

John J. Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University

**Love Your Neighbor:  
An Educational Strategy to Cultivate Compassion in Adolescent Males**

A Thesis Project Submitted to  
the Faculty of the John J. Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University  
in Candidacy for the Degree of  
Doctor of Ministry

by

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John J. Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University

**Thesis Project Approval Sheet**

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## **Abstract**

### **LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR: AN EDUCATIONAL STRATEGY TO CULTIVATE COMPASSION IN ADOLESCENT MALES**

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When challenged to identify the greatest commandment in the Law, Jesus Christ famously included “love your neighbor” in his response, making love foundational for all followers of Christ. Compassion is a key element that serves to demonstrate biblical love; sadly, today’s culture often minimizes or discourages compassion. In ten years of chaplaincy at the secondary school level, this author has seen too many Christian young men finish their high school journey without a foundation in love through compassion.

This thesis project will utilize existing resources for academic and biblical research, as well as interviews of 25 high school males, to identify factors contributing to successful development of compassion in young males. As a result, this thesis project will develop a strategy, through intentional ministry and educational planning and methodology, to instill or reinforce compassion in adolescent males. This strategy will enable young men to better express love which is foundational for all followers of Christ.

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## **Abbreviations**

FUMA	Fork Union Military Academy
JROTC	Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps
ROTC	Reserve Officers' Training Corps
RPG	role-playing game

*“Remember that even Jesus’ most scathing denunciation-a blistering diatribe against the religious leaders of Jerusalem in Matthew 23-ends with Christ weeping over Jerusalem. Compassion colored everything He did.”<sup>1</sup>*

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

When confronted by the religious establishment of the day, Jesus replied that the most important directive in Jewish Law was to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important command. The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands.”<sup>2</sup> The word translated for this passage into English as “love” is ἀγαπάω (agapao), which refers to a selfless, giving, non-emotional kind of love. Out of this type of love emerges compassion, and so one can ascertain that this becomes a primary characteristic God desires His followers to exhibit in their interactions, both amongst themselves and with non-believers.

Jesus displays compassion consistently during His earthly ministry. In Matthew 9:36, Jesus’ emotions while He is teaching, preaching, and healing are described: “When [Jesus] saw the crowds, He felt *compassion* [emphasis added] for them, because they were weary and worn out, like sheep without a shepherd.” In this passage, Matthew uses the Greek base word σπλαγχνίζομαι (splanchnizomai), which is often translated into English as “compassion.” The Greek word, however, identified a deeper emotion than the English word “compassion”

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<sup>1</sup> John MacArthur. *The Book on Leadership*. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 132.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. 22:37-40. Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the Holman Christian Standard Bible (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2009).

commonly denotes. Thayer's Greek Lexicon explains σπλαγχνίζομαι as "to be moved as to one's bowels, hence, to be moved with compassion, have compassion (for the bowels were thought to be the seat of love and pity)."<sup>3</sup> Jesus uses these intense feelings of compassion to motivate His actions towards people that He encounters during His ministry, and He expects his followers to do the same as they encounter others. Essentially, one could argue that God's paramount commandment to mankind is to be people of compassion, as modeled by Jesus Christ.

Sadly, it appears that compassion is too often in short supply in today's world. On what seems to be a daily basis, people are reminded of the overall lack of compassion through stories in the mass media. For example, a recent news story detailed the sentencing of a 20-year old man, Jordan Hill, convicted of leading a peer group to terrorize a classmate who suffers from schizophrenia. The group "used a cellphone to livestream video on Facebook as Hill and co-defendant Tesfaye Cooper taunted the teen in a Chicago apartment, cutting his clothing and gashing his head with a knife."<sup>4</sup> This story became national news as the public was shocked to learn of such horrible treatment of a human being by others. Sadly, cases like this seemingly are becoming more and more common. There is surely a disconnect present in modern times. Jesus' call for people to have compassionate hearts and care for others appears to fall on the deaf ears of far too many in today's world.

Of particular concern is the level of compassion in young people today. Is there appropriate emphasis on showing compassion while encouraging young people to do the same? What role should the family, the church, and/or the education system play in cultivating

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<sup>3</sup> "Strong's Greek: 4697. Splugchnizomai," n.d. accessed June 11, 2018, <http://biblehub.com/greek/4697.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> "Jordan Hill sentenced to 8 years in Facebook hate crime case," Chicago Sun-Times, last updated July 5, 2018. accessed July 17, 2018, <https://chicago.suntimes.com/news/jordan-hill-sentenced-to-8-years-in-facebook-hate-crime-case/>.

compassionate hearts in young people? This thesis project will examine these ideas while presenting strategies to improve and foster kindness in young people, particularly males of high school age. Principally, this project will focus on strategies that an educational institution could possibly implement to help increase empathy and compassion in young people.

## Ministry Context

### **History of Fork Union Military Academy**

Located in central Virginia, Fork Union Military Academy (FUMA) was founded in 1898 by Dr. William E. Hatcher, pastor of Grace Baptist Church in Richmond, Virginia. Dr. Hatcher had a summer retreat in Fluvanna County, about 50 miles west of Richmond, where he spent a great deal of time. Seeing a need in the area's local community for education, Dr. Hatcher had a vision to start an Academy in the village of Fork Union. Dr. Hatcher undoubtedly had a heart for young people and wanted to see them educated and living purposeful lives. Dr. Hatcher envisioned opening the school as quickly as possible and in October 1898 his vision came to fruition as Fork Union Academy opened its doors for the first time. A particular focus of Dr. Hatcher's was young males, who, due to their work in the fields or on family farms, were missing out on critical educational opportunities. "Fork Union has a way of finding gifted and aspiring boys and helping them to get their education, -those of them at least which need help. This constitutes one feature of the school in which my heart is most deeply interested."<sup>5</sup> While the school originally was co-educational, within a decade of opening the transition to a male-only environment was completed.

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<sup>5</sup> Eldridge Burwell Hatcher. *William E. Hatcher, a Biography. Vol. 4.* (Richmond, VA: Hill, 1915), 567.

## **Fork Union Today**

Today, FUMA caters its services to young men grades 7-12 and also offers a one-year post-graduate program for young men as they begin their transition to higher education. Once students are enrolled at FUMA, they are referred to as “cadets,” reflecting the school’s military component. Dating back to the earliest days of the academy, the school’s motto, “Body, Mind, Spirit,” reflects Dr. Hatcher’s fundamental holistic approach to education for young people. Cadets are encouraged and led to grow in physical stature and ability, intellectual aptitude, and spiritual maturity. For over one hundred years, FUMA has been a single-sex (male) school, using the military system to foster discipline and leadership among its cadets. The school boasts a 100% college acceptance rate for graduating seniors.

The corps of cadets is a diverse group: during the 2016-17 academic year, 346 total cadets were enrolled. Of those, 166 (47.98% of the corps) were Caucasian, 97 (28.03%) were African-American, 37 (10.69%) were Asian or Asian-American, 24 (6.94%) classified as “other” or multicultural, 10 (2.89%) were Hispanic, 6 (1.73%) were Middle Eastern, and 6 (1.73%) classified as Native American or Pacific Islander. There were also a variety of countries represented: 38 international cadets hailed from 8 different countries. Domestic cadets represented 28 states, with most (67.07%) coming from Virginia, Maryland, and North Carolina. There was also diversity present in the faith backgrounds represented by cadets: 240 (69.36%) stated they were either Christian or from a specific Christian denomination, 8 (2.31%) were Muslim, 2 (0.58%) were Buddhist, and 1 (0.29%) each identified as Jewish or Mormon (note: 94 (27.17%) chose not to divulge a faith background).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> All demographic statistics were obtained from the FUMA Director of Admissions, COL Tripp Billingsley, on June 5, 2018 via email request.

The diversity in the student body presents not only interesting case study subjects, but also challenges conventional ministry strategies and spiritual education. Young men representing so many different cultures from around the United States and around the world have ingrained attitudes and behaviors that sometimes may conflict with basic Christian teachings. For example, in some cultures it may be a sign of weakness to show empathy and act accordingly to others. In cases like this, it is challenging to educate a young man in the importance of Christian compassion or charity. A young man's time at FUMA may be the first real exposure to the ideal of compassion that he has ever had in his life.

### **Researcher's Role at Fork Union**

This author is currently serving FUMA as the school's chaplain and he has been doing so since August 2006. Traditionally, the person serving as the chaplain at FUMA is responsible for coordinating the spiritual life and formation of the school community (cadets, faculty, and staff). The chaplain's responsibilities include but are not limited to being the primary speaker for five weekly chapel services, teaching the school's religion class, coordinating and leading various Bible studies, spiritual retreats, and mission trips, and serving as a pastoral presence for the school community.

The chaplain at FUMA essentially takes on the traditional role of a community pastor. At FUMA, this community is composed of the faculty, staff, and their families, as well as the cadets and their families. The chaplain's involvement in crisis counseling situations provides unique insight into community "behind the scenes" issues that many outside the community may not realize. In addition, this role and its responsibilities allow for a keen insight into the morale of the adults and cadets on campus. Through counseling and casual conversation with cadets, the

chaplain gains a better understanding of how a cadet views the world, as well as factors that impact a cadet's approach to life in general.

### **Identifying Qualities at Fork Union**

Two aspects of FUMA that are foundational to the school's education system are the military system and the school's Christian focus. FUMA has historically used the military system for structure, discipline, and leadership opportunities for its cadets. Today, the clear majority of FUMA graduates will move on to a college experience, with a few opting for military service, usually through a service academy, an ROTC program, or enlistment in the armed services. However, all cadets undergo the military experience at FUMA and it is crucial in their development as adolescents. The military structure provides an opportunity for personal discipline that cadets may not have had prior to arriving on campus. This personal discipline allows the young men to be successful, not just while enrolled at FUMA, but also in their post-secondary education journeys.

While enrollment at FUMA is not limited to Christians, the school operates as a Christian institution. Regular chapel attendance is required as cadets attend services five times a week, and every class day begins with a Christian devotion led by the classroom's teacher. Cadets must also take and pass a required Religion course (focusing on the Holy Bible), usually during their sophomore year, to receive a diploma and graduate from FUMA. Every cadet, regardless of his religious tradition and practice, will hear the Christian gospel message numerous times while at FUMA. Cadets are taught—via the spiritual formation component of the school—Jesus' teachings that all are called to love God and love their neighbors.

The boarding aspect of FUMA also provides a different atmosphere from that experienced by the average American adolescent. While the school does have some local cadets

enrolled who do not live on campus, known as “day students,” the vast majority of the corps of cadets are young men who are living away from home. This setting allows for cadets at FUMA to deal with issues that the average adolescent male does not face. Some of these experiences include homesickness, a development of a tight-knit brotherhood (an *esprit de corps*), and establishment of a stronger mentor/mentee bond with adults in the school community (who in many cases assume a de facto parental role in a cadet’s life). All these factors work together to help develop a young man’s view of the world and its inhabitants.

To some, two of these distinctive experiences at FUMA may appear to be in conflict. After all, how could an environment that focuses on military discipline and behavior also espouse an atmosphere of Christian love? While this may appear contradictory, at FUMA this is not the case when carried out in practice. For decades, the faculty and staff at FUMA have effectively woven Christ-centered care and concern with work to instill military respect and discipline in young men. As a result, the opportunities to help a young man learn to master himself while developing a servant’s heart following the example of Christ are seemingly endless.

Distinctive to FUMA is the concept of the One-Subject Plan, the basis for the school’s academic structure. In this model, the academic year is divided into five terms, each approximately seven weeks in length. During each term, a cadet will attend just one class each day from 8:00am until 2:00pm and the material covered over the seven-week period is equal to that covered over a year in more traditional academic formats. This structure allows for a young man to concentrate on just one subject at a time, as opposed to juggling multiple academic disciplines. This unique format used at FUMA has proven beneficial to the researcher in the



development of a class focused on cultivating compassion, a class that will be discussed in more detail later in this research project.

### Problem Presented

The problem this project will address is the ostensibly low level of compassion among adolescent, high school aged young men. This particular demographic faces many challenges to the development of compassion and empathy in the current societal climate. Hindrances to proper formation of a compassionate lifestyle can come from a variety of factors. This project will consider a number of these factors, while developing a strategy to help establish a healthy, growing sense of empathy and compassion in the teenage male's heart and mind. The challenges to such a goal can come from within or they can come from outside influences. No matter the type of challenge presented, each can positively impact a young man's capacity and propensity for kindheartedness in his life.

Human nature, existing in a state of perpetual sin, naturally seems to rebel against the notion of compassion or charity displayed by God. Young people, particularly those who are spiritually immature, may tend to lean toward their basic human nature and in doing so reject the idea of helping others simply because it is the right thing to do. One need not look any further than the biblical account of the first murder to find evidence of a self-centered and selfish human nature. Cain's overwhelming concern was for his own personal fulfillment and acceptance from God. When he did not receive the same favor given to his brother Abel, Cain unhesitatingly murdered his sibling. God's words in Genesis 4:7 to Cain, prior to the killing, would provide a forewarning: "But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it." Cain continued his parents' legacy of sinful behavior, an inherent comportment of human nature in the millennia that followed—and up to—to this very day.

A disturbing example of young people giving in to their predisposition to choose wrong over right is the current trend to take out cell phones and record situations rather than stepping in to stop them. A growing trend is recording schoolyard fights and posting them online rather than choosing to help stop a situation where someone could be seriously hurt. This practice has apparently become so commonplace that in recent years legislation has been introduced to make such behavior illegal. One such proposal in Illinois resulted from a legislator's disgust at a news story detailing a schoolyard fight and the behavior of the young people gathered, who chose to record the fight rather than stop it. The proposed legislation would make it illegal to record and upload such a "display of violence to a social media website or social networking website with the intent to promote or condone that activity..."<sup>7</sup> It is a sad state of affairs in our society when it seems as though we are at the point where moral behavior is legislated, rather than taught.

While the trend to record negative events and post them online is just one example, the root of the problem remains the human predisposition to sin and to give in to the temptation to live outside God's will. Through the life of Christ, God provided an example of living a lifestyle that emphasized compassion and mercy. Not only did Christ live a life that exemplified such positive traits, Jesus did so suffering the same temptation to do wrong that is everyone's struggle: "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tested in every way as we are, yet without sin."<sup>8</sup> An attainable goal, therefore, should be to live a life that emphasizes traits emulated by Christ Jesus. The probability of

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<sup>7</sup> "Bill Status of HB4419, 99<sup>th</sup> General Assembly," Illinois General Assembly, accessed October 13, 2018, <http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/BillStatus.asp?DocNum=4419&GAID=13&DocTypeID=HB&LegId=93213&SessionID=88&GA=99>.

<sup>8</sup> Hebrews 4:15.

attaining this goal, however, is increased when young people are encouraged to cultivate their inherent compassion and mercy.

Complicating the challenges presented by human nature, external factors such as peer groups, entertainment choices, and cultural/parental influences may prove themselves hinderances in attempts to develop a servant's heart who models the ideals of Christ. A 2014 report found that “[video game] players aged 13 and older spend more than six hours a week on any gaming platform. That’s a 12 percent increase from the 5.6 hours they spent with gaming platforms in 2012.”<sup>9</sup> As young people spend more and more of their time playing video games, the types of games they are being exposed to undoubtedly affect their view of the world around them and how they interact with that world. Likewise, other forms of entertainment can have an influential effect on sets of values still being formed in an adolescent. For example, listening to aggressive music lyrics or watching violent television shows or movies may have negative effects regarding compassion being established in a developing brain.

Americans may not realize how impactful and influencing their entertainment choices can be. Likewise, Americans may not be cognizant of how much time is devoted to entertainment such as television, movies, print media, or music. “Assuming the average person sleeps 8 hours a night, people spend roughly 55% of their waking hours attending to entertainment media.”<sup>10</sup> If people are devoting more than half their waking hours each day to entertainment media, then surely there will be substantial impact, particularly to the developing brain of an adolescent male. The impact, it would suggest, would be affected by the types of

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<sup>9</sup> “Multi-Platform Gaming: For the Win!” The Nielsen Company (US), LLC, accessed September 15, 2018, <https://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/news/2014/multi-platform-gaming-for-the-win.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Peter J. Rentfrow, et al. “Listening, Watching, and Reading: The Structure and Correlates of Entertainment Preferences.” *Journal of Personality*, vol. 79, no. 2, 2011, pp. 224.

entertainment one is exposed to on a regular basis. "...some studies have found that exposure to 'violent' media (e.g., heavy metal or rap music, action movies, violent video games) increases aggressive thoughts and hostile feelings."<sup>11</sup>

### **The Problem**

The problem, therefore, is the number of obstacles that a young man faces, both internally and externally, when trying to develop a compassionate character. Compounding the issue is the fact that current educational settings do not generally take proactive measures to cultivate compassion in young people, especially in males. Many times, a young man must choose to involve himself in an extracurricular organization or a faith-based community where compassion is modeled and encouraged in order to grow empathetic or kindhearted tendencies. Another possibility is to be part of a family where compassionate behavior is demonstrated on a regular basis. Unfortunately, far too many young men have not had these opportunities, whether by personal choice or by birth, to learn to foster compassion towards themselves and others.

