



Introduction

Fictional narratives take shape in the form of books, movies, and shows. They have become an extremely popular past time, but these narratives have the possibility to serve a larger purpose than pure leisure and entertainment. Many researchers have pondered whether or not there is actually a relationship between fiction and empathy, and subsequently altruism. In other words, could specific genres of fiction correlate with higher levels of empathy and altruism? The Empathy-Altruism Theory regards the combination of empathy and altruism to be the explanation to why helping behavior occurs: Empathy enables an individual to experience another's emotional estate, while altruism allows helpfulness in individuals through the need to eliminate their emotional despair (Hu et al. 2016). Our study intended to investigate the relationship between specific genres of fiction, such as Romance, Drama, Fantasy, Horror, Crime, Comedy and Action genres, and self-reported levels of empathy and altruism.

Hypothesis

We predicted that the participants who prefer the Romance, Drama, and Fantasy genres of fiction will report higher levels of empathy and altruism. and those who prefer the Horror and Crime genres of fiction will report lower levels of empathy and altruism. In addition, participants who report the Comedy and Action genres of fiction will report average levels of empathy and altruism.

Method

Participants

There were a total of 125 participants who completed the study. N = 125. From these 125 participants, 72% reported as Female, 24% reported as Male, and 5% reported as Other. Among the participants, the age range varied from 15 to 49 years of age, with the average age of participants (M) being 22.56 years and the standard deviation (SD) being 5.89 years.

Measures

The survey consisted of a compilation of sixty-nine questions from three, individual surveys: The Questionnaire of Cognitive and Affective Empathy, the Short Test of Music Preference, and the Self-Report Altruism Scale. The QCAE consisted of thirty-one questions that measured empathy as a multidimensional concept, in opposition to the previous questionnaires that failed to measure empathy universally by implying personal definitions (Reniers, Corcoran, Drake, Shryane, Völlum 2011). The STOMP consisted of nine questions that had to be adjusted to measure the correct preferences for out intended music, genre rather than music (Regan 2018). The Self-Report Altruism Scale consisted of twenty-one questions that was designed to measure altruism by calculating the frequency that the participant reported engaging in prosocial behavior (Pardo & Cotrina 2016).

Procedure

We compiled the survey questions and hosted the questionnaire onto Google Docs. The participants received a consent form at the beginning of the survey, and completed the questions alone without aid in order to remove potential biases. No compensation was offered, nor were there any identifiable risks associated with completing the survey.

Results

Table 1

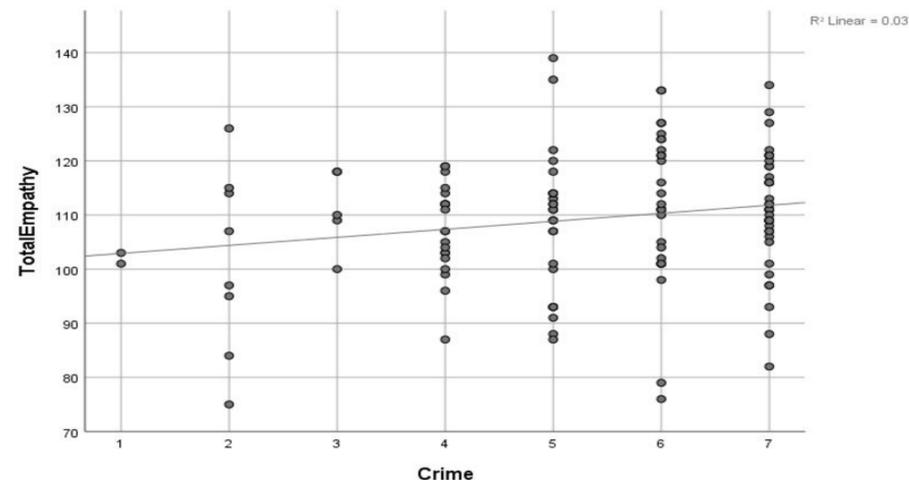
Regression for Total Empathy and Preferred Genre of Fiction

Variable	B	SEM	Beta	T	p
(Constant)	81.91	8.61		9.52	.00
Romance	1.10	.78	.16	1.41	.16
Drama	.54	.79	.07	.68	.50
Horror	1.05	.50	.18	2.08	.04
Comedy	.963	.88	.10	1.09	.28
Action	-1.08	.83	-.14	-1.31	.19
Crime	1.74	.77	.23	2.27	.03
Fantasy	1.04	.74	.13	1.41	.16

The regression analysis run between Total Empathy and Preferred Genre of Fiction found that Crime had the highest predictive value in relation with Total Empathy, $t(125) = 2.27, p < 0.05, r = 0.037$.

Figure 1

Scatterplot for Crime vs Total Empathy



There is a weak, positive correlation between Total Empathy and Crime, $r = 0.037$.

Discussion

Our study predicted that a preference in the Romance, Drama, and Fantasy genres of fiction would have reported higher levels of empathy and altruism; The Horror and Crime genres of fiction was predicted to have reported lower levels of empathy and altruism; The Comedy and Action genres of fiction would have reported average levels of empathy and altruism. The results of our study showed that the Romance genre did not appear to have a significant influence on predicting neither empathy nor altruism levels. The strongest predictor for empathy was the Crime genre. There were no significant relationships between genre and altruism.

Limitations

When surveys are part of the research design, internal biases may have interfered with accurate results. Our team did not define what constitutes a particular genre, and left that interpretation up to each individual participant. This may have created inconsistencies. Additionally, the test takers may have refrained from answering questions that painted themselves in a bad light.

Implications

We have gathered from our study that contradictorily enough, the Crime and Horror genre have the highest relationship with Empathy. Though, no genres appeared to have a relationship with altruism. This goes directly against our initial hypothesis that stated Romance would have the greatest relationship with empathy and altruism. This may mean that we may empathize more with negative emotions, rather than positive, romantic ones. This adds to the Transportation Theory in psychology by expanding on what factors increase immersion. This makes sense biologically, as fear-responses may activate more empathy in order to ensure community safety. Knowing this information, it may be useful to implement more required reading of Crime and Horror novels in high school curriculums in order to nurture a more empathetic generation.

It is important to continue to explore possible correlations between specific genres of fiction and essential behaviors, such as empathy and altruism. While the correlation between fiction and empathy and altruism may never be completely understood, it is essential to continue research to increase autonomy in our lives. As knowledge surrounding this area grows, so will our ability to redirect our life choices, such as the genre of fiction we decide to immerse ourselves in, to influence more favorable outcomes, such as prosocial behavior.

References

Additional references upon request