

Research Paper

Exploring Empathy, Stress, and Narrative Transportation among Fiction and Nonfiction Readers

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ABSTRACT

Fiction and nonfiction literature are two distinct genres, with fiction rooted in imagination and storytelling, while nonfiction is grounded in factual accuracy and real-world events. Reading, irrespective of genre, enhances empathy, decreases stress, and fosters narrative transportation—the process of becoming immersed in a story. Despite extensive research on the benefits of reading, limited studies have directly examined the relationship between empathy, stress and narrative transportation on the basis of genre. The present study aims to compare the degree of change in empathy and stress levels in adults as a result of reading fiction or nonfiction and to study the role of narrative transportation in mediating these effects. Participants were divided into two groups—Group A read fiction, while Group B read nonfiction. Participants completed the Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen et al., 1983), the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (Spreng, McKinnon, Mar & Levine, 2009) in the pre-assessment and post-assessment surveys, as well as the Narrative Transportation Scale (Green & Brock, 2000) weekly. The study revealed that individuals with higher stress levels experienced greater narrative transportation while reading. Additionally, participants reading nonfiction demonstrated higher levels of sympathetic physiological arousal compared to those reading fiction. The findings underscore the transformative potential of reading, providing valuable insights for educators, mental health practitioners, and literary enthusiasts in selecting literature to enhance well-being and empathy.

Keywords: *Empathy, Stress, Narrative Transportation, Fiction, Nonfiction Readers*

Reading comprehension refers to “the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language” (Snow, 2002). Reading is a process that encompasses three interconnected components: the text, the reader, and the reading task, all of which are embedded within a larger sociocultural framework. Effective text comprehension requires the reader to possess various skills (such as attention, memory, and the ability to make inferences), motivation (such as specific reading goals and interest), and knowledge (including domain-specific and linguistic knowledge). These factors are shaped by the particular texts being read and the nature of the reading activity (Snow, 2002).

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Each year, 500,000 to 1 million new books are published worldwide. Including self-published authors, the total reaches nearly 4 million new book titles annually. Additionally, audiobooks have seen a significant rise in popularity, generating about \$5.4 billion in revenue in 2022. (Errera, 2023) According to UNESCO, roughly 2.2 million new book titles are published across the globe each year (Giordano, 2023). This data highlights the evolving nature of reading habits and the expansive community of readers globally.

An increasing amount of research demonstrates that reading profoundly impacts individuals. Clark and Rumbold (2006) identified numerous positive consequences of reading for pleasure, including increased self-confidence, enriches general knowledge, fosters a deeper appreciation of diverse cultures, encourages greater community involvement, and enhances understanding of human nature and decision-making. Moreover, a 2018 survey by the National Literacy Trust, involving nearly 50,000 children and young people, revealed a strong link between literacy engagement and mental well-being. The survey found that those most engaged in reading were three times more likely to report higher levels of mental well-being compared to those least engaged (National Literacy Trust, 2018). Furthermore, clinical data shows that individuals with depression who participate in reading groups experience significant improvements in mental health over time (Billington et al., 2011).

The impact of reading varies significantly depending on the genre, as different genres cater to diverse interests and offer unique benefits. Broadly categorized into fiction and nonfiction, each has its own influence. Fiction genres, such as mystery, thriller, and crime—preferred by nearly half of American readers according to a 2015 survey—stimulate imagination, creativity, and empathy by immersing readers in gripping narratives and complex characters. In contrast, nonfiction genres, like history (favored by 33% of readers) and biographies or memoirs (31%), enrich readers with factual knowledge, cultural understanding, and insights into real-world events and personalities (Watson, 2024).

Fiction stems from the author's imagination, encompassing genres such as short stories, novels, myths, legends, and fairy tales. Although plot points, settings, and characters may occasionally draw inspiration from real-life individuals or events, authors transform these elements into the building blocks of their creative narratives. Fiction novels often employ specific narrative techniques to enhance impact, such as rich sensory details, varied pacing, the juxtaposition of summarized narrative with dramatized scenes, and delaying or withholding information to heighten suspense. Additionally, different points of view, ranging from objective narration to deep subjective interiority, as well as stylized language, all contribute to shaping events and human consciousness. (Grant, 2020).

Nonfiction, on the other hand, refers to factual, real-world writing that aims to inform, explain, or persuade. Unlike fiction, which creates imaginary worlds and characters, nonfiction deals with actual events, people, and ideas. It spans a variety of genres, including essays, memoirs, biographies, self-help books, journalism, and more (Grant, 2020).