### **"Cultivating" Compassion**

This thesis project will refer often to the concept of "cultivating" compassion in people. The focus on cultivation is intentional, primarily because it implies that compassion is already present in people and simply needs to be helped to grow and mature. Like a seed that is grown into a seedling and later into a full-grown plant, compassion must be carefully nourished and encouraged to grow on an individual basis. It is not enough to simply will an apple tree to grow from an apple seed; the seed must be placed in the correct type of environment, fed the appropriate nutrients, and carefully tended to for it to achieve its full apple tree potential.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 225.

Likewise, for compassion to emerge in young males, they must be placed in the proper environment, taught about the concept of compassion, and allowed to put compassion into practice in order for their full compassionate potential to be achieved.

Furthermore, just as a farmer carefully plans out his or her strategy for growing plentiful crops, a proper plan must be developed to cultivate compassion in an adolescent male. Rather than simply deciding that cultivating compassion in adolescent males is important, one must carefully devise an effective strategy to allow a healthy and lasting cultivation of compassion. In the conclusion section of this research project, such a plan is presented: one that has been practiced for several years in the researcher's current setting at FUMA. This plan, established as the Applied Christianity class offering at FUMA, has produced positive results in growing and strengthening compassionate behavior in adolescent males.

#### Purpose Statement

This project aims to examine the levels of compassion in adolescent males and provide a strategy by which compassion can be effectively cultivated within this demographic. Influencing factors, with specific attention given to entertainment choices, will be considered, especially their effect on compassion levels. These entertainment choices will include preference of video games, music, movies, and television programs, and an analysis of the subcategories of these choices will be provided. Through the use of a survey, data will be gathered for analysis regarding entertainment choices made by a target group, males between the ages of 15 and 25.

The primary goal of this project is to provide a strategy to help grow the innate compassion already found in adolescent males. This plan will include an analysis of an academic class currently being offered at Fork Union Military Academy that addresses the development of compassion as one of its educational goals. This current academic offering will

be presented as a case study of an example of how compassion can be cultivated through a focus on Christian values and principles, coupled with service opportunities for the students of the class. Ideally, this type of class offering would be offered in varied academic settings, with the end goal being the successful development of compassion among young people.

### Researcher's Basic Assumptions

The foundational assumption made in this project is the idea that all people are created in the image of God and, as a result, possess qualities and characteristics inherent to God. One of these qualities is compassion. The connection between humans and God is at its core a spiritual connection, and the human soul desires to emulate the compassionate side of God's reality. This project will therefore make the supposition that every person possesses innate qualities that include compassion, and that under the right circumstances and with the proper approach, this quality can be grown and matured in a young person.

### Definitions, Delimitations, and Limitations

The Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary describes compassion as “‘to feel passion with someone’ or ‘to enter sympathetically into one’s sorrow and pain.’”<sup>12</sup> For clarification purposes, the notion of compassion in this project is not equal to empathy, which reflects a much deeper emotional connection between the empathetic person and the focus of those feelings. One may think of compassion as a response to sympathetic emotions which creates a longing to help someone or something else. Empathy, as a deeper emotional connection, generates a desire to connect with the person or object being empathized.

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<sup>12</sup> Don H. Stewart, “Compassion,” ed. Chad Brand et al., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 324.

Because this project focuses on the development of compassion in adolescent males, consideration will not be given to the differences with females, or with an approach targeting co-educational or solely female settings. In addition, this project will address only males in the ages 15-25 demographic, with the primary focus being on those aged 15-18 (the traditional high school age group). While a goal of this project is to suggest an education strategy for the development of compassion in adolescent males, the strategy will not be designed solely for adolescent males. Essentially, this project will take in data and analyze it with an eye on adolescent males, but the suggested basic output of the project should be appropriate for various gender and age groups.

#### Thesis Statement

This thesis project will demonstrate that there are various factors affecting the presence and development of compassion in adolescent males. Data gathered from the target demographic will be shared and analyzed to support this concept. In addition, existing studies will be examined to more fully analyze the data collected. Ultimately, this project will present a strategy by which the characteristic of compassion can be nurtured and fostered in a healthy manner, within an academic environment. The ultimate goal of this thesis project is to develop a strategy to instill or reinforce compassion in adolescent males, enabling them to better express love which is foundational for all followers of Christ.

*“A house is built by wisdom,  
and it is established by understanding;  
by knowledge the rooms are filled  
with every precious and beautiful treasure.”<sup>13</sup>*

## **Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework**

### Literature Review

In preparation for the thesis, the researcher reviewed a wide array of books and journal articles. The literature reviewed below represents selected sources from experts in the virtue of compassion and other related emotions. In addition, biblical passages related to the researcher’s focus for the thesis project are shared, with comments.

#### **Books**

*Smart Compassion*, authored by Wesley Furlong and published in 2017, is divided into three parts and reflects Furlong’s philosophy regarding the cultivation of compassion. The first part addresses “healing presence,” or micro level, which Furlong states is the act of connecting with another at a deeply personal level. The second part deals with “radical hospitality,” or mezzo level, involving the opening of homes and families to strangers. The final section tackles “collective empowerment,” or the macro level working with communities.<sup>14</sup> This approach to cultivating compassion, progressing from one level to another, makes Furlong’s book an excellent resource for an educational strategy directed at adolescents. The book is structured in a

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<sup>13</sup> Proverbs 24:3-4.

<sup>14</sup> Wesley J. Furlong. *Smart Compassion: How to Stop Doing Outreach and Start Making Change*. Herald Press, 2017; 31.



format that is easy to read and understand, making it a wonderful asset to anyone wanting to learn more about compassion and applying it in their lives.

Paul Bothwick's book *Great Commission, Great Compassion* will personally challenge the reader to live out The Great Commission, as presented by Jesus in Matthew 28:18-20. Bothwick asserts that there is also a Great Compassion, which involves "examining biblical teaching on the poor, the disenfranchised, the hurting people of the world, and what God calls us to do."<sup>15</sup> Bothwick's idea that a Christian must focus on both The Great Commission and The Great Compassion provides a fresh approach to personal and corporate ministry. The latter half of the book establishes some practical focus areas for those wishing to fulfill The Great Commission: Choose, Learn, Look, Pray, Welcome and Celebrate, Simplify and Give, Stand Together, and Go. Readers of all ages would benefit from Bothwick's premises and strategies to improve their adherence to Jesus' commands in The Great Commission.

In *The Compassion Revolution* by Dave Donaldson, the author spurs the reader to action and states, "You were not created to live an ordinary existence. God has something more for you—a life of experiencing the joy and adventure of making a difference in other people's lives... God can do something amazing with your life!"<sup>16</sup> Donaldson's passion for empowering people to affect positive change as agents of God is evident throughout the book, and the book undoubtedly would connect with adolescents wishing to learn more about compassion. Donaldson presents several concrete examples of tasks people can undertake to help those in need and encourages the reader to find his or her own God-given purpose in personal ministry.

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<sup>15</sup> Paul Bothwick. *Great Commission, Great Compassion: Following Jesus and Loving the World*. InterVarsity Press, 2015; 17.

<sup>16</sup> Dave Donaldson. *The Compassion Revolution: How God Can Use You to Meet the World's Greatest Needs*. Harvest House Publishers, 2010; 198.

Jean M. Twenge and W. Keith Campbell's *The Narcissism Epidemic*<sup>17</sup> is a must-read for anyone working with adolescents. The book examines the role of narcissism in today's world and proclaims that there is an epidemic-level of narcissism being faced today. Among the factors examined, Twenge and Campbell consider not only the roles of parenting and social media, but also the part that celebrities play in furthering this narcissism epidemic. In other words, the authors theorize that the entertainment industry plays a major role in self-centeredness among today's youth. This view supports the research in this thesis project, which considers how young people entertain themselves and how those choices might impact their proclivity for compassion.

If it is possible to examine a topic like compassion in a very simple yet in-depth manner, that is accomplished in *Compassion*<sup>18</sup> by Henri J.M. Nouwen, Donald P. McNeill, and Douglas A. Morrison. In this work, the authors suggest there is value in studying compassion from three perspectives: vertically ("The Compassionate God"), inwardly ("The Compassionate Life"), and horizontally ("The Compassionate Way"). By accomplishing this manner of considering compassion, the authors assert that a vision can be achieved that "makes us share one another's burdens, carry our crosses together, and unite for a better world. This vision takes the despair out of death and the morbidity out of suffering, and opens new horizons... through these grateful actions the first glimpses of a new heaven and a new earth can be seen."<sup>19</sup> The book's unique

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<sup>17</sup> Jean M. Twenge and W. Keith Campbell. *The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement*. Free Press, 2009.

<sup>18</sup> Henri J.M. Nouwen, Donald P. McNeill, and Douglas A. Morrison. *Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life*. Doubleday, 1983.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 132.

approach to explaining compassion is valuable when determining how best to educate young people about compassion.

Thupten Jinpa's Buddhist perspective on compassion can be found in his book *A Fearless Heart*.<sup>20</sup> While not examining the virtue of compassion from a Christian perspective, there is great value in Jinpa's thoughts on compassion. The significance placed on compassion ("...an undifferentiated sense of concern for the well-being of all beings"<sup>21</sup>) by practitioners of the Buddhist faith has resulted in much reflection and study on compassion, and Jinpa's book is exceptional in this regard. As one develops a strategy and thought process regarding compassion, Jinpa's work—filtered through the Holy Spirit—proves extremely insightful and beneficial to the reader.

Rick Warren's best-selling work *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here for?*<sup>22</sup>, while not specifically addressing compassion, finds relevance in the study of compassion by challenging the reader to search out meaning for his or her life. Using the Christian faith as the foundation for his strategy, Warren believes that one finds purpose in the service of others, but that human nature is an obstruction: "Thinking like a servant is difficult because it challenges the basic problem of my life: I am, by nature, selfish... self-denial is the core of servanthood."<sup>23</sup> Warren's assertion that God-centered purpose can only be found in compassionate service of others is a bold answer to the question: "Why should it be important to cultivate compassion in today's young people?"

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<sup>20</sup> Thupten Jinpa. *A Fearless Heart: How the Courage to Be Compassionate Can Transform Our Lives*. Penguin Random House, 2015.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 209.

<sup>22</sup> Rick Warren. *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* Zondervan, 2002.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 263.

Another best-selling Christian author helping readers search for relevance and finding answers in compassionate service is David Platt. In his books *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream*<sup>24</sup> and *Follow Me: A Call to Die. A Call to Live*<sup>25</sup>, Platt aims to remind his readers that authentic Christianity is marked by one caring for others and living out that care through service. Moreover, Platt states that lack of compassion quite possibly reflects a false Christian faith: "...if our lives do not reflect radical compassion for the poor, there is reason to wonder if Christ is really in us at all."<sup>26</sup>

*Counter Culture: Following Christ in an Anti-Christian Age*<sup>27</sup>, another book by David Platt, tackles the predominant secular teachings about and approaches to various timely topics. In addressing his ideas regarding Christian response to topics such as abortion, sex slavery, and refugees, Platt challenges the church to embrace God's compassion as a key strategy. "One of my hopes in this book is that God would give us grace to see what He sees. To see the poor, the hungry, and the neglected as He sees them. To perceive those crushed by political, economic, or ethnic oppression from His perspective..."<sup>28</sup> Platt is stressing that compassionate servanthood is fundamental to faithful Christianity, and without compassion one cannot serve God in the way He desires people to behave.

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<sup>24</sup> David Platt. *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream*. Multnomah Books, 2010.

<sup>25</sup> David Platt. *Follow Me: A Call to Die. A Call to Live*. Tyndale House Publishers, 2013.

<sup>26</sup> Platt, *Radical*, 111.

<sup>27</sup> David Platt. *Counter Culture: Following Christ in an Anti-Christian Age*. Tyndale House Publishers, 2017

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

## Journal Articles

“The Great Recession: Implications for Adolescent Values and Behavior” details the results of a study focused on the effects of an economic downturn on values of adolescents.<sup>29</sup> Interestingly, the authors found evidence that, during the Great Recession (2008-2010), adolescents displayed “consistent evidence for increasing collectivism (concern for others and environmentalism) and some indication for decreasing or leveling individualism (materialism)”<sup>30</sup>. The results of this study are of particular interest, given that the target demographic of this project was very much in a formative stage during the 2008-2010 timeframe. The correlation between external influences and levels of compassion in adolescents is a focus of this thesis project, and this journal article helps reinforce the view that there is a connection between the two.

In his article “Compassion,” Eric J. Cassell examines the concept of compassion and asks if it is an emotion, a duty, a virtue, or a personality characteristic.<sup>31</sup> Cassell concludes that compassion “is an emotion, and its magnitude is a function of personality characteristics.”<sup>32</sup> Accepting Cassell’s conclusion, one can deduce that compassion can be controlled or, more appropriately, strengthened and developed in people. On the other hand, if compassion is not developed in a positive manner, it can weaken and have its progress stunted. It is of the utmost

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<sup>29</sup> Heejung Park, Jean M. Twenge, and Patricia M. Greenfield, “The Great Recession: Implications for Adolescent Values and Behavior,” *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 5, no. 3 (2014).

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 316.

<sup>31</sup> Eric J. Cassell. “Compassion.” *Handbook of Positive Psychology*, by C. R. Snyder and Shane J. Lopez, Oxford University Press, 2005, pp. 434–445.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 441.

importance then, to possess a strategy to effectively develop the emotion of compassion at a key stage of human development—the adolescent years.

Lynn Holding’s article, “Empathy and Loving-Kindness,” asserts that empathy, while closely aligned with compassion, stands apart from it.<sup>33</sup> Development of empathy, Holding states, is essential to the human’s ability to do good. Holding, a participant in the fine arts, states that, “Art and empathy have this in common: both are among our noblest attributes, and both require practice.”<sup>34</sup> This assertion that empathy is a trait that can be formed and improved is significant as it validates the idea that a strategy to develop a similar emotion, compassion, has merit.

Michael E. Cavanagh, in his article “Rediscovering Compassion,” provides an in-depth examination of the virtue of compassion. Cavanagh’s proclamation that “compassion is an innate capacity which is activated, to a greater or lesser degree, by the world around us”<sup>35</sup> provides the foundation for his article’s findings and provides recommendations regarding the healthy development of compassion. This comprehensive piece offers several looks at the general idea of compassion, types of compassion, and elements of compassion. Cavanagh’s approach, from a psychological and behavioral perspective, provides valuable insight into the understanding of compassion.

Many times, the concepts of compassion, empathy, and love are addressed as being identical. Not so, says Peter J. Frost, in his article “Why Compassion Counts!” Frost asserts that the three are very different: “Compassion is broader than empathy—it entails, even inspires

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<sup>33</sup> Lynn Holding. “Empathy and Loving-Kindness,” *Journal of Singing* 73, no. 5 (2017), 547-551.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 550.

<sup>35</sup> Michael E. Cavanagh. “Rediscovering Compassion,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 34, no. 4 (Winter 1995), 323.

helpful and merciful action. It is not as encompassing as love, although it may be a form of ‘disinterested love.’”<sup>36</sup> Frost’s article details why it is important to cultivate compassion in human engagement and why it is crucial particularly to organizational life. This significance drives Frost to distinguish between the three values of compassion, empathy, and love, and why the absence of compassion in modern-day organizational life is an issue that must be addressed.

As social media use skyrockets, the medium can become an important focus of a person’s life. Many times, social media becomes the target for those who would complain that young people today appear to be increasingly self-centered, apathetic, and unfeeling. Helen Vossen and Patti M. Valkenburg argue the opposite, based on their findings in their research detailed in the article “Do Social Media Foster or Curtail Adolescents’ Empathy?”<sup>37</sup> Vossen and Valkenburg deduced after their research that “in contrast to concerns that have been raised, social media use can actually have a beneficial influence on empathy.”<sup>38</sup> Given this project’s focus on external factors such as social media, Vossen and Valkenburg’s article may, on some level, disagree that this factor has a negative impact on adolescent empathy. However, the article provides valuable data for analysis by this researcher.

