**Literature Review Summary**

**Title:** How Does Fiction Reading Influence Empathy? An Experimental Investigation on the Role of Emotional Transportation

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**Summary:**

This study examined whether fiction reading has an effect on the reader's empathy by conducting two experimental studies. The researchers predicted that if readers read fiction and they were emotionally transported into the story, then they would become more emphatic.

In both studies, there were no dropouts and none of the participants from study 1 could participate in study 2. Both fiction and control conditions from both studies 1 and 2 were done via computer screen. Before participating, all participants provided written informed consent of participating in the study, and this procedure was conducted by the ECP (Ethische Commissie Psychologie/Ethical Commission Psychology) of the university.

In study 1, 66 Dutch undergraduate students were randomly assigned to either the fiction or the non-fiction (control) condition. Participants who completed the fiction condition read the first part of a short story, from Arthur Conan Doyle, ‘The Adventure of the Six Napoleons.’ Participants who completed the control (non-fiction) condition read two newspaper stories from the Dutch newspaper, *De Volkskrant.*

In study 2, 97 Dutch undergraduate students were also randomly assigned to either of the two conditions. Participants who completed the fiction condition read the first chapter of the book, *Blindness,* written by José Saramago. It also included a Dutch translation since the participants were native Dutch citizens. Participants who completed the control (non-fiction) condition read parts of the Dutch newspaper *NRC Handelsblad,* including total of five stories.

For both studies, participants worked from home. Before the experiment (T1), they first filled out demographic variables, a range of study irrelevant scales, and the empathy scale. They then read either the newspaper or fictional book for one week. Right after reading the text (T2), they filled out the emotional transportation measure using the scale from *Busselle and Bilandzic*. Example item included: “The story affected me emotionally” and they had to give a score with a 5-point scale, 1=not at all, 5=to a great extent. Participants also filled out the empathy scale using the empathic concern scale of Davis that involved seven items, and an example item included: “Sometimes I don’t feel sorry for other people when they are having problems.” Moreover, they filled out some other irrelevant scales. *Narrative Understanding scale* was used to see whether participants understood the text (e.g., “At points, I had a hard time making sense of what was going on in the stories”). *Attentional Focus scale* was used to see whether participants paid attention while reading the text (e.g., “I found my mind wandering while I was reading the story”). Participants then wrote down a summary of what they had read to see if they read the text they were assigned to carefully. Lastly, they filled out digital questionnaire from home, including the empathy scale and irrelevant scales one week after the experiment (T3).

The researchers found out that empathy measured in T1 (before the experiment) was a strong predictor of empathy measured in T3 (one week after the experiment) (*β* = .81, *p*<.001). Narrative understanding, attentional focus, and emotional transportation were not related to empathy measured in T3. For study 1, fiction readers became more empathic over the period of one week when they were emotionally transported into the story. For study 2, low emotional transportation led to lower empathy over time. Overall, for both studies 1 and 2, when there was no emotional transportation, the level of empathy was decreased for fiction readers. This effect was found insignificant for non-fiction readers in both studies. The researchers suggested that when a reader is not able to identify with a text and does not become transported, this might lead to disengagement, with the reader being less focused and frustrated. Furthermore, in study 2, empathic skills of the participants of the control condition decreased slightly when they became emotionally transported into non-fiction stories even after manipulating factors such as narrative understanding, positive or negative emotions during reading, and the difficulty of the texts.