Feeling Through Fiction: Exploring the Connection Between Engagement with the *Harry Potter* Series and Empathy

Kenia Rios
University of North Carolina at Charlotte
Honors Thesis Proposal Layperson Summary
Feeling Through Fiction

This research aims to study the relationship between fiction and empathy. More specifically, this research will examine the *Harry Potter* series in relation to empathy. From a young age, people are exposed to fiction. Fiction impacts the lives of people in many ways, one of which is the development of empathy. Empathy is a vital skill necessary for having compassion and connecting with others. It is imperative to examine and understand the relationship between fictional texts such as the *Harry Potter* series and empathy. The main interest of this research is to examine how connecting with these texts and being exposed to its themes can cause people to be more empathic towards their fellow human beings, particularly in regards to human rights.

This study will be useful to the general body of scientific knowledge because although evidence from previous studies has indeed shown a connection between exposure to fiction and an increased sense of empathy, this study will help determine how engagement with the *Harry Potter* series in particular influences an individual’s level of empathy. Participants will complete an online survey with questions from an established empathy scale and several additional questions related to empathy traits. Students will also answer demographics questions and questions regarding their exposure to and engagement with *Harry Potter* as well as about their current reading habits in regards to fiction. Further developing this sense of understanding in regards to fiction and empathy will serve to provide insight that will help determine how to best implement educational frameworks that use fiction such as this series as a means to foster empathy in the most effective way possible.