In analyzing his research detailed in the article “Self-centeredness in Adolescents,” Axel Foller-Mancini concluded that “the school itself may have a significant impact on the ethical commitment of students and can contribute to the process of adolescents’ development to future adults as relational and moral beings.”<sup>39</sup> Foller-Mancini’s findings are important to this thesis

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<sup>36</sup> Peter J. Frost. “Why Compassion Counts!,” *Journal of Management Inquiry* 20, no. 4 (2011), 395.

<sup>37</sup> Helen Vossen and Patti M. Valkenburg. “Do Social Media Foster or Curtail Adolescents’ Empathy?,” *Computers in Human Behavior* 63 (2016), 118-124.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>39</sup> Axel Foller-Mancini. “*Self-centeredness in Adolescents: An empirical study of students of Steiner schools, Christian academic high schools, and public schools,*” *Research on Steiner Education* 1, no. 2 (2010). 155.

project, as they support the notion that the academic and social environment in the school setting has the potential to greatly impact a young person's ability to feel, show, and act in compassion. Based on Foller-Mancini's conclusions, the intentional development of a program for an academic setting to cultivate compassion in adolescents has potential for enormous impact, both at the individual and collective levels.

While authored for a healthcare audience, Janet Gardner and Jan Emory's article "Changing students' perceptions of the homeless: A community service-learning experience" uses an experience similar to one this researcher advocates for adolescent males. Allowing nursing students to work with a homeless population allowed the students to develop closer relationships with individuals with whom they had little to no previous interaction. The authors found that "students learned skills in advocacy and communication. In addition, they gained empathy for a population some once feared."<sup>40</sup> The article supports this researcher's theory that using a strategy to allow students to engage with others in acts of service will draw out the students' intrinsic quality of compassion.

The role of religion in promoting compassion as an alternative to aggressive behavior in adolescents is the focus of the article "Religiousness and Aggression in Adolescents: The Mediating Roles of Self-Control and Compassion." In their research for the article, the authors found that adolescents who developed a strong sense of compassion would be less apt to engage in aggressive behaviors. Of particular interest to this researcher was the authors' focus on the role of religion in helping to strengthen compassion: "As our research and the research of others reveals, religiousness is also linked to greater self-control and compassion, two traits that are

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<sup>40</sup> Janet Gardner and Jan Emory. "Changing students' perceptions of the homeless: A community service learning experience," *Nurse Education in Practice* 29 (2018), 136.



largely incompatible with aggression... Perhaps exposure to religious passages in which God sanctioned compassion and self-control might reduce aggressive behavior.”<sup>41</sup> Using Christian foundations in an educational strategy to cultivate compassion would appear to be crucial in increasing a program’s likelihood for success.

### **Pertinent Scriptures**

The primary scriptural impetus for this thesis project is Jesus’ identification of the greatest commandment, in Matthew 22:37-40: “He said to him, ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important command. The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands.’”<sup>42</sup> Jesus’ statement that loving others is placed on the same level as loving God reveals the importance of developing a compassionate heart. If one envisions the entirety of Holy Scripture as a tapestry, then these two commandments identified by Jesus are threads that find their way through every part and corner of the textile. The Bible is dotted with statements and commandments to show compassion and to live it out always.

Ephesians 4:32, “And be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God also forgave you in Christ.” Paul encourages the church at Ephesus to display the same attitude God had taken towards them. This exhortation to be compassionate to each other not only was intended so that the people might reflect God in their interactions, but also to make the world in which they lived a better place.

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<sup>41</sup> James A. Shepperd, Wendi A. Miller, and Colin Tucker Smith. “Religiousness and Aggression in Adolescents: The Mediating Roles of Self-Control and Compassion,” *Aggressive Behavior* 41 (2015), 619.

<sup>42</sup> Matthew 22:37-40.

Colossians 3:12-13, “Therefore, God’s chosen ones, holy and loved, put on heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, accepting one another and forgiving one another...” To the church in Colossae, Paul lists compassion as one of the virtues the people should take on as they might take on a piece of clothing. Compassion is something God’s people need to wear prominently in their daily lives.

2 Corinthians 1:4, “He comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any kind of affliction, through the comfort we ourselves receive from God.” In order to show compassion, someone must have the proper heart. Just as God provides comfort through difficult experiences in one’s own life, he or she must reflect that same caring presence in the lives of others who are struggling or going through difficulties.

1 Corinthians 10:24, “No one should seek his own good, but the good of the other person.” To the church in Corinth, Paul reminds them that placing someone else’s needs above their own is paramount. Selfless caring is a key component to a compassionate heart and presence. All these directives from Paul to the various churches reflect the call to compassion that Jesus taught. The importance of Christ’s followers to imitate the care for others that Jesus espoused was key to the success and expansion of the church on a universal scale.

Exodus 22:27, “And if he cries out to Me, I will listen because I am compassionate.” In this section of Exodus, God is establishing rules regarding the treatment of others. God uses specific examples of those who reflect the most vulnerable in society: widows, orphans, and the poor. This section is punctuated by God’s statement that He is compassionate, establishing compassion as a quality of God.

James 1:27, “Pure and undefiled religion before our God and Father is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself unstained by the world.” The definition

of pure religion by the One who is the object of religion is clear in this passage. God desires His followers to treat others, particularly those in positions of greatest need, with compassion.

Micah 6:8, “Mankind, He has told you what is good and what it is the Lord requires of you: to act justly, to love faithfulness, and to walk humbly with your God.” While the translation used chooses “faithfulness,” other translations use “kindness” (NAS) and “mercy” (KJV). God requires His followers to embrace a lifestyle that values mercy above almost all else. Once again, God is telling His followers how they treat others is of utmost importance.

John 13:34-35, “I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you must also love one another. By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” Christ’s words in this instance establish that how members of the early church treated each other would provide a powerful witness to the world in general. Using the love that Jesus displayed to his followers as an example, disciples of Christ are urged to treat each other likewise, so that the world outside the church universal might see and (hopefully) believe.

1 Peter 3:8, “Now finally, all of you should be like-minded and sympathetic, should love believers, and be compassionate and humble...” Like many of the other biblical authors, Peter identifies compassion as a quality which followers of Christ should strive to possess. The fact that this urging comes from the same Peter who impulsively sliced off a man’s ear with his sword the night Jesus was arrested should serve as inspiration that anyone can achieve a compassionate heart.

1 John 3:17, “If anyone has this world’s goods and sees his brother in need but closes his eyes to his need—how can God’s love reside in him?” Turning a blind eye to those in need is the antithesis of compassion. In this passage John goes so far as to question the viability of a

Christian's faith if they do not exhibit a compassionate heart. John tells the reader that in order to host God's love in his or her heart, a person must show compassion to others.

Proverbs 21:13, "The one who shuts his ears to the cry of the poor will himself also call out and not be answered." Like John's comment above, this passage reinforces the idea that God will abandon those who choose to ignore the call of the needy. If one chooses to turn a blind eye to another in need, God will choose to turn His back on that person in his or her time of need.

Romans 8:1, "Therefore, no condemnation now exists for those in Christ Jesus..." Once again, those who receive Christ are called to reflect that which they have been given. Paul tells the church in Rome that for those who accept Christ there is no condemnation. Compassion does not condemn or judge, and those who live out compassionate lives should not be condemning or judgmental.

Galatians 6:2, "Carry one another's burdens; in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." When one has a compassionate heart and performs acts of compassion, he or she helps to take some of the burdens of others upon himself or herself. A characteristic of compassion, willfully taking on another's burdens is very much a Christlike attribute.

Lamentations 3:22-23, "Because of the Lord's faithful love we do not perish, for His mercies never end. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness!" The writer exalts God's compassion and mercy, reminding readers that the characteristics of God, like God Himself, are eternal and without end. This fact should drive Christians to prioritize qualities like compassion when they live out their lives.

### Theological Foundations

As the previous examination of various passages of scripture revealed, God desires His people to not only see the world through the lens of compassion, but for them to actively be

people of compassion to the world around them. Nowhere is this fact evidenced more than in Jesus' statement that the most important rules established for mankind in following God was to love God with every ounce of being, and to love others<sup>43</sup>. The inclusion by Jesus during this encounter of the commandment to love others becomes foundational to the Christian church. "This commandment and the first complement each other, so Jesus mentioned them together. They are not to be separated. It is impossible to love God without loving people, for his law and heart's desire is to love others."<sup>44</sup>

This truth requires a Christian to love others as an act of service, obedience, and service to God. In order to effectively love others, one must develop a compassionate heart. Much like a human muscle, this quality needs to be actively developed and strengthened. This thesis project takes the approach that cultivating compassion is the best strategy, because compassion already exists in humans (as they were created in the image of God) and simply must be nurtured to grow and mature.

Cultivating compassion should be a goal for followers of Christ. As disciples of Christ, they must intentionally emulate the characteristics and values of Jesus. But simple embodiment is not enough, and compassionate action must emerge to be proper followers of Christ. The importance of teaching others to live in a similar Christ-like manner transcends religion. It would be extremely difficult to find anyone who would actively resist the development of a compassionate heart and the subsequent good works in the service of others.

There are numerous occasions in the biblical accounts of the life of Jesus where a compassionate heart is modeled. In the Gospel of Mark, for example, readers are told that a

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<sup>43</sup> Matthew 22:37-40.

<sup>44</sup> Stuart K. Weber. *Matthew, vol. 1, Holman New Testament Commentary*. Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000; 358.

leper approached Jesus and begged to be healed. As part of his request, the man expressed concern that Jesus might not want to heal him when he said, “If You are willing, You can make me clean.”<sup>45</sup> On one hand, the man apparently had confidence in Jesus’ healing abilities, but on the other hand the man was unsure of Jesus’ ability to have compassion on him. The implication appears to be that if Jesus did not feel compassion on the leper, then no healing would take place. Without motivation to heal, it seemingly did not matter whether Jesus was able to heal the skin disease or not. In fact, Mark used a specific word when detailing Jesus’ response to the leper’s request: “Moved with *compassion* [emphasis added], Jesus reached out His hand and touched him. ‘I am willing,’ He told him. ‘Be made clean.’ Immediately the disease left him, and he was healed.”<sup>46</sup> The Greek word Mark used which is translated into the English word “compassion” is σπλαγγισθεῖς (*splanchnistheis*), previously noted in this project as a word used to describe a deep emotional response to someone in need. Jesus was deeply moved to help the leper, and subsequently physical healing took place. The link between ability and desire was formidable, allowing a miracle to take place.

A question one might present is whether it is necessary to exhibit the deep compassion that Jesus displayed so many times in the gospel accounts in order to heal. The answer may be found in a clue provided in another account in Mark’s gospel. In this account, Jesus is approached by a man in a crowd, pleading for the life of his son. “Teacher, I brought my son to You. He has a spirit that makes him unable to speak. Wherever it seizes him, it throws him down, and he foams at the mouth, grinds his teeth, and becomes rigid. So I asked Your disciples

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<sup>45</sup> Mark 1:40b.

<sup>46</sup> Mark 1:41-42.

to drive it out, but they couldn't."<sup>47</sup> The disciples had previously been given the ability to heal by Jesus<sup>48</sup>, but in this case they were unable to help the boy. Notice that it is not until the father invokes Jesus' compassion (σπλαγχνισθεις), that healing for the boy is provided: "But if You can do anything, have *compassion* [emphasis added] on us and help us."<sup>49</sup> Can God's work, in this case via a healing miracle, truly take place without compassion? It certainly is an interesting thought, and perhaps should cause Christians to pause and reflect as they try to live out Christ's mission. Ability without motivation is largely useless. Christians should realize that their focus, usually on the "how," might need to be changed instead to be on the "why."

### Theoretical Foundations

In his Commencement address at Northwestern University in 2006, then-Senator Barack Obama stated:

There's a lot of talk in this country about the federal deficit. But I think we should talk more about our empathy deficit – the ability to put ourselves in someone else's shoes; to see the world through those who are different from us – the child who's hungry, the laid-off steelworker, the immigrant woman cleaning your dorm room.

As you go on in life, cultivating this quality of empathy will become harder, not easier. There's no community service requirement in the real world; no one forcing you to care. ...we live in a culture that discourages empathy. A culture that too often tells us our principal goal in life is to be rich, thin, young, famous, safe, and entertained. A culture where those in power too often encourage these selfish impulses.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Mark 9:17-18.

<sup>48</sup> Luke 9:1-2: "Summoning the Twelve, [Jesus] gave them power and authority over all the demons, and power to heal diseases. Then He sent them to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick."

<sup>49</sup> Mark 9:22b.

<sup>50</sup> Barack Obama. "Obama to Graduates: Cultivate Empathy," June 19, 2006; accessed March 12, 2019, <https://www.northwestern.edu/newscenter/stories/2006/06/barack.html>.

Ignoring political affiliation or beliefs, most would agree with Mr. Obama's statement that "we live in a culture that discourages empathy." Modern-day society has far too often taken on the "me first" attitude and this destructive attitude that contradicts Christ's teachings permeates society in a variety of ways. Mr. Obama alluded to these when he stated that culture "too often tells us our principal goal in life is to be rich, thin, young, famous, safe, and entertained." Essentially, he was referencing key battlefield issues in most adolescents' lives: career choices, entertainment choices, and spending habits.

When choosing a career, the opportunity to serve others may be one of the factors considered by someone, but it rarely ranks higher on the list than advancement opportunities or potential salary. This was evident when the popular website Glassdoor.com listed the most common career choices for recent college graduates. The study "identifies the most common job titles that college graduates held in the first five years of their careers."<sup>51</sup> The list does not reveal many jobs with the potential to compassionately serve others: Sales Associate, Research Assistant, Teaching Assistant, Intern, Administrative Assistant, Account Manager, Social Media Manager, Software Engineer, Case Manager, Data Analyst, Engineer, Marketing Coordinator, Web Developer, Financial Analyst, Operations Manager, Lab Technician, Pharmacy Technician, Substitute Teacher, Customer Service Representative, and Tutor. This is not pointed out with the intent to demean those jobs or careers, but rather to reinforce the idea that young people are not consciously choosing career paths that promote compassionate activity. Research may show that this was not always the case with young people, even those surveyed for the Glassdoor.com article. Evidence, interestingly, may be found in a more youthful time.

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<sup>51</sup> Emily Moore. "20 Most Popular Jobs for College Graduates," May 18, 2017; <https://www.glassdoor.com/blog/20-most-popular-jobs-for-college-graduates/>.



In 2017, the website Fatherly.com and New York Life Insurance Company joined forces to survey over 1,000 children under the age of 12. The survey sought to gather information on what the children surveyed wanted to do when they grew up, and the responses were vastly different from the prior survey referenced above:

1. Doctor
2. Veterinarian
3. Police Officer
4. Firefighter
5. Scientist
6. Engineer
7. Musician
8. Athlete
9. Teacher
10. Astronaut<sup>52</sup>

The younger group's preferences for careers reflected choices that not only seemed more whimsical and inspirational, but more importantly they overall showed a desire to help others. The children group's choices were occupations that focused on serving others with compassion, suggesting that the younger children showed more signs of compassion regarding life overall. Therefore, it might be deduced that something seemingly affected young people's level of compassion between their preteen years and late adolescence.

But it is not simply career choices that reflect an overall self-centered approach to life in today's world. From video games to television to movies to music, entertainment choices are a major part of most lives. What people choose to entertain themselves with has great potential to influence their compassion levels. A relatively recent phenomenon, "binge watching," involves watching a large number of episodes of a television series in one sitting. Netflix, the popular

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<sup>52</sup> "The 2017 Imagination Report: What Kids Want to Be When They Grow Up," December 22, 2017; <https://www.fatherly.com/love-money/work-money/the-2017-imagination-report-what-kids-want-to-be-when-they-grow-up/>.

video streaming service, identified the top ten most binge watched series of 2018 on its platform.<sup>53</sup> Following each title, in bold, are the numerical values (out of a possible 5) assigned to the series by the Common Sense media website<sup>54</sup> for “positive messages,” “positive role models and representations,” and “violence:”

1. “On My Block” **(3/3/2)**
2. “Making a Murderer: Part 2” **(0/0/3)**
3. “13 Reasons Why: Season 2” **(2/1/4)**
4. “Last Chance U” **(2/2/3)**
5. “Bodyguard” **(0/1/5)**
6. “Fastest Car” **(no ratings available)**
7. “The Haunting of Hill House” **(1/1/4)**
8. “Anne with an E: Season 2” **(4/5/1)**
9. “Insatiable” **(0/0/4)**
10. “Orange Is the New Black: Season 6” **(4/2/3)**

The average of the ratings for the shows listed is 1.78 (out of 5) for “positive messages,” 1.67 for “positive role models and representations,” and 3.22 for “violence.” If the seemingly out-of-place “Anne with an E” show is removed, the averages dip to a miserable 1.5/1.25/3.5. In other words, the most popular shows people are binge watching on Netflix are overly violent offerings with little to no positive messages or role models. Entertainment choices and any possible effects will be examined in further detail later in this project, when survey results regarding entertainment choices and compassion levels are analyzed.