Joan Didion (1976), an American writer and journalist, highlighted the differences between fiction and nonfiction writing through a metaphor: "Writing nonfiction is more like sculpture, a matter of shaping the research into the finished thing. Novels are like paintings, specifically watercolors. Every stroke you put down you have to go with. Of course, you can rewrite, but the original strokes are still there in the texture of the thing"

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Given the significant psychological and emotional benefits of reading, which vary depending on the genre, it is evident that literature profoundly impacts individuals. The relationship between reading and stress relief, reading and empathy, and the impact of narrative transportation on changes in stress and empathy levels in adults will be discussed in this study.

Firstly, numerous studies have explored the link between reading and stress relief. As stated by Hans Selye's General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS), stress occurs in three stages: alarm, resistance, and exhaustion. "De-stressing" refers to the process of managing or reducing the body's response to these stress stages. In the alarm stage, the body reacts with a "fight-or-flight" response, and during resistance, it adapts to the stressor. Without proper de-stressing, prolonged stress leads to exhaustion, where the body's ability to cope is depleted (Selye, 1956). For instance, (Sykes, 2003) the Nestlé Family Monitor study on young people's attitudes towards reading found that 55% of respondents stated that books help them understand different people and cultures, and 50% described reading as relaxing, highlighting its role in stress relief. Moreover, Dungworth and colleagues also found that pupils often read for enjoyment and relaxation, further emphasizing the emotional benefits of reading (Dungworth, Grimshaw, McNight, Morris, 2004). Furthermore, in a survey by the Scottish Book Trust, 98% of Scottish readers said that reading for pleasure supported their well-being, while 92% indicated that reading was particularly important during times of stress or anxiety (Lynch, 2024). Additionally, a study examining the importance of leisure reading for health sciences students revealed that 11.8% of participants felt that reading fiction improved their work-life balance and served as a source of stress relief. With many offering further comments to reinforce this view (Watson, 2015). These findings illustrate the significant relationship between reading and stress relief, providing context for the objectives of this study.

Secondly, a multitude of studies have explored the link between reading and empathy. Empathy is described by Davis (1994) as the capacity to recognize and empathize with another person's emotions, encompassing both cognitive and emotional components. It allows individuals to recognize and respond to the emotional states of others, facilitating deeper interpersonal connections and enhancing prosocial behavior. Research published in the *Journal of Healthcare Communications* highlights the therapeutic benefits of reading, showing that bibliotherapy helps individuals address emotional and psychological challenges while gaining a deeper understanding of themselves and the world around them. (Heath, Sheen, Leavy Young, 2005) Furthermore, researchers from The New School in New York found that reading literary fiction improves readers' ability to comprehend what others are thinking and feeling. (Chiaet, 2024). Moreover, A study from the University of Liverpool revealed that two-thirds of readers report strong empathy compared to less than half of non-readers, with those reading for just 30 minutes a week being 23% more likely to understand others' emotions (Billington, 2015). Fiction, in particular, is noted for its ability to transport readers into another character's mind, enabling them to experience life from different perspectives, which can significantly enhance empathic understanding (Schmidt, 2020). The effect of reading on emotional responses has been further supported by studies that argue that engaging with fiction evokes emotional responses that enhance empathy through the simulation of social interactions. (Mar et al., 2006) These findings highlight the significant relationship between reading and empathy, offering valuable context for the objectives of this study.

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Narrative transportation is another important factor to consider in the study alongside the book genre when assessing changes in empathy and stress levels. According to Savitri and Farah, “it is not the matter of fiction or non-fiction that can affect the readers’ empathy, but the extent to which the text can transport the readers (narrative transport).” This implies that the effect of reading on empathy is not solely determined by whether the text is fiction or nonfiction, but also by the extent to which the narrative transports the reader, a variable known as narrative transportation. (2022)

Having established the significant effects reading can have on individuals, including distinctions between fiction and nonfiction and their connections to empathy levels and stress relief, this study can now explore the relationship between book genres (fiction or nonfiction) and the degree of change in stress and empathy levels in adults. Additionally, the relationship between levels of narrative transportation and the degree of change in stress and empathy levels in adults can also be examined.

Despite extensive research on the effects of reading materials, there remains a significant gap in our understanding of the difference between how fiction and non-fiction books influence empathy and stress levels. As illustrated above, studies have explored the effects of each genre individually on empathy and stress levels; however, very few have directly compared the difference between the effects of these two genres. Gaining a deeper understanding of the psychological effects of reading is essential due to the widespread and impactful nature of this activity. This study aims to compare the changes in stress and empathy levels, while considering the role of narrative transportation, in adults aged 35 to 67 who consistently engage with either fiction or nonfiction literary material.

