventures. In the end they all had the same goal of escapism, they just got there a little differently.

○ J

Similarities:

Both in their Mid-Late 20s

Both tech-savvy

Both from a forum writing site I participate in (hobbyist creative writers)

Both use TikTok

Differences:

AMAB & AFAB

A Language Arts teacher versus a game producer

Someone who enjoys reading and another who finds it taxing/non-enjoyable

One from Texas and another from Tennessee

One discouraged from reading and another not having had that experience

One participating in grad school and another without higher education

Both of these individuals that I interviewed are from a creative writing website where we all write stories together – which in and of itself requires reading. My friend, ‘Pepper’ the ELA teacher, really enjoys reading and teaches the skills for it for a living to her 3rd grade class. She was never discouraged from reading as a child, and loves engaging in the classic literature, finding herself to be picky about her genres but still overall enjoying reading on a whole. On the other hand, my friend ‘Krank’, works in game production for Epic Games and will avidly report that he ‘does not know how to read’. It’s a running joke, considering he obviously has to for work and other activities (not to mention our hobby), but when it comes down to it, he doesn’t enjoy reading outside of our forum activities. Even simple emails and other items are a struggle, and he often has trouble focusing on long term objectives. The last time he remembers reading a book through cover to cover was in the 8th grade, which was nearly 15 years ago for him now.

I found it really interesting that one of my friends, ‘Krank’, had despised the testing platform where points were awarded based on difficulty of the book being read, etc. I remember in elementary school that I absolutely loved taking those quizzes on the books I read, and watching the points rack up throughout the week or month. So it was really intriguing to find that my friend had been pushed away from reading because of the chore revolving around taking those weighted tests and earning points. Whereas I was an overachiever and really enjoyed testing my knowledge and proving that I had read all of those books, he really

struggled with having reading attached to an assignment that was now graded and required, rather than simply something he did for fun in his free time. It makes me wonder if he would have turned out with the same feelings towards reading if those tests had not been required of him during his upbringing. This made me have to take a backseat and interpret this information through a new lens – while I had found something really rewarding and enjoyable, it had actually done harm to my friend’s willingness to read and enjoy books altogether. It was obviously something that left a lasting impression if he was still able to recall that as a specific point in time that discouraged him from reading.

‘Pepper’ was the one who suggested BookTok as a means of culminating new books based off recommendations by users on TikTok, which I had never heard of before. While she doesn’t use a tracking system to manage her readings, she does enjoy engaging in BookTok exploration and dabbles in finding new recommendations through online users all utilizing the same hashtag. However, as someone who typically enjoys the classics and older books, I have to wonder how well this works out for her, as she even admitted in her interview that she wouldn’t really find interest in a book if it was published in the last 20 years. Something tells me that BookTok is more up to date and current than that, and I am curious how she curates new choice reads when most of those wouldn’t match her original description for what she’s looking for.

Empathy Activity Log:

Monday (6-7pm) - searched for book recommendations using ‘BookTok’ hashtags.

This took a bit of searching and getting used to, as I don't already follow BookTok individuals so it was all new to me to use it for this purpose. Typically I only use TikTok for cute and funny animal videos as a way to decompress at night, rather than utilizing it to gather more information, so it was weird to go out of my way to search for book recommendations. Especially from strangers who don't know my taste, etc. I typically rely on friends who I know I can trust that have the same taste as I do. I also only use TikTok in short doses, because I 'burn out' really quickly on social media platforms so I can only search for about an hour or so. I immediately noticed that there is a TON of hype about 'A Court of Thorns and Roses'.

Tuesday (6-7pm) - researched the Booktok movement

Barnes and Noble has an entire page dedicated to Booktok, where they post and update lists based off of TikTok book recommendations. They have it broken down by subjects on the left that help narrow down someone's search. NPR even did an article on how TikTok is driving book sales based off its BookTok movement. There are even articles out there (Distractify) where they hash out the best people to follow for Booktok content.

Wednesday (6-7pm) - Youtube Content on BookTok

There is a Youtube 'rabbit hole' that follows various users who are reading through BookTok recommended books and talking about whether they are worth it or not, or what they thought of them. Of course this is going to come with a grain of salt no matter what happens, considering everyone is going to have differing tastes and opinions.

