Gender, Age, and Race Differences in Self-Reported Reading Attitudes of College Students

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Abstract : Little research has been conducted to examine college students' reading attitudes, including students' perceptions of reading behaviors and reading abilities. This is problematic, as reading assigned course material is a critical component to an undergraduate student's academic success. For this study, flyers were electronically disseminated to instructors at 24 public and 10 private U.S. institutions in "Reading-Intensive Departments" including Psychology, Sociology, Education, Business, and Communications. We requested the online survey be completed as an in-class activity during the fall 2019 and spring 2020 semesters. All participants voluntarily completed the questionnaire anonymously. Of the participants, 280 self-identified their race as Black and 280 self-identified their race as White. Of the participants, 177 self-identified their gender as Male and 383 self-identified their Gender as Female. Participants ranged in age from 18-24. Factor analysis found four dimensions resulting from the questions regarding reading. The first we interpret as "Reading Proficiency", accounted for 19% of the variability. The second dimension was "Reading Anxiety" (15%), the third was "Textbook Reading Ability" (9%), and the fourth was "Reading Enjoyment" (8%). Linear models on each of these dimensions revealed no effect of Age, Gender, Race, or Income on "Reading proficiency". The linear model of "Reading Anxiety" showed a significant effect of race ($p = 0.02$), with higher anxiety in white students, as well as higher reading anxiety in female students ($p < 0.001$). The model of "Textbook Reading Ability" found a significant effect of race ($p < 0.001$), with higher textbook problems in white students. The model of "Reading Enjoyment" showed significant effects of race ($p = 0.013$) with more enjoyment for white students, gender ($p = 0.001$) with higher enjoyment for female students, and age ($p = 0.033$) with older students showing higher enjoyment. These findings suggest that gender, age, and race are important factors in many aspects of college students' reading attitudes. Further research will investigate possible causes for these differences. In addition, the effectiveness of college-level programs to reduce reading anxiety, promote the reading of textbooks, and foster a love of reading will be assessed.

Keywords : age, college, gender, race, reading

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