METHODOLOGY

Research Aim

Existing research studies suggest that reading, whether fiction or nonfiction, has significant effects on stress reduction, empathy, and narrative transportation. The aim of this study is to compare the extent to which each of these variables is influenced by engagement with fiction or nonfiction literature. The objective of the study is to determine:

- To examine the relationship between book genre (fiction or nonfiction) and the degree of change in stress and empathy levels in adults.
- To determine whether the genre of the book or the level of narrative transportation has a greater impact on participants' stress and empathy levels.

Research Design

A quantitative survey methodology has been employed for the purpose of carrying out this experimental research design. The time period of the experiment study was 4 weeks long. While the methodology for both rounds was predominantly consistent, there were some minor adjustments. Participants were randomly assigned to either Group A or Group B. Group A participants read a fiction book, whereas Group B read a non-fiction book. All participants were instructed to read their assigned books for a minimum of thirty minutes each day.

Scales and Tools Used

Participants were sent the surveys and information via WhatsApp messages and Email. All communication occurred through these channels.

1. Perceived Stress Scale

The perceived stress scale was used to determine the stress-levels of the participants' pre and post assessment. The following information was given to participants before they submitted the PSS: "Below is a list of questions. Please read each of the questions carefully and select your answer. There are no right or wrong answers or trick questions. Please answer each question as honestly as you can." The scale consists of 14 items, each scored on a 4-point Likert scale from 0 (never) to 4 (very often). The total score, which ranges from 0 to 56, is obtained by summing the scores of all items. Higher scores reflect greater levels of perceived stress. The scale demonstrates good internal consistency and reliability. Individual scores on the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) can range from 0 to 40, with higher scores indicating higher perceived stress.

- 0-13 points: Low stress
- 14-26 points: Moderate stress
- 27-40 points: High perceived stress

Here are some example questions:

- In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?
- In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?
- In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?

2. Toronto Empathy Questionnaire

The Toronto Empathy Questionnaire was used to determine the empathy-levels of the participants' pre and post assessment. According to the National Library of Medicine: "In developing the TEQ, we [they] created a parsimonious scale that is short, clear and homogenous and has strong psychometric properties including a robust single factor structure, high internal consistency, construct validity and test retest reliability". The following information was given to participants before they submitted the TEQ: "Below is a list of statements. Please read each statement *carefully* and rate how frequently you feel or act in the manner described. Circle your answer on the response form. There are no right or wrong answers or trick questions. Please answer each question as honestly as you can."

The scale includes 16 items that are scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (never) to 5 (very often). The Library of Medicine categorized the questions in the following manner:

The TEQ features 16 questions designed to measure various aspects of theoretical empathy.

- **Emotion Perception:** Two items focus on recognizing an emotional state in others and experiencing the same emotion oneself (items 1 and 4).
- **Assessment of Emotional States:** Several items measure the frequency of behaviors that show appropriate sensitivity to others' emotions (items 2, 7, 10, 12, 15).
- **Sympathetic Physiological Arousal:** Four items assess physiological responses related to empathy (items 3, 6, 9, 11).
- **Altruism:** Three items focus on altruistic tendencies (items 5, 14, 16).
- **Higher-Order Empathic Responding:** One item examines behaviors related to prosocial actions and helping behaviors (item 13).

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- **Negatively Scored Items:** Eight items are scored negatively (items 2, 4, 7, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15).

Here are some example questions:

- Other people's misfortunes do not disturb me a great deal.
- I enjoy making other people feel better.
- I am not really interested in how other people feel.

3. Narrative Transportation Scale

The narrative transportation scale was given to participants weekly. It is a tool designed to measure the extent to which individuals become absorbed or "transported" into a narrative while engaging with it.

- **Measures Narrative Transportation:** Assesses the degree to which individuals are mentally and emotionally immersed in a story or narrative.
- **Captures Absorption:** Evaluates how much a person feels transported into the narrative world, losing themselves in the story, and experiencing it as if it were real.
- **Predicts Influence:** Helps understand how narrative transportation can affect attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors by engaging with stories.

This was used to assess the effects of differing "narrative transportation" within group A and group B.