Another possible clue concerning compassion levels is examining how people choose to spend their money. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics’ Consumer Expenditures report for 2016<sup>55</sup> (the last reported full year), the average U.S. household’s annual expenditures

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<sup>53</sup> Laura Stampler. “These Are Netflix’s 10 Most Binge Watched TV Shows Of 2018.” December 11, 2018; <http://fortune.com/2018/12/11/these-are-netflixs-10-most-binge-watched-tv-shows-of-2018/>.

<sup>54</sup> <https://www.common sense media.org/>

<sup>55</sup> “Consumer Expenditures in 2016.” April 2018; <https://www.bls.gov/opub/reports/consumer-expenditures/2016/home.htm>.

were \$57,311. While alcoholic beverages, apparel and services, entertainment, personal care products and services, and tobacco products and smoking supplies accounted for \$6,244 of that total, cash contributions (or charitable contributions) only totaled \$2,081. This is not to say that the \$6,244 could all be considered frivolous spending, and certainly people give of themselves in other ways besides financial contributions, but the comparison of that spending with the \$2,801 number is eye-opening. A society where the average person spends \$2.23 on items such as alcohol, tobacco, makeup, hair gel, and massages for every dollar he or she gives to those in need does not appear to be a society that reflects overall compassion and care for others.

### **Cultivating Kindness and Compassion in Younger Children**

In December 2014, Dr. Kimberly Schonert-Reichl presented at the Center for Child and Family Well-Being at the University of Washington in Seattle. Dr. Schonert-Reichl's focus was on research and practical strategies for nurturing compassion in elementary-aged children.<sup>56</sup> In her presentation, Dr. Schonert-Reichl shared that it is important to develop compassion in children primarily to overcome various societal risks children face today: poverty, stress, bullying, decreased empathy, and mental illness. These factors, Dr. Schonert-Reichl argues, can prove problematic when trying to develop healthy compassion and kindness in children at a key stage of mental and emotional development.

The benefits of a healthy level of compassion and kindness in young people are numerous, according to Dr. Schonert-Reichl. A marked improvement in academic performance, a reduction in aggressive behavior, and a decrease in emotional distress were all cited in the

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<sup>56</sup> Kimberly Schonert-Reichl, "Cultivating Kindness and Compassion in Children: Recent Research and Practical Strategies." PowerPoint presentation, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, December 5, 2014. [http://drive.google.com/open?id=0Bw\\_GRjIgG5ArSWpnWW11b0Q4XzA&authuser=0](http://drive.google.com/open?id=0Bw_GRjIgG5ArSWpnWW11b0Q4XzA&authuser=0)

presentation. Of particular interest, however, was the finding that a quantifiable health benefit exists from increased empathy and altruistic behavior. This conclusion was the result of a study referenced by Dr. Schonert-Reichl and published in the article “Effect of Volunteering on Risk Factors for Cardiovascular Disease in Adolescents.”<sup>57</sup> This study found that “those who increased the most in empathy and altruistic behaviors, and who decreased the most in negative mood, also showed the greatest decreases in cardiovascular risk over time.”<sup>58</sup> Adolescents who volunteered their time to work with younger children experienced overall reductions in factors such as interleukin 6 levels, cholesterol levels, and body mass index over time.

Dr. Schonert-Reichl suggests five strategies to promote empathy and compassion in elementary-aged children, and this researcher believes these stratagems would work effectively with adolescents as well. The five strategies are:

1. Avoid material rewards and rather focus on verbal praise.
2. Acknowledge the capacity children have for empathy and sympathy.
3. Encourage children to engage in opportunities to help others and reflect about the good feelings that come from kindness.
4. Maximize support and minimize punishment.
5. Help develop a caring and kind identity by focusing on the person rather than the acts.

These five tactics correlate very well with this researcher’s proposed educational strategy detailed later in this thesis project. Dr. Schonert-Reichl, in her presentation and her extensive research, provided excellent information and resources for this researcher.

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<sup>57</sup> Hannah M. C. Schreier, Kimberly Schonert-Reichl, and Edith Chen, “Effect of Volunteering on Risk Factors for Cardiovascular Disease in Adolescents.” *Journal of the American Medical Association Pediatrics* 167, 4: 327-332.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid 327.

## Compassion Development in Higher Education

In 2015, the *Journal of Psychology and Theology* published an article by Roxanne Rashedi, Thomas G. Plante, and Erin S. Callister, titled “Compassion Development in Higher Education.”<sup>59</sup> This article summarized the results of a study conducted in 2014 at Santa Clara University (SCU), studying the compassion levels of college students and factors that might affect those levels. The goal of the article was to “show how educating our students to be compassionate could help transform our troubled and often remarkably uncompassionate world into a more humane and compassionate one.”<sup>60</sup> Rashedi and her colleagues reviewed the role of spirituality in the development of compassion by analysis of the role of the Jesuit order of the Roman Catholic Church in education. In addition, a 2013 study at the secular University of San Diego was cited in the article as an impetus for the 2014 SCU study.

Interestingly, the study found that “having any type of religious or spiritual practice is associated with higher compassion scores. Those who identified as religious or spiritual had significantly higher compassion scores than those who identified as secular.”<sup>61</sup> This finding would seemingly support this researcher’s perception that a Christian foundation to an educational strategy to cultivate compassion is indispensable. Another component of this researcher’s educational strategy, active involvement in service projects (discussed in detail in Chapter 5 of this project), was identified in the article as valuable towards a healthy maturity of

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<sup>59</sup> Rashedi, Roxanne, Thomas G. Plante, and Erin S. Callister. “Compassion Development in Higher Education.” *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 43, no. 2 (2015). 131-139.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, 131.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, 136.

compassion levels: "...participation in community service, even to satisfy a class requirement, was associated with higher compassion scores."<sup>62</sup>

One major distinction between the article's study and this researcher's project was the demographic addressed. Rashedi and her colleagues asserted that "[h]igher education is ideal for transformative learning. Seeds of care, empathy, interconnectedness—all of which encompass compassion—are planted during these college years."<sup>63</sup> This researcher believes that it is even more so effective to start cultivating the seeds of compassion at an earlier age, at the high school level. Even so, Rashedi and her colleagues' findings proved valuable to this thesis project and its goals.

### Summary

While many books and articles have been written about the importance of compassion, very few exist that detail a strategy to cultivate compassion in an educational setting. It may seem a very specific target group to identify adolescent males as the focus of such a strategy, but in numbers alone the target group is enormous. There is potential for incredible impact, through an effective strategy put in place to cultivate compassion in this key demographic group. A key component to such a strategy is to incorporate actual hands-on opportunities for students to apply concepts learned regarding compassion. To simply learn about compassion without putting it into action is pointless—it would be like trying to become fluent in French without daily immersion in a French-speaking community for an extended period of time. English philosopher Herbert Spencer once opined that "The great aim of education is not knowledge, but action." Applying this theory to the cultivation of a compassion in others that mirrors Jesus' commands

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 137.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 134-135.

regarding compassion, one can surmise that simple reflection and introspection, though important, are not enough. In order to properly “learn” the compassion of Christ, one must couple reflection and introspection with practice. In the case of compassion, this is done through active service towards others.

*“Many plans are in a man’s heart, but the Lord’s decree will prevail.”*<sup>64</sup>

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

#### **Intervention Design**

As noted previously, levels of compassion and empathy appear to be dropping in today’s American society. A variety of possible contributing factors have been considered, but for this project the primary focus will be on the consideration of entertainment choices for young people. This project will attempt to determine if there is any correlation between entertainment choices for adolescent males and their level of compassion. Data was collected for this analysis through an internet-based anonymous survey. The survey asked respondents to identify their personal entertainment choices, as well as the subjects’ perceived levels of compassion, both given and received.

#### **Internet-based Anonymous Survey**

The Internet-based anonymous survey provided participant informed consent authorization, collected basic but not personally identifiable demographics from each respondent, and asked questions to identify entertainment choices in various areas. These areas included video games, movies, television, and music. Information was also collected to determine the respondents’ involvement in volunteer work and charitable giving, along with their overall thoughts on the level of compassion shown by various demographic groups.

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<sup>64</sup> Proverbs 19:21.



## Implementation of the Intervention Design

The internet-based anonymous survey was publicized via several social media posts and collected responses from July 5, 2017 until November 10, 2017. There was no particular intentionality that drove the choice of the timeframe used. Rather the start date of the survey was determined by the final approval of the survey granted by Liberty University's Institutional Review Board. The survey was open for a four-month period and was closed a few days after a final request for participation via social media informational blast. While the survey was open during the summer months, it did not negatively affect the response rate. Instead, the timeframe used might have helped the response rate, as 21 of the 37 (57%) respondents who completed all questions stated they were currently in college. A survey offered during the academic year could possibly have yielded a lower response rate, given the average college student's workload and availability.

The survey was hosted on the internet web site Survey Monkey, described in an online review as "practically synonymous with online surveys in many users' minds."<sup>65</sup> The site's reputation and wide acceptance ("...SurveyMonkey is helping more than 330,000 organizations gather and measure feedback"<sup>66</sup>) played major roles in its selection to host the survey for this thesis project. The company's favorable pricing for academic research also played a role in its selection. Finally, the site's ease of use made the implementation of a survey, data collection, and subsequent data analysis rather uncomplicated. Because of SurveyMonkey's user-friendliness, the researcher was able to design the survey to fit his vision and proper collection of

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<sup>65</sup> Ross Rubin, "SurveyMonkey Review," accessed May 26, 2020, <https://www.pcmag.com/reviews/surveymonkey>.

<sup>66</sup> SurveyMonkey, "How it Works," accessed May 26, 2020, <https://www.surveymonkey.com/mp/take-a-tour>.

data. Other collection instruments considered were LimeSurvey, Survey Anyplace, and SurveyGizmo. Ultimately, after deliberately weighing pros and cons for each site, SurveyMonkey was selected to host the survey and to gather response data.

In total, 52 adolescent males participated in the survey with a 71% completion rate (specifically, 37 of 52 respondents completed all questions). To reflect the constituent demographic at the researcher's ministry setting at an all-male boarding school, participants were required to be males. The age range of respondents was limited to at or between the ages of 15-25 to capture information from adolescents or recent adolescents. And while most respondents were either present or former attendees of Fork Union Military Academy, it was not a requirement for participation.

#### Participant Consent

To ensure participant agreement with the informed consent information in the survey, respondents were presented summary information on the survey, as well as an informed consent acknowledgement. Before continuing with the survey, participants had to respond affirmatively to the statement of consent. The full text of the Consent Form for non-minors is provided below:

You are invited to be in a research study of compassion in teenage males and factors that may affect a person's level of compassion. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a male between the ages of 18 and 25. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

James A. Benson, Jr., a doctoral candidate in the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to develop a strategy for a school to increase compassion in teenage males.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Take an online survey that should take about 15-20 minutes.

Risks and Benefits of Participation: The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life. Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Compensation: Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Anonymity: Participants in the online survey will do so on an anonymous basis. No participant names or identifying information will be collected during the survey.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time prior to submitting the survey without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is James A. Benson, Jr. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact him at [jabenson@liberty.edu](mailto:jabenson@liberty.edu). You may also contact the researcher's faculty advisor, Dr. Steve Vandegriff, at [svandegriff@liberty.edu](mailto:svandegriff@liberty.edu). If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 1887, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

This survey was reviewed and approved by the Liberty University Institutional Review Board, and approved on June 26, 2017.

\* Please select one of the following to continue:

I agree to participate  
I decline to participate

Requiring the participants to respond affirmatively to this prompt ensured that they were advised of the nature and purpose of the survey, as well as confirmation of their voluntary, non-coerced participation, and agreement to other elements (compensation, risk) of the survey.

### Parental Consent for Minors

Participants who identified themselves as minors were required to have a parent complete a parental consent form. The full text of the Parental Consent Form for non-minors is provided below:

Your child is invited to be in a research study of compassion in teenage males and factors that may affect a person's level of compassion. He was selected as a possible participant because he is a male between the ages of 15 and 18. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to allow him to be in the study.

James A. Benson, Jr., a doctoral candidate in the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

**Background Information:** The purpose of this study is to develop a strategy for a school to increase compassion in teenage males.

**Procedures:** If you agree to allow your child to be in this study, I would ask him to do the following things:

1. Take an online survey that should take about 15-20 minutes.

**Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:** The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks your son would encounter in everyday life.

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

**Compensation:** Your child will not be compensated for participating in this study.

**Anonymity:** Participants in the online survey will do so on an anonymous basis. No participant names or identifying information will be collected during the survey.

**Confidentiality:** The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:** Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to allow your child to participate will not affect his current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to allow your child to participate, he is free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time prior to submitting the survey without affecting those relationships.

**Contacts and Questions:** The researcher conducting this study is James A. Benson, Jr. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact him at [jabenson@liberty.edu](mailto:jabenson@liberty.edu). You may also contact the researcher's faculty advisor, Dr. Steve Vandegriff, at [svandegriff@liberty.edu](mailto:svandegriff@liberty.edu). If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 1887, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.

**Statement of Consent:** I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to allow my child to participate in the study.

This survey was reviewed by the Liberty University Institutional Review Board, and approved on June 26, 2017.

Signing your name below means that you want to be in the study.

Signature of Minor [space provided for signature and date]  
Signature of Parent [space provided for signature and date]  
Signature of Investigator [space provided for signature and date]

## **Demographic Information**

At the beginning of the survey, participants were asked to provide demographic information that, while non-identifying for the participants to maintain anonymity, allowed the researcher to perform further in-depth analysis of the data once collected. These demographic questions, along with the offered responses, are provided below:

- What is your age?
  - 25
  - 24
  - 23

- 22
- 21
- 20
- 19
- 18
- 17
- 16
- 15
- What academic grade will you be in as of September 2017?
  - 8th
  - 9th
  - 10th
  - 11th
  - 12th
  - I am currently in college
  - I am not currently in college, and I have not completed college
  - I have completed college, or am currently pursuing a graduate degree
- Have you ever been enrolled as a student at Fork Union Military Academy?
  - Yes
  - No

Each of these questions required a response from the participant to continue and allowed the researcher to analyze responses to later questions grouped by age, grade level, and whether the respondent was ever enrolled at Fork Union Military Academy.