- **Bruce**

User Demographics and responses

User 1 = Kevin

User 2 = Cindy

User 1 is a 40-year-old male working in Information Technology for an American multinational corporation. He has an active family life and spends considerable time outdoors for recreation. He is a self-described book enthusiast, utilizing both traditional printed books and audio books while traveling or when audio books are preferential. User 1 described his relationship with reading as healthy. He enjoys reading for both fun and to a lesser extent, personal growth and gaining knowledge in the form of business and leadership books and computer development. He primarily described his experience reading fiction and talked about how he enjoys reading books with a strong lead and exciting yet plausible setting. As he finishes a book and thinks about what to read next, he first looks for books by the same author or something that falls into a similar genre. He characterizes his book completion rate as high. The one difficulty he described in acquiring books was related to where he lived. The city he lives in is small and oriented to outdoor living. Therefore, the local library is limited in its selection and capability to acquire new books. Special orders are possible, but it takes time to deliver. So, he will make use of Amazon to acquire new books through purchase in lieu of availability at the library. User 1 also ascribes a lack of time as the primary reason he is not able to read as much as he wants.

User 1 is a 30-year-old female and a former corporate librarian and researcher. She has a love of books and reading and regularly finishes books in a variety of genres. She enjoys reading

for personal enjoyment and personal growth. She chooses books based on recommendations from friends and also utilizes two recommendation services, Goodreads and Bookstagram. While she doesn't write reviews on Goodreads, she does record her personal reviews in a separate notebook, as a reading journal where she revisits her thoughts on books that she rereads. She did indicate that there were several reasons she would stop reading a specific book, but they revolve around whether she is enjoying the book or not, including a connection to the characters, plot elements and an unlikeable cover. The main reason she can't read as much as she wants is a lack of time.

Reflection

User 1 and User 2 were very different in how they approach and feel about reading. User 1 appreciates books, even describing himself as an enthusiast, yet he reads approximately 6 books a year and listens to roughly the same amount. User 2 also describes herself with a healthy relationship with books yet is reading a new book almost every week. User 1 does not read or write or post reviews, nor solicit recommendations from friends or the internet. He does not utilize book recommendation or review services of any kind except for Amazon where it suggests a similar book based on aggregate user data, but this doesn't expressly constitute a specialized book recommendation service in the way that other book lovers tend to engage with the reading community. User 2, a former corporate librarian, and researcher loves books at an almost emotional level. She immerses herself in reading, often spending hours in the evening when family responsibilities are typically over or less pressing. She, on the other hand, makes extensive use of book recommendation services and reading trackers including her own reading journal written in a notebook. Both users did explicitly identify

time constraints and competing priorities as a contributing factor to their inability to read as much as they wanted. User 1 has many competing priorities including family activities like school sports, homework support, personal hobbies, and work responsibilities. User 1 also uses their phone for mobile games and other time-consuming activities. User 2 also has competing priorities with activities that include family responsibilities and occasionally running for pleasure, although User 2's prime hobby is specifically reading, so she takes as much time during the day to read as possible. User 1 attempts to compensate for a perceived lack of time by listening to audiobooks while driving and waiting for kids to complete their activities. Although this is a serviceable activity for some readers, his preference is to read a printed book and only utilizes audiobooks as a last resort.

User 1 and User 2 both enjoy reading. Yet they are vastly different in how they engage with the global reading community with User 1 fully engaging in a variety of channels and services and User 2 largely ignoring it entirely. They both experience time, attention and priority constraints which limit their reading capacity.

- **Megan**

Interviewee #1: Jenna

Interviewee #2: Scarlett

Interviewee #3: Alice

Interviewee #4: Sabrina

How did we work to gain empathy with others? - emphasis on new insights, surprises, problems

For this phase of the project there are a few different ways that I attempted to gain empathy for the people that I interviewed. Our team's problem space is reading, which is a common activity performed globally. Growing up, it was an activity that I struggled with and even still struggle with today. The main difference is that now I find myself encouraged to read. Knowing that it is not always something that people are naturally consistently doing, I wanted to make sure that I was open to hearing different perspectives. My goal was to let my interviewee's know that it does not matter if you read or not and that I just wanted to hear their stories. One of the things that my team was concerned about was that individuals may not want to share information on why they don't read or don't like reading. Surprisingly, I found that to be quite the opposite and that they didn't mind sharing that information. Now, the people I interviewed were people I have known for a long time and that may have helped them feel comfortable with being open and honest but, I do feel that stating that it didn't matter if they read or not helped. Second to that establishment, I also feel that using the semi-structured interview protocol helped allow me to tailor the conversation to meet their perspectives. While each interview had a similar starting point and shared some similarities, each interview offered different angles on the information provided and opened new possible problems.