Data Collection Procedure

In the first round of data collection: prior to commencing the study participants were required to submit a demographics survey, a Perceived Stress Scale and the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire. Daily, participants were asked to submit a short survey reflecting on their assigned reading. Weekly, participants submitted a Narrative Transportation Scale survey. After the completion of the study, participants were required to submit the Perceived Stress Scale and the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire once again. An interview was also conducted to gain a deeper understanding of their experience.

In the second round of data collection: prior to commencing the study participants were required to submit a demographics survey, a Perceived Stress Scale and the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire. Daily, participants were asked to submit a short survey reflecting on their assigned reading. Weekly, participants submitted a Narrative Transportation Scale survey. After the completion of the study, participants were required to submit the Perceived Stress Scale and the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire once again.

Details on the Books

The fiction book chosen for this study: "Where the Wild Ladies Are" by Aoko Matsuda. The non-fiction book chosen for this study: "These Precious Days" by Ann Patchett. Both books involve 3 common themes:

1. **Exploration of Relationships:** Both books delve into the complexities of human connections and relationships. "These Precious Days" reflects on friendship, family, and the deeper meaning of connection. "Where the Wild Ladies Are" reimagines traditional Japanese folktales, exploring themes of love, desire, and transformation.
2. **Personal Reflections:** Both authors share personal experiences and insights. Ann Patchett's essays in "These Precious Days" are deeply personal reflections on her life, growth, and relationships. Aoko Matsuda's stories in "Where the Wild Ladies

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Are” blend folklore with contemporary feminist perspectives, creating a unique and personal narrative.

- 3. Female Perspectives:** Both authors offer feminist perspectives. Ann Patchett explores womanhood, friendship, and the value of experiences. Aoko Matsuda reinterprets Japanese folktales from a contemporary and feminist lens.

In summary, while the two books have distinct styles and cultural contexts, they share common threads related to relationships, personal reflections, and magical storytelling.

Data Collection Procedure

Daily Survey

Participants were required to complete a daily survey after finishing the assigned reading. This survey served several purposes:

- **Reading Duration:** Recorded the number of minutes spent reading the assigned material.
- **Additional Reading:** Inquired whether participants had read other books outside of the study, including the duration and genre.
- **Engagement Level:** Assessed how engaging participants found the assigned reading on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 meant "Not engaging. You could not read many pages in one sitting" and 5 meant "Very engaging. You were able to focus solely on the story and lost track of time while reading."
- **Emotional Response:** Asked participants to specify the primary emotion felt during the reading and rate the strength of this emotional response on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 indicated "The book did not elicit an emotional response from you" and 5 indicated "The book elicited a strong emotional response from you."
- **Reflection:** Requested participants to summarize their feelings after reading the book in 2-3 sentences.

Sampling and Sample Characteristics

In the initial round of data collection, 6 participants were involved, followed by 6 participants in the second round. Overall, the study comprised a total of 12 participants. The Demographics form was sent to participants before the study began and collected the following information: full name, age, gender, and general reading habits. To assess reading habits, participants were asked, "How often do you read for pleasure?"

Ethical Considerations

Regarding the privacy of information, participants were provided with a clear assurance that "All information collected during the study will be kept confidential and used solely for research purposes." This assurance is critical to building trust between the researchers and participants, encouraging honest and open responses throughout the study. To ensure confidentiality, personal identifiers such as names, email addresses, and contact information were securely stored and only accessible to authorized research personnel. Participants communicated via WhatsApp and email, both of which were kept confidential to protect their identities and ensure that any discussions or exchanges remained private.

Furthermore, special attention was given to the content of the books selected for the study. Both the fiction and non-fiction texts were carefully vetted to ensure that they did not contain any triggering or disturbing material that could negatively impact the participants' emotional well-being. By selecting literature that is both engaging and sensitive to the needs

of readers, the study aimed to create a safe environment conducive to positive experiences and meaningful insights.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The present section consists of analysis and interpretation of the collected data wherein inferential statistics have been conducted to examine these findings. Mann-Whitney U was carried out for comparison among Fiction and Non-Fiction Pre and Post assessment groups. Additionally, Pearson correlation was performed between Narrative Transportation (NT) and PSS scores in pre- and post-assessment groups.

Table 1: Mann-Whitney U Test Analysis among Fiction and Non-Fiction pre - assessment groups for Total Empathy Quotient Scores (N=12)

Respondent	N	Mean	SD	U	Z	Exact p
Fiction	7	44	7.26	15.5	-0.79	0.429
Non-Fiction	5	47	6.23			

Table 1 depicts that the mean for Non-Fiction (NF) respondents (M = 47, SD = 6.23) was higher than that for Fiction (F) respondents (M = 44, SD = 7.26). However, this difference was not statistically significant (U = 15.5, p = 0.429).