### **Questions Regarding Entertainment Choices**

Survey participants were queried regarding their personal choices for entertainment in the areas of video games, movies, television, and music. In addition, questions were asked about how much time, per week, respondents spent in each of the entertainment fields. Within each type of entertainment, detailed options were given regarding genres and subgenres. Examples were provided for each genre and subgenre to assist respondents in providing as accurate responses as possible. The text of the entertainment questions on the survey is provided below:

- If you play video games, what genres do you enjoy? Mark up to 5.
  - I don't play video games
  - Action: Platform games (Example: Super Mario Bros.)
  - Action: Shooter games (Example: Call of Duty)
  - Action: Fighting games (Example: Injustice)
  - Action-Adventure: Survival horror (Example: Silent Hill)
  - Role-playing: Action (Example: Diablo)
  - Role-playing: MMORPG (Example: World of Warcraft)
  - Role-playing: Tactical RPG (Example: Shadowrun Returns)
  - Role-playing: Sandbox RPG (Example: Skyrim, Fallout)

- Role-playing: Fantasy (Example: Final Fantasy)
- Simulation: Life simulation (Example: The Sims)
- Simulation: Vehicle simulation (Example: Flight simulators, NASCAR simulators)
- Strategy: Artillery game (Example: Pocket Tanks)
- Strategy: Real-time strategy (RTS) (Example: Starcraft)
- Strategy: Real-time tactics (RTT) (Example: Warhammer)
- Strategy: Multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA) (Example: League of Legends)
- Strategy: Tower defense (Example: Warzone Earth)
- Strategy: Wargame (Example: Combat Mission)
- Sports: Racing (Example: Gran Turismo, Forza)
- Sports: Sports game (Example: Madden, NBA2k, NHL, FIFA)
- Sports: Sports-based fighting (Example: UFC, Fight Night, WWE)
- How many hours, on average per week, do you spend playing video games?
  - Zero (I don't play video games)
  - Less than 1
  - 1-5
  - 6-10
  - 11-20
  - More than 20
- If you watch movies, what are the genres you enjoy? Mark up to 5.
  - I don't watch movies
  - Action: Spy (Example: the Bourne trilogy)
  - Action: Thriller (Example: the Fast and Furious or the Die Hard franchises)
  - Action: Superhero (Example: The Avengers or The Dark Knight)
  - Adventure: Swashbuckler (Example: Pirates of the Caribbean)
  - Adventure: Western (Example: The Magnificent Seven or Tombstone)
  - Comedy: Slapstick (Example: Bad Grandpa or Caddyshack)
  - Comedy: Dark comedy (Example: The Big Lebowski or Fargo)
  - Comedy: Comedy horror (Example: the Scary Movie franchise)
  - Comedy: Romantic comedy (Example: She's Out of My League or Pretty Woman)
  - Comedy: Teen movie (Example: Pitch Perfect or Superbad)
  - Drama: Crime drama (Example: The Wolf of Wall Street or American Hustle)
  - Drama: Historical drama (Example: Ben-Hur or Braveheart)
  - Drama: Docudrama (Example: Hidden Figures or Snowden)
  - Drama: Legal drama (Example: Twelve Angry Men or A Few Good Men)
  - Drama: Psychodrama (Example: Fight Club or Black Swan)
  - Drama: Horror (Example: The Conjuring or The Cabin in the Woods)
- How many movies do you watch per week, on average?
  - Zero (I don't watch movies)

- Less than 1
  - 1-5
  - 6-10
  - 11-20
  - More than 20
- If you watch television, what are the genres you enjoy? Mark up to 5.
    - I don't watch television
    - Drama: Action (Example: Prison Break)
    - Drama: Courtroom (Example: Law and Order)
    - Drama: Detective (Example: Sherlock)
    - Drama: Fantasy (Example: Game of Thrones)
    - Drama: Horror (Example: American Horror Story)
    - Drama: Police drama (Example: Blue Bloods)
    - Drama: Medical drama (Example: Grey's Anatomy)
    - Drama: Political drama (Example: House of Cards)
    - Drama: Science fiction (Example: Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D)
    - Drama: Soap opera (Example: General Hospital)
    - Drama: Teen drama (Example: Pretty Little Liars)
    - Drama: Thriller (Example: The Walking Dead)
    - Drama: Western (Example: Longmire)
    - Comedy: Action comedy (Example: Archer)
    - Comedy: Comedy-drama (Example: This is Us)
    - Comedy: Romantic comedy (Example: How I Met Your Mother)
    - Comedy: Satire (Example: Family Guy)
    - Comedy: Slapstick (Example: Scrubs)
    - Comedy: Sitcom (Example: The Big Bang Theory)
    - Comedy: Sketch comedy (Example: Key & Peele)
    - Live-action unscripted: Documentary (Example: 30 for 30)
    - Live-action unscripted: Game show (Example: Family Feud)
    - Live-action unscripted: Music television (Example: MTV)
    - Live-action unscripted: News (Examples: Fox News or CNN)
    - Live-action unscripted: Religious (Example: The 700 Club)
    - Live-action unscripted: Reality show (Examples: The Voice or Master Chef)
    - Live-action unscripted: Sports (Examples: NFL, NBA, MLB games)
    - Live-action unscripted: Talk show (Example: The Tonight Show)
    - Live-action unscripted: Variety show (Example: Saturday Night Live)
  - How many hours, on average per week, do you spend watching television shows?
    - Zero (I don't watch television)
    - Less than 1
    - 1-5
    - 6-10
    - 11-20
    - More than 20



- If you listen to music, what are the genres you enjoy? Mark up to 5.
  - I don't listen to music
  - Blues
  - Calypso
  - Classical
  - Country
  - Electronic dance music (EDM)
  - Folk
  - Gospel
  - Heavy metal
  - Hip hop
  - Jazz
  - Pop
  - Punk rock
  - Reggae
  - Rhythm and blues (R&B)
  - Rock
- How many hours, on average per week, do you spend listening to music?
  - Zero (I don't listen to music)
  - Less than 1
  - 1-5
  - 6-10
  - 11-20
  - More than 20

Questions regarding entertainment choices and frequency were to help analyze subsequent questions regarding respondents' volunteer work, charitable giving, and views on compassion. By identifying preferences regarding entertainment choices, respondents provided valuable information to the researcher as he sought to find a correlation between external factors and levels of compassion among adolescent males. For example, are adolescent males who listen to heavy metal music more or less likely to exhibit positive viewpoints and/or behaviors about compassion?

### **Questions Regarding Compassion**

The final section of questionings in the survey asked for respondents' opinions pertaining to compassion. Participants were queried about their views on the importance of compassion at a

personal level, their opinion on how others show compassion to various demographic groups, and the role that various entities play in the development of compassion in young people. The text for these questions, along with the researcher's comments on each is provided below:

- Do you actively participate in volunteer work?
  - No
  - Yes - several (10+) hours a week
  - Yes - a few hours (less than 10) a week
  - Yes - a few times each month
  - Yes - a few times each year
  - Yes - once a year

By collecting information regarding each respondent's participation in volunteer work, the researcher could form an opinion regarding the level of compassion in the respondents. While a tendency towards compassion does not guarantee volunteer work participation, people with well-developed views on compassion will seek out active participation in compassionate work. Consequently if, overall, respondents were active participants in volunteer work, then it could be theorized that they had a stronger sense of compassion. In addition, this information could be used for further analysis by the researcher. For example, examination might reveal that respondents who played a certain type of video game exhibited greater tendencies toward compassion through volunteerism.

- Do you donate to special causes? Mark all that apply.
  - No
  - Yes - money
  - Yes - time (physical work)
  - Yes - time (administrative work, research)
  - Yes - physical items (food, clothing, etc.)

Just as with volunteerism, donation to special causes does not simply identify someone as compassionate. Once again, however, the researcher sought possible correlations between

attention to special causes and entertainment choices. For example, could someone who watches sports on television be more apt to give of their time and/or resources to help others?

- Place the following in order from most important (1) to least important (8) as desirable characteristics for people in your life.
  - Common sense
  - Compassion
  - Courageousness
  - Discipline
  - Integrity
  - Intelligence
  - Self-confidence
  - Sense of humor

This question asked respondents to list, in order of importance, characteristics they desired in other people. Doing so allowed the researcher to assess the level of importance placed on compassion by the respondents. Did the respondent demographic place a high value on compassion as opposed to discipline? A negative response to such a question would possibly identify a need for fostering compassion in the demographic represented.

For the following question, participants were given a general definition of compassion to assist in their responses. At the top of the page, participants saw the following text: “Merriam-Webster defines compassion as ‘a feeling of wanting to help someone who is sick, hungry, in trouble, etc.’” When answering the questions below, please keep this definition in mind.” The establishment of an overall definition of compassion helped ensure that there was general concurrence on how the responses were provided.

- On a scale of 1-10 (with 10 rating as the highest), how would you rate the general level of overall compassion each of the following display to others:
  - Yourself
  - Your friends
  - Members of your immediate family
  - Adult (25+ years old) males
  - Adult (25+ years old) females
  - High school (Grades 9-12) males
  - High school (Grades 9-12) females

This question allowed participants to assess various demographic groups regarding the level of compassion the respondent perceived the group as showing to others. First, respondents were asked to rate themselves on the level of compassion they have shown to others. Next, the respondents were asked to rate people closest to them (friends and immediate family) regarding compassion shown to others. Respondents were also asked to consider members of the general age group above them (ages 25 and up), with differentiation between males and females. Finally, high school aged males and females were rated. These ratings allowed the researcher to examine levels of perceived compassion among various groups.

- Please place the following in order from most important (1) to least important (6) of each to help instill a sense of compassion in young people.
  - Family
  - Church
  - School
  - Friends
  - Athletic teams/coaches
  - Extracurricular activity leaders

This question asked respondents to rank six organizations or groups of people in order of importance in helping to impart a sense of compassion in young people. The results of this question allowed the researcher to determine whether young people viewed an educational setting (i.e. school) as a proper place to learn about compassion. If young people viewed a setting as proper for teaching compassion, then they would be more receptive to the lessons taught.

- Give your thoughts on the role of a high school in developing compassion in young people.

As a final question, respondents were given the opportunity to offer their individual thoughts on the role of a high school setting in helping to teach and cultivate compassion in young people. These responses, in a free-response format, offered the potential for great insight from the

respondents and consideration by the researcher. While not as straight-forward to analyze as preset options, the free-response capability allows for the respondents to offer personal responses, which at times can be very in-depth in manner.

The data collected via the survey was organized into three general groupings: demographic information, entertainment choices and frequency, and attitudes and perceptions about compassion. These three groupings allowed the researcher to investigate possible patterns more effectively within the data. Patterns found might help strengthen the researcher's thesis that cultivation of compassion is essential in the adolescent male demographic.

### Summary

The researcher developed this thesis project to provide a strategy to cultivate compassion in adolescent males. A component of the strategy entailed understanding what external forces could negatively affect the cultivation of compassion within this specific demographic. As a result, a survey was developed to collect data pertaining to outside entertainment influences and perceived levels of compassion among the respondents and selected demographic groups. An online survey was designed and implemented via the SurveyMonkey service, and data was collected over a four-month period in 2017. Respondents to the survey were limited to males, ages 15-25. Questions pertaining to entertainment choices in video games, movies, television, and music were asked via the survey. Questions were also asked that measured respondents' self-perception regarding compassion levels, as well as the respondents' perception of compassion levels among specific groups of people. The collected data was subsequently analyzed, with the results examined in the following chapter of this thesis project.

*“...whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable—if there is any moral excellence and if there is any praise—dwell on these things.”<sup>67</sup>*

## **Chapter 4: Results**

Once the survey collections were closed, this researcher gathered the data into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet for analysis. Particular attention was given to identify possible trends or patterns among the responses. Analyzing each question would provide insight to how external factors might aid or inhibit the growth of compassion in young people.

### **Demographic Information**

Of the 52 respondents that began the survey, 51 stated they were either 18 years of age or older, or that they had received parental consent to participate in the survey. The lone exception was not allowed to continue with the survey. Of the 51 survey respondents, there were 44 who chose to answer the questions regarding demographic information. The average age of respondents was 21.6 years of age, and 47.7% of respondents were currently in college. The youngest respondent was 15 years of age, while the oldest was 25 years of age. Most respondents were enrolled at Fork Union Military Academy at some point of their life, evidenced by 79.5% responding that they had attended FUMA.

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<sup>67</sup> Philippians 4:8.

## Data Analysis Per Individual Questions

Data was analyzed on a per question basis, to identify any relevant patterns or commonalities within each query. In most cases, each question yielded valuable information and insight when considered independently. Once this analysis was completed, a “bigger picture” examination of the overall results was done.

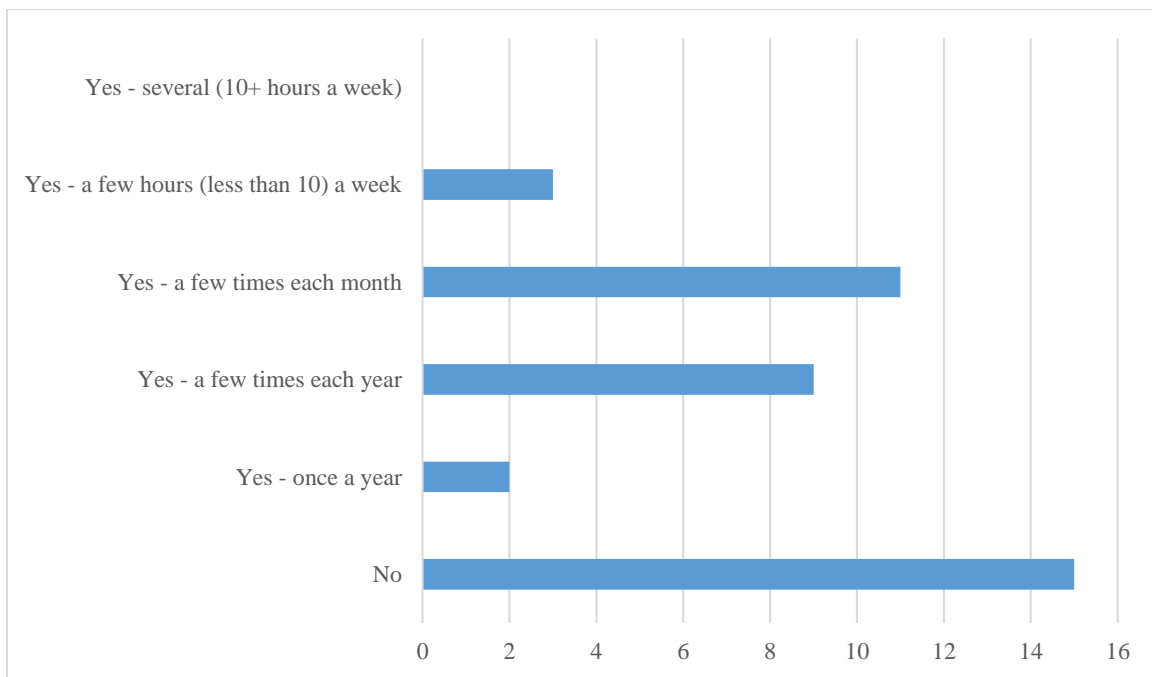
### Questions Pertaining to Compassion

*Question:* “Do you actively participate in volunteer work?”

*Researcher’s Motivation:* The question was presented to consider how involved respondents were in giving of their time to charitable causes. The researcher surmised that frequency of volunteer work by an individual correlated with a more developed sense of compassion.

*Respondents:* 40

*Results:*



Most respondents (62.5% or 25 of 40) indicated their participation in volunteer work at some level, well above the national average of 19.1% for males in the 16 to 24 age group.<sup>68</sup>

<i>“Do you actively participate in volunteer work?”</i>		
No	15	37.5%
Yes - a few times each month	11	27.5%
Yes - a few times each year	9	22.5%
Yes - a few hours (less than 10) a week	3	7.5%
Yes - once a year	2	5.0%
Yes - several (10+) hours a week	0	0.0%

*Question:* “Do you donate to special causes? Mark all that apply.”

*Researcher’s Motivation:* The researcher wanted to see how the respondents were contributing to the lives of others through service and involvement. More active participation would most likely reflect an increased level of compassionate feelings in the respondent group.

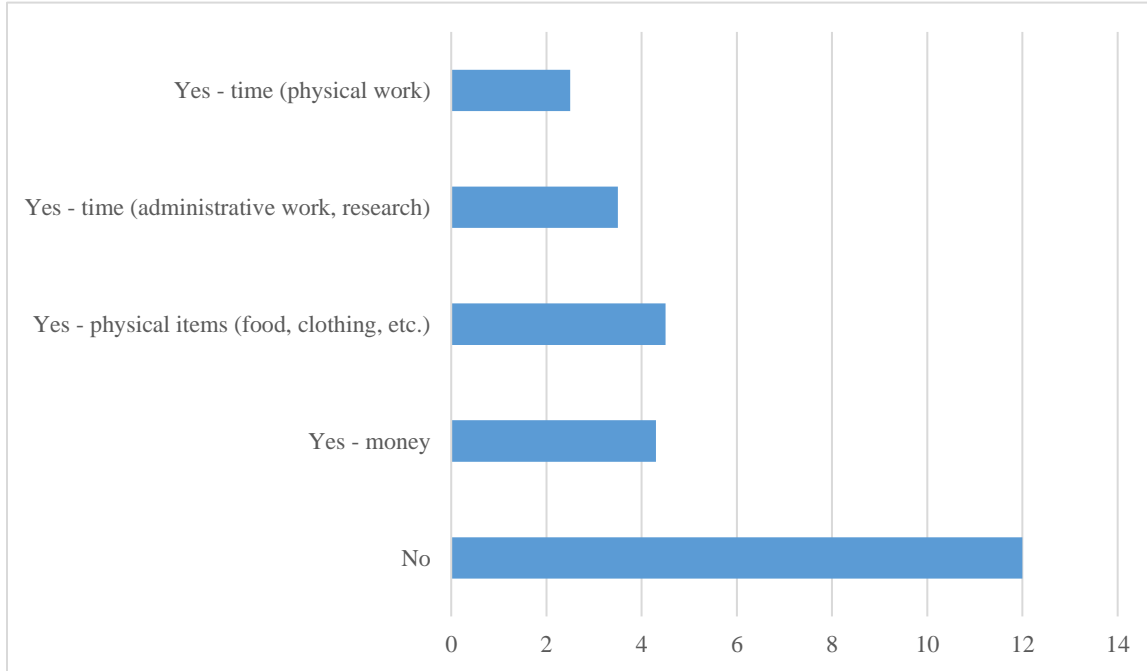
*Respondents:* 40

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<sup>68</sup> U.S. Department of Labor. “Volunteers by selected characteristics, 2015.” Bureau of Labor Statistics, Economic News Release. September 2015. Accessed 8/10/2019. <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/volun.t01.htm>.