Now that I have completed the interviews, in order to further empathize, I took some of the problems I found and tried to put myself in the situations they were in. For the most part, I already was personally experiencing or have experienced similar problems. These include – being a slow reader, busy with a lot going on in life making it difficult to find time to read, being better in math/science related subjects in school discouraged me from exploring reading, challenging to find books that I like to read and having access to other activities that provide

quick dopamine responses/require less brain power (Instagram, Tik-Tok, Snapchat, etc.). The problems that I haven't experienced previously are – using the Libby app to read library books and having to sit on a wait-list and then having to return the book 2 weeks later, feeling like the cost of books is too high, and using an e-reader that has blue light and reverts some of the benefits to reading. While I have an e-reader and a backlog of physical books to read, I decided to download the Libby app to attempt to experience the problem faced when using it.

Additionally, I wanted to further understand the other two problems in more depth. Finally, all of the interviewee's brought up a common theme as a problem that I see as a benefit. The problem being that reading is mentally exhausting/tiring. While I personally do get tired when reading, I find it as a helpful way to improve my sleep quality. I mostly read before bed or in a relaxing situation so that if I fall asleep then it is acceptable. This does make me wonder about this problem and whether or not it is based on situation and time of day when the activity is done. In order to understand this perspective, I changed my reading pattern during the week and tried different times each day of the week. Here are my logs on the 2 activities I attempted in order to gain perspective and understanding:

Monday: Read at @2:30pm, Download Libby

- Libby:
 - Easy to sign into my library with my card
 - UI not great to helping me discover books – better to know what you want to read
 - Lots of options for books/audio books
- Reading

- I tried to read at lunch time but work was busy so I read when I had a break
- I didn't feel tired when reading at this time but more so distracted with my thoughts on what all I needed to get done and only got to read a few pages

Tuesday: Find a popular book that I have been wanting to read and get on wait-list, Read in the morning

- Libby:
 - Got on wait-list, will attempt to read book on my phone
- Reading:
 - Could not find time during the morning to read, didn't want to compromise sleep – definitely an issue – still read at night

Wednesday: Read in early evening, Reflect on other problems

- Reading:
 - Read in morning right after waking up, felt most tired during this time – may be better to read 30 mins after waking and doing morning routine. Difficult with work involved
 - Had a headache and did not want to read in the early evening – still read at night

Overall, there seem to be many blockers that people face regarding the activity of reading. A major insight that I encountered was that each interviewee cited benefits to reading. Those that read noted those benefits as an influence in creating reading a habit while the others seemed to

not have interest or feel that those benefits outweigh the costs and challenges they would face by reading. I have personally once felt the same and still sometimes struggle to stay consistent with reading. Despite this, I have experienced positive benefits on my physical and mental health. I have noticed improvements in my vocabulary, stress levels, and sleep quality. Reading is not something that your health provider prescribes to improve your health. Usually individuals are prescribed diet or exercise to improve their health which can lead to prioritizing those activities rather than reading.

Description of Interviewees – similarities/differences, what reading meant to each of them, how do they perform the activity, what they enjoy/struggle with, stories

Interviewee Similarities:

- All assigned female at birth
- All around the same age
- All work at the same place
- All have the same level of education – Bachelors
- All live in the eastern time zone of the United States

Interviewee Differences:

- Different majors in college
- Different interests and hobbies
- All have different reading habits:
 - Interviewee #1: Does not read

- Interviewee #2: Listens to audio books
 - Interviewee #3: New Year's resolution to read more
 - Interviewee #4: Avid Reader
- Interviewee #1 and #4 have a baby 3-6 months old
- Interviewee #3 wants to read for pleasure and personal growth and is looking to advance her career by reading.

What Reading Means to each of them/How they perform it:

- Interviewee #1: Does not read. Feels reading is a waste of time and has little to no interest in reading though, admits there are benefits to reading.
- Interviewee #2: Listens to audio books. Feels reading is like a chore but finds audio books to be easier to consume.
- Interviewee #3: New Year's resolution to read more. Feels reading is challenging but wants to get better at it. Using for both personal growth in her career and for entertainment. Hoping to benefit from reading.
- Interviewee #4: Avid Reader – Typically reads off of her phone though, previously used an e-reader. Likes to use the Libby app for free reading that is accessible. She has had periods of time reading/not reading.