Furthermore, The results of the Mann-Whitney U tests for the **subscales** of the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (Emotional Perception, Assessment of Emotional States, Sympathetic Physiological Arousal, Altruism and Higher-Order Empathic Responding) reflect baseline differences between the Fiction (F) and Non-Fiction (NF) groups prior to the study's intervention. Non-Fiction respondents demonstrated slightly higher mean scores on Emotional Perception, Sympathetic Physiological Arousal, Altruism, and Higher-Order Empathic Responding, while Fiction respondents showed marginally higher scores on the Assessment of Emotional States subscale. However, **none of these were statistically significant**. These findings indicate that, before the study began, there were no substantial differences in empathy levels between the two groups as measured by the TEQ subscales and TEQ total.

Table 2: Mann-Whitney U Test Analysis among Fiction and Non-Fiction post - assessment groups for Total Empathy Quotient Scores (N=12)

Respondent	N	Mean	SD	U	Z	Exact p
Fiction	7	42	6.53	8	-1.55	0.149
Non-Fiction	5	47.2	4.44			

Table 2 portrays that the total score for Non-Fiction (NF) respondents (M=47.2, SD=4.44) was higher than that for Fiction (F) respondents (M=42, SD=6.53). This difference was not statistically significant (U=8, p > 0.05)

The post-assessment results of the Mann-Whitney U tests for the **subscales** of the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (Emotional Perception, Assessment of Emotional States, Sympathetic Physiological Arousal, Altruism, and Higher-Order Empathic Responding) revealed differences between the Fiction (F) and Non-Fiction (NF) groups. Fiction respondents scored higher on Emotional Perception (M=6, SD=1.15) compared to Non-Fiction respondents (M=5, SD=0.45), while Non-Fiction respondents scored higher on Assessment of Emotional States (M=11.2, SD=2.39), Altruism (M=10.2, SD=1.48), and

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Higher-Order Empathic Responding ($M=3.4$, $SD=0.55$). However, none of these differences were statistically significant.

The only *statistically significant* finding was observed in Sympathetic Physiological Arousal, where Non-Fiction respondents demonstrated significantly higher scores ($M = 13.6$, $SD = 1.14$) compared to Fiction respondents ($M = 11$, $SD = 1.63$), with $U = 3.5$ and $p = 0.018$. This result highlights a notable post-assessment variance in physiological responses tied to empathy between the two groups.

Table 3: Mann-Whitney U Test Analysis among Fiction and Non-Fiction post - assessment groups for Sympathetic Physiological Arousal Score (N=12)

Respondent	N	Mean	SD	U	Z	Exact p
Fiction	7	11	1.63	3.5	-2.3	0.018
Non-Fiction	5	13.6	1.14			

Non-Fiction (NF) respondents showed significantly higher Sympathetic Physiological Arousal ($M = 13.6$, $SD = 1.14$) compared to Fiction (F) respondents ($M = 11$, $SD = 1.63$). This difference was statistically significant ($U = 3.5$, $p = 0.018$).

Table 4: A non-parametric Mann-Whitney U Test Analysis among Fiction and Non-Fiction pre - assessment groups for Perceived Stress Scale scores (N=12)

Respondent	N	Mean	SD	U	Z	Exact p
Fiction	7	22	2.08	17	-0.09	1
Non-Fiction	5	22	3.67			

The mean total PSS (Perceived Stress Scale) score was identical for Fiction (F) respondents ($M = 22$, $SD = 2.08$) and Non-Fiction (NF) respondents ($M = 22$, $SD = 3.67$). The Mann-Whitney U test revealed no difference between the two groups, with $U = 17$ and $p = 1$. This indicates that both groups reported similar levels of perceived stress during the pre-assessment.

Table 5: A non-parametric Mann-Whitney U Test Analysis among Fiction and Non-Fiction post - assessment groups for Perceived Stress Scale scores (N=12)

Respondent	N	Mean	SD	U	Z	Exact p
Fiction	7	22.14	4.74	17	-0.08	1
Non-Fiction	5	21.4	2.97			

The mean total PSS (Perceived Stress Scale) score for Fiction (F) respondents ($M = 22.14$, $SD = 4.74$) was slightly higher than that for Non-Fiction (NF) respondents ($M = 21.4$, $SD = 2.97$). However, the Mann-Whitney U test showed no significant difference between the groups, with $U = 17$ and $p = 1$. This indicates that both groups reported comparable levels of perceived stress during the post-assessment.