*Results:*



Differing somewhat from the preceding question regarding volunteer work, more respondents to this question expressed an overall desire to help others through contributions of time, finances, or material items.

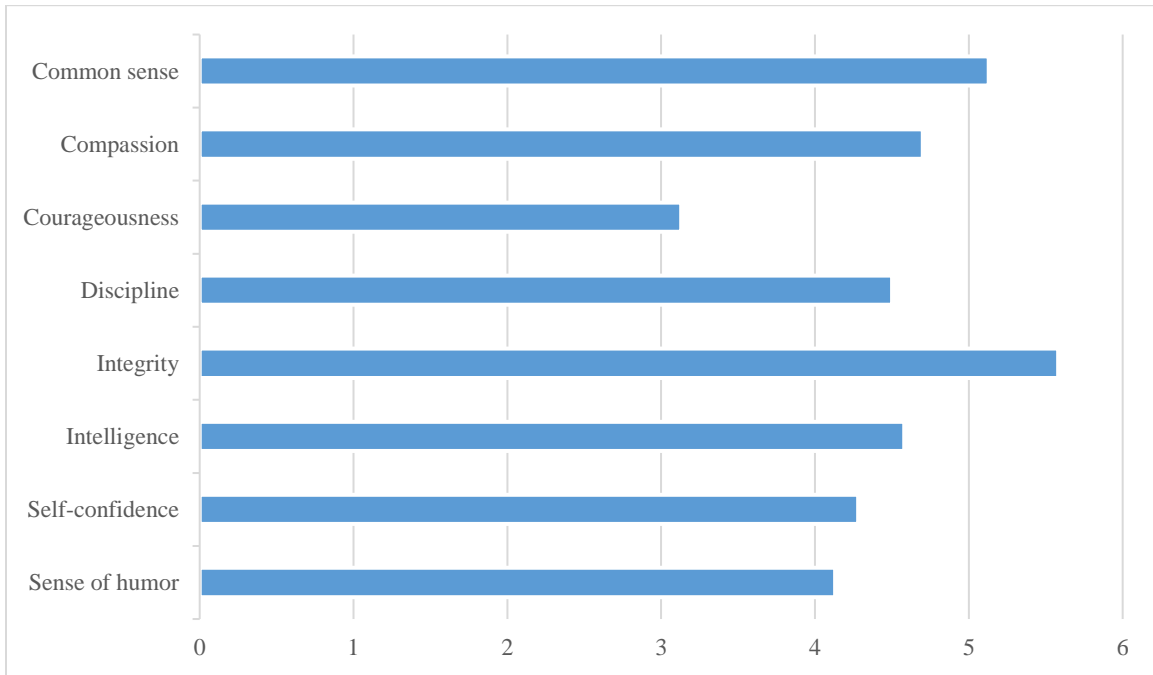
<i>“Do you donate to special causes? Mark all that apply.”</i>		
Yes – money	18	45.0%
Yes – time (physical work)	17	42.5%
Yes – physical items (food, clothing, etc.)	15	37.5%
No	12	30.0%
Yes – time (administrative work, research)	4	10.0%

*Question:* “Place the following in order from most important (1) to least important (8) as desirable characteristics for people in your life.”

*Researcher’s Motivation:* The question was presented to assess the respondents’ perception of various characteristics as to their desirability in others. By including compassion as an option, the researcher could specifically analyze the importance of this characteristic to the responding demographic group.

Respondents: 40

Results:



\*Score was determined by giving 8 points for a “1” response, 7 points for a “2” response, and so on down to 1 point for an “8” response. That weighted total was then divided by the total number of respondents (40 for this particular question). Thus, the higher the score, the more desirable the characteristic was to the respondents.

Characteristic	Score*
Integrity	5.58
Common sense	5.13
Compassion	4.70
Intelligence	4.58
Discipline	4.50
Self-confidence	4.28
Sense of humor	4.13
Courageousness	3.13

While compassion was ranked third overall, deeper analysis of the data reveals that this overall ranking may be misleading. The margin between compassion and second-ranked common sense (a .43 margin) was essentially the same as the difference between compassion and sixth-ranked self-confidence (a .42 margin). It can be theorized that respondents basically divided the characteristics into three tiers: integrity and common sense in the top tier,

compassion, intelligence, discipline, and self-confidence into the middle tier, and sense of humor and courageousness into the bottom tier. Labeling the tiers as “important,” “neutral,” and “not important,” compassion is grouped into the neutral cluster, meaning respondents overall did not have strong feelings one way or another about it as a desirable characteristic in others.

Further analysis is accomplished by assigning an individual’s ranking of 1-3 as an important characteristic, an individual’s ranking of 4 or 5 as a neutral characteristic, and an individual’s ranking of 6-8 as an unimportant characteristic:

<b>Characteristic</b>	<i>Important</i>		<i>Neutral</i>		<i>Not Important</i>	
Integrity	23	57.5%	8	20.0%	9	22.5%
Common sense	18	45.0%	11	27.5%	11	27.5%
Compassion	17	42.5%	9	22.5%	14	35.0%
Intelligence	15	37.5%	13	32.5%	12	30.0%
Discipline	14	35.0%	14	35.0%	12	30.0%
Self-confidence	13	32.5%	12	30.0%	15	37.5%
Sense of humor	12	30.0%	10	25.0%	18	45.0%

Therefore, data reveals that over a third of respondents (35%) felt compassion was not an important characteristic when compared with other characteristics. While compassion ranked third in the “important” column (with 42% of respondents ranking between first and third), its aforementioned 35% score in the “not important” column places compassion third from the bottom in that column. Sadly, it would appear the respondent demographic (young males) does not place a particularly high desirability on compassion in others. This could be a reflection of an overall underdeveloped sense of compassion in the respondent demographic.

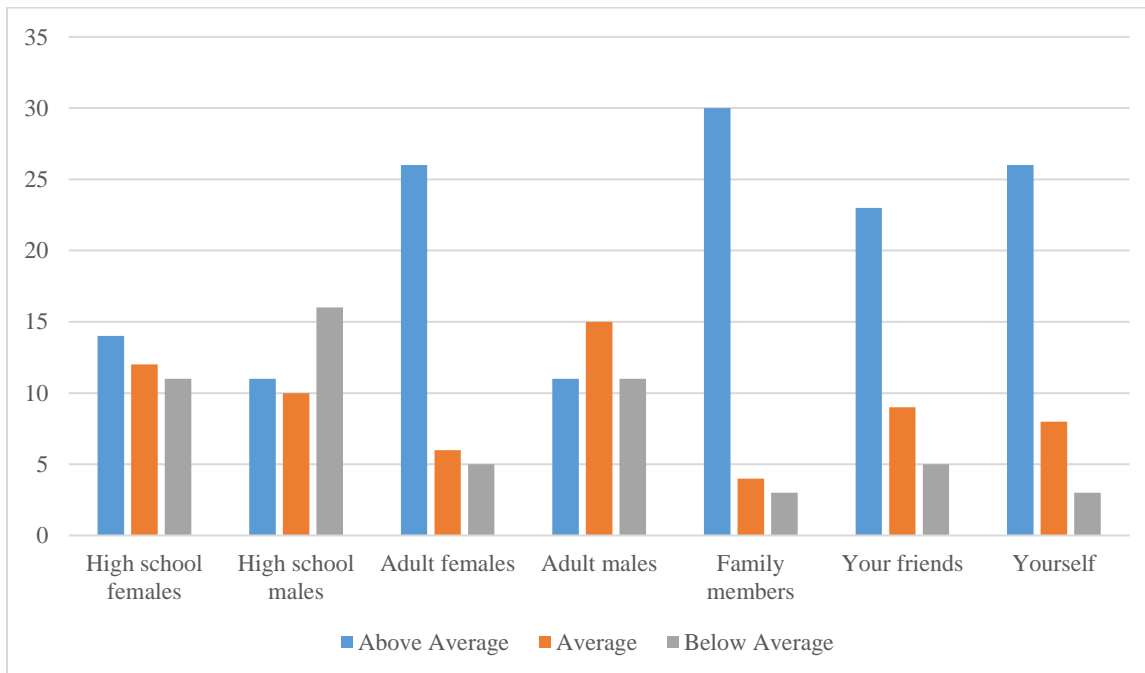
*Question:* “On a scale of 1-10 (with 10 rating as the highest), how would you rate the general level of overall compassion each of the following display to others?”

*Researcher’s Motivation:* The question was presented so the researcher might evaluate how the respondents sense compassion in various people groups. By asking respondents to consider how

much compassion they and others in their lives reflect to others, the researcher could gain insight as to possible motivation or inspiration for leading compassionate lives.

*Respondents: 37*

*Results:* For analysis purposes, the following tiers were created: scores of 7 or higher were classified as “above average,” scores of 6 or 5 were classified as “average,” and scores of 4 or below were classified as “below average.”



	<i>Above Average</i>		<i>Average</i>		<i>Below Average</i>	
Yourself	26	70.3%	8	21.6%	3	8.1%
Your friends	23	62.2%	9	24.3%	5	13.5%
Family members	30	81.1%	4	10.8%	3	8.1%
Adult males	11	29.7%	15	40.5%	11	29.7%
Adult females	26	70.3%	6	16.2%	5	13.5%
High school males	11	29.7%	10	27.0%	16	43.2%
High school females	14	37.8%	12	32.4%	11	29.7%

Interestingly, respondents scored themselves relatively high on the compassion scale, with 70.3% identifying themselves as “above average” by their scoring. Other groups scoring well in the “above average” range were family members and adult (age 25+) females. High school males,

the target group of this research project, scored the worst overall; 43.2% of respondents classified this group as being “below average” in its level of compassion displayed. The next two worst scores (29.7% “below average”) were an amalgamation of two groups comprising the target group: males and high schoolers. As a result, one could conclude that high school males are a combination of two groups that traditionally do not display compassion in their regular interactions.

*Question:* “Please place the following in order from most important (1) to least important (6) of each to help instill a sense of compassion in young people.”

*Researcher’s Motivation:* This question was presented in order for the researcher to determine the respondents’ perception of a school environment’s current role in developing compassion, and whether it might be a viable option to cultivate compassion in adolescents.

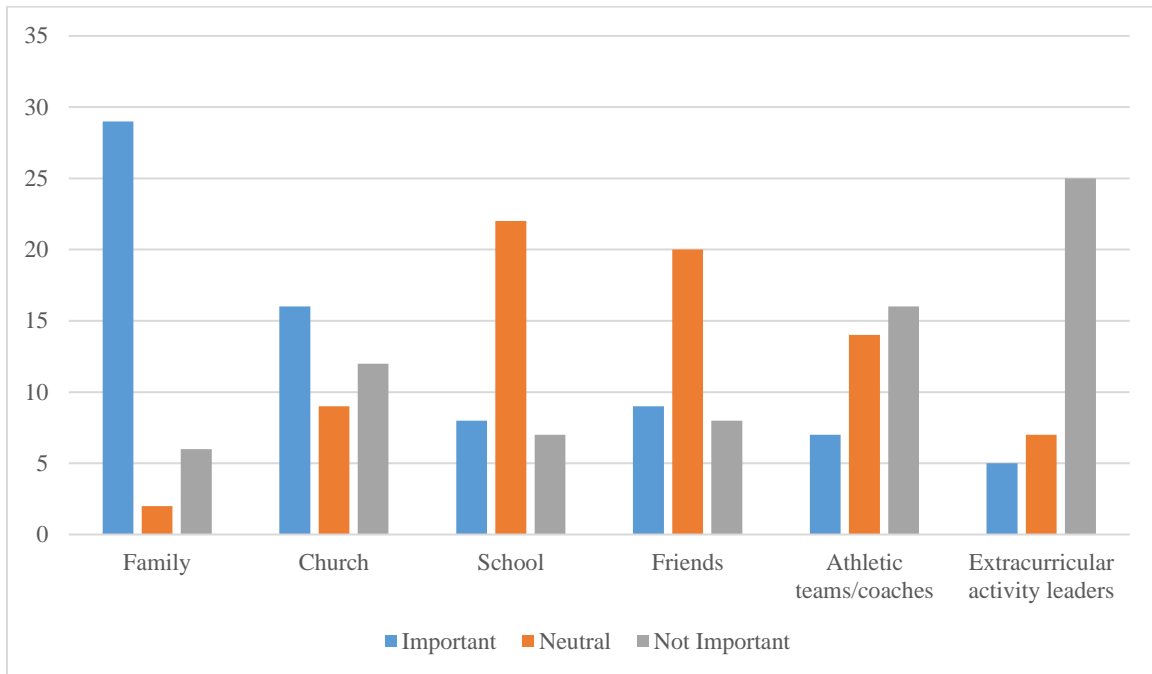
*Respondents:*37

*Results:* Respondents felt strongly about the role of family and church in instilling compassion in young people, with 81% (30 of 37) of respondents citing one of those groups as the most important in that regard. Sadly, the academic environment (“school”) was identified by only 2 respondents (5.4%) as the most important of the groups listed in imparting compassion in young people.

	<b>1</b>		<b>2</b>		<b>3</b>		<b>4</b>		<b>5</b>		<b>6</b>	
Family	21	56.8%	8	21.6%	2	5.4%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	6	16.2%
Church	9	24.3%	7	18.9%	6	16.2%	3	8.1%	7	18.9%	5	13.5%
Athletic teams/coaches	3	8.1%	4	10.8%	5	13.5%	9	24.3%	8	21.6%	8	21.6%
School	2	5.4%	6	16.2%	10	27.0%	12	32.4%	6	16.2%	1	2.7%
Extracurricular activity leaders	2	5.4%	3	8.1%	5	13.5%	2	5.4%	9	24.3%	16	43.2%
Friends	0	0.0%	9	24.3%	9	24.3%	11	29.7%	7	18.9%	1	2.7%

The researcher further grouped the results into three tiers: “important” identified as scores of 1 or 2, “neutral” given to scores of 3 or 4, and “not important” assigned to scores of 5 or 6.

This process revealed important possibilities for this research project:



	<b>Important</b>		<b>Neutral</b>		<b>Not Important</b>	
Family	29	78.4%	2	5.4%	6	16.2%
Church	16	43.2%	9	24.3%	12	32.4%
Friends	9	24.3%	20	54.1%	8	21.6%
School	8	21.6%	22	59.5%	7	18.9%
Athletic teams/coaches	7	18.9%	14	37.8%	16	43.2%
Extracurricular activity leaders	5	13.5%	7	18.9%	25	67.6%

While the school environment may not have received high responses in the “important” tier, its placement firmly in the “neutral” tier reveals that respondents did not strongly feel one way or the other about that environment’s role in cultivating compassion. Even though respondents did not feel strongly in favor of a school’s role in instilling compassion in young people, they did not feel strongly against it either. This is promising for the concept of developing a strategy in an

academic environment to strengthen compassion in young people, which is the goal of this research project.

*Question:* “Give your thoughts on the role of a high school in developing compassion in young people.”

*Researcher’s Motivation:* This question allowed respondents to provide input, in their own words, about the idea of an academic environment helping to develop compassion in young people.