What They Enjoy/Struggle with

- Interviewee #1: Does not enjoy reading unless it's a page turner. Hard to find a page turner/does not have the time for reading. Struggles with reading speed and aptitude.

Would rather be traveling than reading. Does not see the point in spending time on reading.

- Interviewee #2: Likes using audio books since she can multi-task while reading. Struggles with reading physical books due to lack of time and mental exhaustion. Would rather use free time to give her brain a break through activities like watching TV.
- Interviewee #3: Likes catchy covers and doesn't want to have to read descriptions to find out if she wants to read the book. Finds it hard to find books she wants to read. Struggles with slow reading and 2-week limit of renting on Libby. Likes the \$30 for 6 months subscription to rent books on the Kindle. Does not want to spend a lot of money on reading.
- Interviewee #4: Likes particular genres – struggles with reading non-fiction stories the most. Finds the best way to read consistently is to have the book near-by. This is why reading on her phone is preferred. Social media has made it challenging to read consistently because it's easier to consume small chunks of content than a book. Has deleted social media apps to help her stay on track. She also does not like audio books because the length of the clips seem long and daunting – doesn't mind them on road trips.

Stories

- Interviewee #1: This individual does not have an interest in reading and has not read a book since college. They enjoy traveling and seeing the world over reading about it in a book. They said there are too many other alternative activities to reading that they

feel are of higher priority such as exercising. They were discouraged from reading, like many of us, because they feel they are a slow reader and struggled with vocabulary growing up. Despite this, the interviewee did acknowledge the benefits of reading and said that if there was a good page turner, like the Princess Diary books, that they would consider reading in the future.

- Interviewee #2: The second interviewee just recently had a baby and finds herself busy working full time and caring for her newborn. The last book she read she said she couldn't get into and after the vacation was over she stopped reading. She stated that reading often feels like a chore and would rather be able to multi-task when reading. This is why this interviewee like audio books. She uses the Libby app to download free podcasts and uses her sister's audible account. Like interviewee #1, she also acknowledges the benefits of reading but ultimately wants to "turn her brain off" after a hard day's work rather than using mental energy towards reading.
- Interviewee #3: Interviewee #3 just recently took up a new year's resolution to read more. She has been struggling at work to earn the compensation and promotion she has worked hard for. Thus she reads for both self-improvement and entertainment. Her current goal is to read a book on personal development in the morning when her mind is sharp and a book for pleasure in the evening to help her wind down. She also feels she is a slow reader and has been deterred from the Libby app's options as they have a 2 week limit and if there is a wait-list she would have to get back in line at the end. Despite this, she found another affordable alternative – the Kindle book subscription that costs \$30 for 6 months or \$5 per month. This option is available to her as she can use her iPad as an e-reader. She prefers physical books however, they

are often more expensive. In addition to self-improvement, she hopes that this helps improve her reading speed. As she just started reading, she is having trouble finding books that would interest her but has used covers to help her choose.

- Interviewee #4: The last interviewee is a reader that reads quite a bit. Her main challenge with reading is staying consistent as she has had periods of time where she had stopped reading. She mostly uses the Libby app to read as she needs a light to read at night as to not wake up her husband. She does not like audio books as she doesn't like pausing them and the length but doesn't mind pausing podcasts or books. The primary benefit of reading for her is the escapism aspect of it but also recognizes that it can help you learn things. She states social media as the biggest challenge to reading and states "Mark Zuckerberg is the enemy of reading".

Potential Problems for Problem Statement

- Slow Reading
- Interest/difficult to find books people want to read
- Too many alternatives to reading
- Reading is mentally taxing and people want to "turn brain off" after working hard all day
- Libby app not supportive of slow readers and restricts books to 2 weeks
- While reading is shown to be beneficial, especially to one's wellbeing, people aren't motivated to prioritize reading
- Hard to find time to read and make it a habit

- Not a lot of studies on reading health benefits – primarily physical health benefits
- Social Media is a blocker to reading
- 57% of Americans have stated they haven't read a book in the last year
- Our attention span is limited and reading requires focus