Table 6: A Pearson Correlation Test between Narrative Transportation Scores and Perceived Stress Scale Scores in Fiction and Non-Fiction groups in pre-assessment and post-assessment groups (N=12)

Variable	Fiction: Perceived Stress Scale Score Pre- assessment	Non-Fiction: Perceived Stress Scale Score Pre- assessment	Fiction: Perceived Stress Scale Score Post- assessment	Non-Fiction: Perceived Stress Scale Score Post- assessment
Fiction: Narrative Transportation Pre-assessment	1	.069*		
Non-Fiction: Narrative Transportation Pre-assessment	0.69*	1		
Fiction: Narrative Transportation Post- assessment			1	0.58*
Non-Fiction: Narrative Transportation Post- assessment		-	0.58*	1

From the above findings it can be implied that there is a positive relationship between Narrative Transportation and Perceived Stress Scale, both in the Pre-assessment and Post-assessment stages.

For the Pre-assessment: The significant positive correlation with a coefficient of 0.69 suggests that as Narrative Transportation increases, so does the perceived stress level indicating that individuals who experience higher levels of narrative transportation may also report higher levels of perceived stress before the intervention or assessment.

Furthermore, for the **Post-assessment:** The positive correlation of 0.58 implies that after the assessment, there is still a moderate positive relationship between Narrative Transportation and Perceived Stress. This suggests that even post-intervention, those who experienced more narrative transportation continue to report higher perceived stress levels, though the correlation is somewhat weaker than in the pre-assessment. Together, these findings suggest that the relationship between Narrative Transportation and Perceived Stress persists across both stages.

The objectives of the study were effectively addressed through the outcomes observed in the analysis. The first objective, to examine the relationship between book genres (fiction or nonfiction) and the degree of change in stress and empathy levels in adults, was explored by

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conducting the Mann-Whitney U test to compare TEQ scores between the Fiction and Non-Fiction groups. The significant difference found in Sympathetic Physiological Arousal, where Non-Fiction respondents showed higher scores than Fiction respondents, indicates that the genre of the book had an impact on physiological responses tied to empathy, fulfilling the objective of examining the relationship between genre and empathy levels.

The second objective, to determine whether the genre of the book or the level of narrative transportation (NT) has a greater impact on stress and empathy levels, was addressed through the Pearson Correlation tests for NT and Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) in both the Pre-assessment (PREA) and Post-assessment (POST A) stages. The findings revealed a significant positive correlation between NT and PSS at both stages, suggesting that narrative transportation plays a crucial role in influencing perceived stress levels. These results imply that while the genre may affect empathy responses, narrative transportation is a significant factor in determining stress levels, fulfilling the objective of evaluating the relative impact of NT and book genre on participants' emotional responses.

Additionally, the findings of this study are supported by research in media psychology, such as the study by van Laer, de Ruyter, Visconti, and Wetzels (2014) on Media-induced Absorption and Stress Response. Their research suggests that individuals with higher perceived stress levels are more likely to experience greater absorption in media, or narrative transportation, as they seek relief from their personal stresses. This supports the current study's finding of a positive correlation between perceived stress and narrative transportation, emphasizing the role of stress in enhancing individuals' engagement with stories and media.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study underscores the profound psychological and emotional impacts of reading, analysing the extent to which literature is capable of affecting stress and empathy levels. By comparing fiction and nonfiction genres, it becomes evident that each uniquely influences stress and empathy levels, mediated by the degree of narrative transportation. The study revealed that individuals with higher stress levels experienced greater narrative transportation while reading. Additionally, participants reading nonfiction exhibited higher levels of sympathetic physiological arousal compared to those reading fiction.

These findings align with broader research on the transformative power of reading, emphasizing its role in mental well-being and interpersonal connections. As global reading habits continue to evolve amidst increasing publication rates and the rising popularity of audiobooks, the importance of understanding how different genres affect readers remains critical. Future research could explore how specific genres within fiction and nonfiction uniquely affect outcomes like stress reduction and empathy. Neuroimaging studies could reveal how the brain processes narrative transportation and emotional arousal across genres, linking storytelling to neural mechanisms. Additionally, examining how reading enhances social skills, such as perspective-taking and conflict resolution, could further highlight its role in fostering empathy and interpersonal understanding.

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Conflict of Interest

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