*Respondents:* 37

Some results, with the researcher’s comments provided following each:

- “High school doesn’t really focus on development of compassion in young people.” The wording of this suggests the respondent might see value in an academic setting focus on compassion.
- “In my experience, the development I recieved [sic] in any area of my life while in high school came mostly from the mentorship of those above me in extracurricular activities. They were invested in me beyond a grade average and therefore had more impact and a more developed relationship.” The respondent identifies the importance of adult role models and relationships in growing compassion in young males.
- “I think being around teachers and coaches or people in general that have been where you are and have developed their compassion can help high schoolers develop theirs quicker than they did.” Again, the importance of having compassion modeled by adults to achieve successful development is identified by a respondent.

- “High school plays a small role in the development of compassion in young people.”  
While the respondent identifies the role played as small, there is an implied admittance that school does indeed play a role. Like a proverbial foot in the door, this reinforces the importance of a development of a strategy to develop compassion in an academic environment.
- “I think the average high school setting does little to nothing to instill compassion. True compassion has to be modeled consistently and there are few venues in the high school setting where it regularly occurs.” Once again, the importance of modeling compassion is stressed by a respondent.
- “I believe places such as Fork Union help in developing compassion in young people. I don't believe most public school [sic] help in this development. High school is a time of finding yourself and I believe it does play a role in developing compassion in young people.” The respondent identifies FUMA as a positive force in the development of compassion in young males.
- “I believe a top-down approach from the faculty to the leaders and then through to the rest of the students is important. Being personally involved in the lives of students individually is key to this, and showing that you care what they are going through.” The respondent identifies the importance of an academic organization committing itself top-to-bottom to a strategy to develop compassion.
- “Having compassionate teachers and staff would serve as a great example, and these are many of the adults who spend the most time around high school students.” Yet again, the significance of adults demonstrating compassion to young people is identified.



- “Compassion is very important because it is key to creating and maintaining relationships. High school is a time for a student to grow and learn about yourself. High schools should promote compassion to create a better world.” The respondent acknowledged the connection between developing compassion and the high school environment as being crucial in successfully cultivating compassion at a critically formative age.
- “In an [sic] boarding setting such as Fork Union the role the high school can play a huge role.” While the respondent was somewhat ambiguous in his reply, not directly addressing a connection between compassion and the high school experience, it is evident that this respondent acknowledges the key role a secondary education provider can play in development of its students.
- “Of utmost importance. High school experiences can set an enduring theme or life trajectory.” Yet another respondent that recognizes how important a role the high school environment is in development of young people, particularly in a lasting promotion of positive ideals in adolescents.

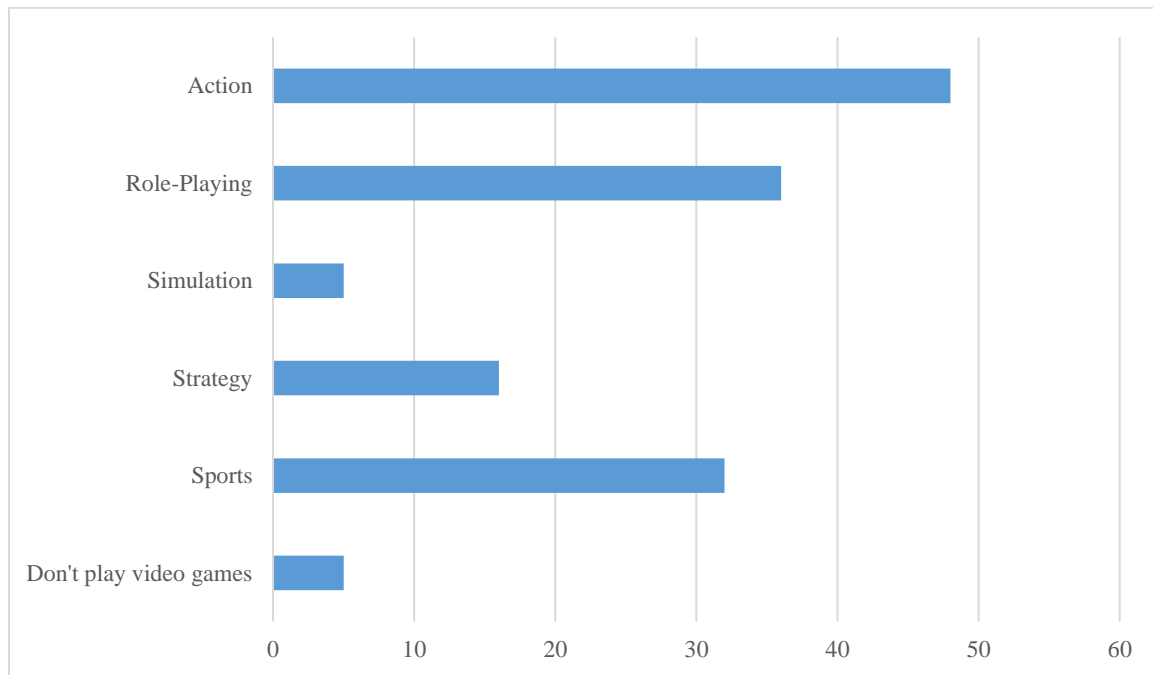
### **Questions Pertaining to Entertainment Choices**

*Question:* “If you play video games, what genres do you enjoy? Mark up to 5.”

*Researcher’s Motivation:* By determining what types of video games respondents played, the researcher might be able to examine how this activity may affect compassion levels in adolescent males.

*Respondents:* 43

*Results:* The three major genres of choice were Action (48 subgenres from this were chosen), Role-Playing (36), and Sports (32). Far less popular were the overall genres of Strategy (16) and Simulation (5).



Taking into consideration the subgenres chosen within video games seemingly reveals much about the respondents. More than any other subgenre by far, shooter games were identified as the choice of respondents, with more than six out of ten (60.5%) of respondents marking this subgenre as a common choice. Coming in a distant second, sports games (48.8%) were also a popular selection. The top five subgenres were rounded out by action role-playing (27.9%), sandbox-style role-playing games, commonly referred to as RPGs (23.3%), and fighting games (18.6%). Of those five subgenres, only one (sports games) cannot be classified as overtly violent. Popular titles in these other top-ranked subgenres involve a player shooting and/or killing opponents, whether human or computer-controlled, with little concern given towards characteristics such as compassion and mercy.

Action: Shooter games	26	60.5%
Sports: Sports game	21	48.8%
Role-playing: Action	12	27.9%
Role-playing: Sandbox RPG	10	23.3%
Action: Fighting games	8	18.6%
Action: Platform games	7	16.3%
Action-Adventure: Survival horror	7	16.3%
Role-playing: Fantasy	7	16.3%
Sports: Sports-based fighting	6	14.0%
I don't play video games	5	11.6%
Role-playing: MMORPG	5	11.6%
Sports: Racing	5	11.6%
Strategy: Real-time strategy	5	11.6%
Simulation: Vehicle simulation	3	7.0%
Strategy: Multiplayer online battle arena	3	7.0%
Strategy: Wargame	3	7.0%
Role-playing: Tactical RPG	2	4.7%
Simulation: Life simulation	2	4.7%
Strategy: Artillery game	2	4.7%
Strategy: Real-time tactics	2	4.7%
Strategy: Tower defense	1	2.3%

A look at top-selling video game titles reflects this interest in the aforementioned subgenres. In 2018, the most popular video games (according to physical sales) were: Red Dead Redemption 2 (a sandbox-style RPG), Call of Duty: Black Ops 4 (a first-person shooter), NBA 2K19 (a sports game), Madden NFL 19 (a sports game), and Super Smash Bros. Ultimate (a fighting game).<sup>69</sup> According to respondents to this research project's survey, 79% (34 of 43) play video games at least one hour a week, and 46.5% (20 of 43) play at least 6 hours a week. Undoubtedly, devoting almost an hour a day to inherently violent video games must affect a young male's inclination to compassion.

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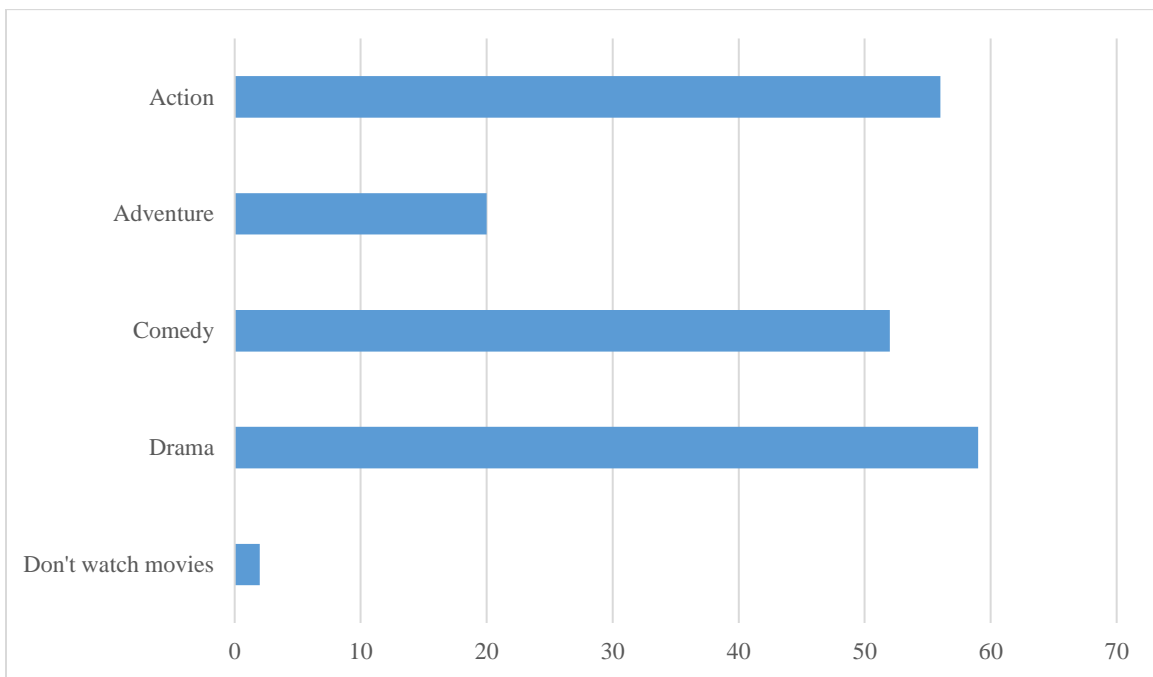
<sup>69</sup> "NPD 2018: The 20 best-selling games of the year." January 22, 2019; <https://www.venturebeat.com/2019/01/22/npd-2018-the-20-best-selling-games-of-the-year/>.

*Question:* “If you watch movies, what are the genres you enjoy? Mark up to 5.”

*Researcher’s Motivation:* By determining what types of movies respondents watched, the researcher might be able to examine how this activity may affect compassion levels in adolescent males.

*Respondents:* 43

*Results:* Overall, the major genres of Drama (respondents identified subgenres of this 59 times), Action (56), and Comedy (52) were the most popular among respondents.



Regarding subgenres, the responses for this question reflected more balance than the video game question. Ten different subgenres received at least a 25% response rate, suggesting a more varied interest level in young males.

Action: Superhero	23	53.5%
Action: Thriller	20	46.5%
Comedy: Slapstick	16	37.2%
Comedy: Dark comedy	15	34.9%
Drama: Crime drama	15	34.9%
Drama: Historical drama	14	32.6%
Action: Spy	13	30.2%
Comedy: Teen movie	13	30.2%
Drama: Horror	13	30.2%
Adventure: Swashbuckler	11	25.6%
Adventure: Western	9	20.9%
Drama: Psychodrama	9	20.9%
Comedy: Comedy horror	8	18.6%
Drama: Legal drama	5	11.6%
Drama: Docudrama	3	7.0%
I don't watch movies	2	4.7%
Comedy: Romantic	0	0.0%

Movie-watching appeared to be a common activity: 90.7% (39 of 43) of respondents watched at least one movie per week, with 67.4% (29 of 43) watching between one and five movies per week. Devotion of such a substantial amount of time to this entertainment medium could possibly have long-term effects on a young person's development. The types of movies one watches, and the content of those movies could influence how a young person perceives the world and those in it and how a young person interacts with the world and those in it. To get a better sense of the content contained in movies young people are watching, this researcher analyzed the top ten domestic-grossing movies of 2018<sup>70</sup>. Following each title, in bold, are the numerical values (out of a possible 5) assigned to the movie by the Common Sense media web site<sup>71</sup> for "positive messages," "positive role models and representations," and "violence:"

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<sup>70</sup> IMDB. "2018 Yearly Box Office Results." Box Office Mojo, accessed June 3, 2019, <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/yearly/chart/?p=.htm&yr=2018>.

<sup>71</sup> <https://www.common sense media.org/>

1. Black Panther (4/4/4)
2. Avengers: Infinity War (4/4/4)
3. Incredibles 2 (4/4/3)
4. Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom (3/3/4)
5. Aquaman (3/3/3)
6. Deadpool 2 (3/2/5)
7. Dr. Seuss' The Grinch (2018) (4/4/3)
8. Mission: Impossible - Fallout (2/3/4)
9. Ant-Man and the Wasp (3/3/3)
10. Bohemian Rhapsody (2/2/1)

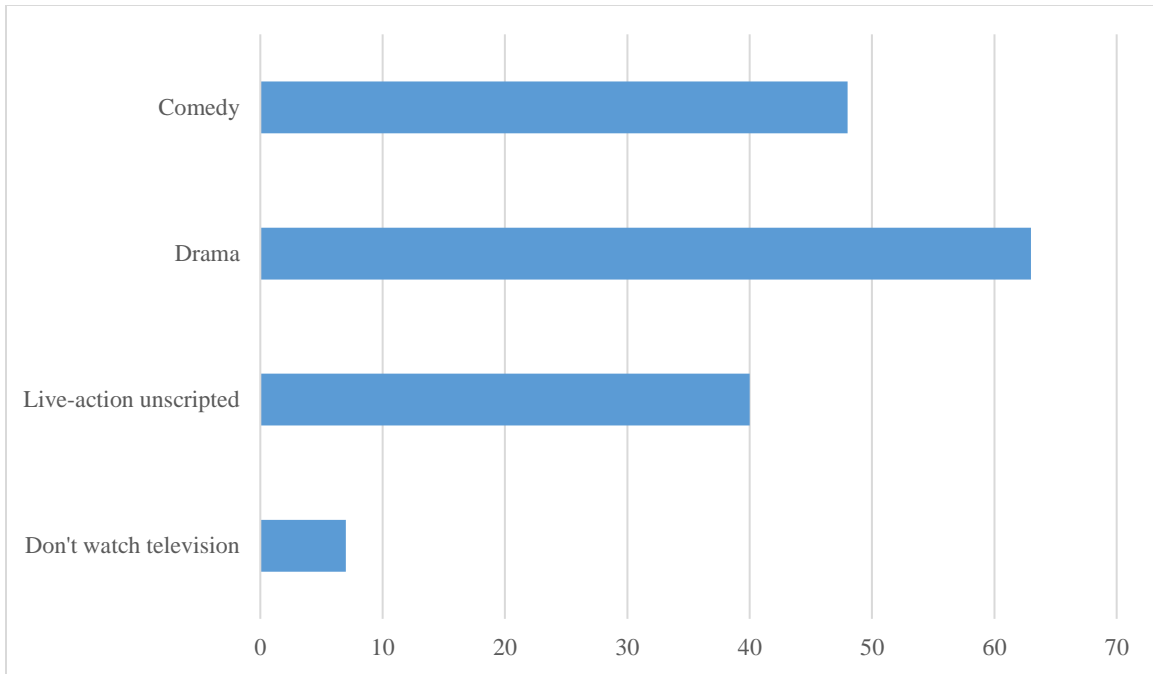
A collective score of 3.2 for “positive messages,” 3.2 for “positive role models and representations,” and 3.4 for “violence” for the top ten of 2018 reveals that, while the popular movies of the year did a slightly above-average job reflecting positive messages and positive role models, violence still proved more predominant. As young people spend time watching these movies, their development of compassion as a prevailing characteristic may be stunted by a strong focus on violence. It is highly unlikely that compassion can successfully coexist with violence in their representations on the silver screen.

*Question:* “If you watch television, what are the genres you enjoy? Mark up to 5.”

*Researcher’s Motivation:* By determining what types of television shows respondents watched, the researcher might be able to examine how this activity may affect compassion levels in adolescent males.

*Respondents:* 42

*Results:* Among the respondents who watch television, the selection of major genres appeared to be relatively balanced. Drama was the most popular (subgenres of this were selected 63 times), followed by Comedy (48) and Live-action Unscripted (40).



Within the subgenre selections, with the exception of the very popular (45.2%) live sports subgenre, there appeared to be quite a bit of balance in the choice of television entertainment in respondents.

Live-action unscripted: Sports	19	45.2%
Comedy: Satire	13	31.0%
Drama: Action	12	28.6%
Comedy: Action comedy	11	26.2%
Drama: Fantasy	11	26.2%
Comedy: Sketch comedy	9	21.4%
Drama: Courtroom	7	16.7%
Drama: Police drama	7	16.7%
Drama: Political drama	7	16.7%
I don't watch television	7	16.7%
Live-action unscripted: Documentary	6	14.3%
Live-action unscripted: News	6	14.3%
Comedy: Slapstick	5	11.9%
Drama: Horror	5	11.9%
Drama: Thriller	5	11.9%
Comedy: Romantic comedy	4	9.5%
Comedy: Sitcom	4	9.5%
Drama: Detective	4	9.5%
Live-action unscripted: Variety show	3	7.1%
Comedy: Comedy-drama	2	4.8%

Drama: Western	2	4.8%
Live-action unscripted: Game show	2	4.8%
Drama: Medical drama	1	2.4%
Drama: Science fiction	1	2.4%
Drama: Teen drama	1	2.4%
Live-action unscripted: Music television	1	2.4%
Live-action unscripted: Reality show	1	2.4%
Live-action unscripted: Religious	1	2.4%
Live-action unscripted: Talk show	1	2.4%
Drama: Soap opera	0	0.0%

Respondents stated they watched a fair amount of television, with 80.9% (34 of 42) replying that they watched at least one hour of TV per week. The most common amount of time weekly spent watching TV was between one and five hours, with 40.5% (17 of 42). While the respondents did not claim to watch nearly as much TV as they watched movies or played video games, it is still a considerable amount of time to spend entertaining oneself and could therefore have an effect on the development of characteristics such as compassion.

As for the content of what is most watched on television, this researcher again turned to Common Sense media and analyzed the top ten regularly scheduled television programs of 2018, as determined by industry standard The Nielsen Company:<sup>72</sup>

1. “Roseanne” (3/3/2)
2. “NBC Sunday Night Football” (**ratings not provided for live sports series**)
3. “The Big Bang Theory” (1/1/0)
4. “NCIS” (2/2/4)
5. “This Is Us” (3/3/1)
6. “Young Sheldon” (3/2/1)
7. “Manifest” (2/2/3)
8. “The Good Doctor” (3/3/2)
9. “America’s Got Talent” (2/1/1)
10. “Bull” (1/0/2)

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<sup>72</sup> The Nielsen Company (US), LLC. “Tops of 2018: Television.” Nielsen.com, accessed June 3, 2019, <https://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/news/2018/tops-of-2018-television.html>.



A collective score of 2.2 for “positive messages,” 1.9 for “positive role models and representations,” and 1.8 for “violence” reveals that, while violence on television is seemingly nowhere near the aforementioned level of current movie choices (3.4), neither is the presence of positive messages (3.2) or role models (3.2). Much more so than movie choices, engaging in television entertainment appears to be largely devoid of opportunities for positive characteristic development. Prolonged exposure to television entertainment, it would appear, may not have a positive effect on a person’s development of compassion.

*Question:* “If you listen to music, what are the genres you enjoy? Mark up to 5.”

*Researcher’s Motivation:* By determining what types of music respondents listened to, the researcher might be able to examine how this activity may affect compassion levels in adolescent males.

*Respondents:* 41

*Results:*

Hip hop	26	63.4%
Country	21	51.2%
Heavy metal	13	31.7%
Classical	12	29.3%
Pop	12	29.3%
Electronic dance music (EDM)	11	26.8%
Punk rock	11	26.8%
Folk	7	17.1%
Jazz	6	14.6%
Reggae	6	14.6%
Rhythm and blues (R&B)	5	12.2%
Blues	2	4.9%
Gospel	2	4.9%
Calypso	1	2.4%
I don't listen to music	0	0.0%

By a landslide, the two most popular music genres for respondents were hip-hop (63.4%) and country (51.2%); no other genre garnered even a third of responses. Of particular concern

for this research project is the high percentage of hip-hop listeners. Traditionally, the hip-hop genre (which in most all cases includes the extremely popular genus of rap music) has not been conducive to the development of compassionate attitudes and lifestyles. A recent study found that "...there were significantly more references to men as competitive, risk-taking, violent, antifeminine, sex-focused, aggressive, and focused on material goods as a symbol of status in rap/hip-hop songs than in R&B or pop songs."<sup>73</sup> Those seven traits are definitely in conflict with the ideals of a compassionate lifestyle. The same study concluded that the rise in popularity of hip-hop/rap music could have lasting effects on youth who listen to this type of music. "Because rap/hip-hop music has come to present the most unidimensional representations of gender and increasingly dominates the popular music charts, commercially successful Black artists may be dangerous models from which Black youth derive beliefs about gender and sexual ideals."<sup>74</sup>

### Summary

Young people, much like the generations before them, primarily turn to movies, television, and music when making entertainment selections. The past four decades have also seen the introduction of video games as a widespread entertainment option. The amount of time devoted by young people to these forms of entertainment has become extraordinarily high—well over half their waking time during a typical day, as evidenced by the survey responses for this thesis project:

- 20 of 43 respondents (46.5%) play video games, on average, at least one hour a day.
- 39 of 43 respondents (90.7%) watch at least one movie, on average, a week.
- 17 of 42 respondents (40.5%) watch at least one hour of television, on average, a day.
- 34 of 41 respondents (82.9%) listen to at least one hour of music, on average, per day.

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<sup>73</sup> Avery, Lanice R., L. Monique Ward, Lolita Moss, and Dilara Üsküp. "Tuning Gender: Representations of Femininity and Masculinity in Popular Music by Black Artists." *Journal of Black Psychology* 43 (2017): 181.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.

While the amount of time devoted to these mediums alone may not necessarily have negative consequences, it appears the types of entertainment chosen on the mediums may affect compassion levels in an undesirable manner.

Analysis of the survey results showed that most entertainment choices by adolescent males involve senseless violence. Four of the five most popular video game styles were identified as blatantly violent. Television shows and movies watched by the survey demographic frequently venerate violence and qualities that are not consistent with maturing compassion in a developing young adult. Exposure to such violence may lead to a devaluing of life, human and animal. Minimizing the sanctity of life is in direct conflict with the ideal of compassion, which emphasizes the sacredness of God's creation and encourages action that supports this holy truth.

Even music choices can seemingly inhibit the progress of compassion levels by their young listeners. The survey revealed that compassion is viewed by young males as an average quality at best and not one particularly desired above other characteristics offered, such as integrity or common sense. Compassion, in other words, is for all intents and purposes a "take-it-or-leave" quality in the eyes of adolescent males. This reality is at the heart of the problem this thesis project addresses, and the survey results present insight as to how the problem can be confronted.

With a possible correlation between entertainment choices that minimize—or in many cases deride—the ideal of compassion, how should this problem be addressed? Young people today spend most of their waking hours engaged with types of media that hinder a healthy development and cultivation of compassion. The answer, as will be discussed in the following chapter of this thesis project, may lie in the educational system which occupies another healthy portion of a young person's time. By developing a strategy within the educational system to help

encourage the healthy development of compassion in young people, it may be possible to combat the negative influences so prevalent currently in society.

*“Whatever you do, do it enthusiastically, as something done for the Lord and not for men, knowing that you will receive the reward of an inheritance from the Lord.”<sup>75</sup>*

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion**

With the results of the survey confirming an average, at best, level of compassion in adolescent males, how can the problem and challenges be addressed? The possibility of leveraging an educational institution to help cultivate compassion to higher levels in adolescent males is promising. But this intentional development cannot simply be spoken into existence. Rather, it must be carefully and meticulously planned and implemented in order for positive results to be seen. One such strategy was put into practice at Fork Union Military Academy by this researcher, and it will be shared as a case study for consideration.

### **Case Study: Applied Christianity**

In order to combat societal and cultural obstacles regarding the healthy development of compassion as a common trait, this researcher began to develop a strategy to cultivate compassion in an educational environment. Specifically, the goal was to encourage adolescent males to become more compassionate in their lifestyles and to embrace compassion as a desirable virtue, both in themselves and others. Given his role as chaplain at Fork Union Military Academy (FUMA), this researcher found himself in an ideal environment to develop and implement such a strategy.

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<sup>75</sup> Colossians 3:23-24

## **Background and Implementation**

In the summer of 2015, this researcher approached the school's Academic Dean with a proposed new class. The class aimed to develop positive character traits, such as compassion, in young men by giving them an opportunity to grow in their Christian faith through academic study and find purpose for their lives through active service opportunities. The target audience at FUMA was high school seniors and postgraduates. After some discussion, the class was approved, and plans began to offer it during the final seven-week academic term of the 2015-16 academic year.

The class was titled "Applied Christianity" to reflect the focus of not only growing deeper in the students' knowledge of the Christian faith, but to actively put the tenants of Christian service to use. Biblical evidence for this methodology is found primarily in the Epistle of James, when James challenges Christian believers to live out their faith through active works: "What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? ... faith, if it doesn't have works, is dead by itself... just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead"<sup>76</sup> What better way to do works to embody one's Christian faith than to serve others? Jesus' emphasis on living out faith through service demands nothing less.<sup>77</sup>

As this was to be a first-time class offering at FUMA, there was no existing curriculum or class structure in place. This researcher, in his role as teacher of the new class, developed lesson plans, a reading list, and class assessment tools as part of overall planning for the class. Each of these components would focus on cultivating compassion in the enrolled cadets by focusing on the Christian pillar of service to others and the related teachings of Christ.

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<sup>76</sup> James 2:14,17,26.

<sup>77</sup> Matthew 25:35-45, for example.

The Applied Christianity class was intentionally scheduled for the final seven-week academic term at FUMA (known as the “fifth term”). The hope in such a tactic was to help combat “senioritis” (defined as “an ebbing of motivation and effort by school seniors as evidenced by tardiness, absences, and lower grades”<sup>78</sup>) among the target audience and make the end stages of a high school experience as meaningful and enjoyable as possible. This researcher was inspired to develop the class in part by speaking to senior cadets in previous years who had completed their credit requirements and were scheduling “easy” classes such as freshman English or Spanish 1 to finish out their high school careers. The Applied Christianity class would offer an alternative that would keep the cadets engaged and interested as they finished out their high school careers.

## **Goals**

The Applied Christianity class was designed with the primary goal of developing compassion in the class cadets by exposing them to a more in-depth view of the gospel message of Jesus Christ and through the identification of their personal purpose through various service opportunities, on and off the FUMA campus. It was, and continues to be, this researcher’s hope that young people would find their identity in Jesus Christ at such a crucial time of their development and, as a result, discover their purpose in life based on that identity. This researcher believes that when a person finds his or her God-given identity and purpose, he or she will truly reflect the characteristics of God, including true compassion. The Applied Christianity class would focus on this foundational belief as it moved forward.

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<sup>78</sup> Merriam-Webster. “Senioritis.” Merriam-Webster.com, accessed May 18, 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/senioritis>.

There were also academic goals to be established for the new class. The selection of texts and biblical passage study was carefully planned to ensure an exceptional academic experience relevant to the target age group. A key challenge academically was not to make the material too overwhelmingly wearisome, possibly resulting in indifference and apathy among the class roster. Accordingly, a discussion-heavy approach was selected where cadets would be able to discuss and debate the academic material covered throughout the class.

The Applied Christianity class proved an exceptional fit for FUMA's holistic "body, mind, spirit" approach to education and development. Realizing the importance of such complete development and education for young men, FUMA has always placed a priority in academic endeavors of this holistic method. Accordingly, the class was structured to help young men develop their body through physical labors of service, their mind through academic study, and their spirit through personal reflection and spiritual growth.

### **Structure**

The unique configuration of FUMA's One Subject Plan allowed enrolled cadets to focus solely on the class for an intensive seven-week period. The One Subject Plan also allowed for unrestricted scheduling of service trip opportunities, without the concern of other academic classes. The academic arrangement at FUMA allowed the class to meet daily between the hours of 8:00am and 2:00pm. Total instructional time each day was three hours and forty-five minutes, after accounting for scheduled breaks and a lunch period. Nightly, cadets participated in a mandatory study hall time from 7:50pm until 9:35pm. This schedule allowed the class to meet



the Virginia Administrative Code 8VAC20-131-110 by engaging the cadets in an experience “comparable to 140 clock hours of instruction.”<sup>79</sup>

For the 2015-16 academic year, the class roster size was limited to 12. To maximize class discussion involvement by the cadets in small group and classroom environments, the 12-cadet roster size was identified as preferable. A 12:1 cadet-to-instructor ratio correspondingly allowed for an effective classroom management strategy. An additional advantage to a 12-cadet roster was the need for only one FUMA minibus (seating capacity: 14) for off-campus service trips with an additional chaperone. As a result of these factors, future class roster sizes were also constrained to 12 cadets.

### **Texts Used**

Given the class’ primary goals of Christian spiritual development and determination of purpose, the texts used for the class were carefully selected by the instructor. Texts used for the class helped to strengthen a young man’s Christian development (or possibly introduce a young man to deeper Christian concepts) and to help a young man find personal meaning and identity through selfless service. Texts used during the Applied Christianity classes have included the following, listed alphabetically by title:

- *Counter Culture: Following Christ in an Anti-Christian Age*, by David Platt (ISBN: 1414390386). In this book, Platt addresses many hot topics in today’s culture from a Christian perspective, including poverty, abortion, the marginalized, sexual morality, and ethnicity. In order to cultivate compassion in young men, it is crucial to engage in discussions and debate on these possibly controversial topics. The reasoning was to

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<sup>79</sup> Commonwealth of Virginia. “Standard and Verified Units of Credit.” Virginia Administrative Code, accessed May 19, 2020, <https://law.lis.virginia.gov/admincode/title8/agency20/chapter131/section110/>.

challenge the cadets to understand that Jesus' commandment in Matthew 22:37-40 needs to be applied to all. Platt's own imploring to the reader at the conclusion of the book drives this truth home: "So pray to God, participate with God, and proclaim the gospel. And do these things not because you have a low-grade sense of guilt that you ought to act, but do them because you have a high-grade sense of grace that makes you want to act."<sup>80</sup> As one might expect, this book generated some intense and emotional conversations in the classroom which presented remarkable opportunities for emotional and spiritual growth.

- *Don't Waste Your Life*, by John Piper (ASIN: B00DEKCH9U). Piper's work is an intense call for people to choose a Christ-centered life-or suffer eternal consequences. While researching resources during the development of the class curriculum, this work was identified as a beneficial book to help challenge the cadets' sense of purpose in light of a relationship with God. Based on post-class evaluations and feedback, it was discovered that most cadets enrolled found this book to be off-putting and many sadly could not seem to make a connection with it. As a result, the book was not used beyond the first year the class was taught.
- *Follow Me: A Call to Die. A Call to Live.*, by David Platt (ISBN: 1414373287). In this work, which some cadets in the class have found unnervingly challenging, Platt focuses on the things Christians are called to surrender in order to truly become followers of Christ. Primarily, Platt persistently reminds the reader that surrendering one's life completely and totally to God is a non-negotiable requirement of being a Christ-follower. "With good intentions and sincere desires to reach as many people as possible for Jesus,

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<sup>80</sup> Platt, *Counter Culture*, 279.

we have subtly and deceptively minimized the magnitude of what it means to follow him.”<sup>81</sup> Platt’s emphasis in one chapter on Jesus’ statement that “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, and even his own life—he cannot be My disciple”<sup>82</sup> proved most challenging for several cadets in the class.

- *Great Commission, Great Compassion: Following Jesus and Loving the World*, by Paul Borthwick (ISBN: 0830844376). Borthwick’s premise for the book presumes that in addition to Jesus’ Great Commission found in Matthew 28:19, there is also a Great Compassion (Matthew 25:31-46) in which Jesus calls on Christians to care for others at their point of need. Borthwick believes that for someone to truly follow Christ as Lord, he or she must embrace both The Great Commission and The Great Compassion. To follow Christ is to emulate Christ, and Borthwick would undoubtedly agree: “We demonstrate long-term love toward others because Jesus saw us in our need, and he didn’t forget us.”<sup>83</sup> Via a discussion of eight self-identified lifestyle imperatives Christ-followers should embrace, Borthwick offers practical advice and examples of how someone might act on both The Great Commission and The Great Compassion.
- *Multiply: Disciples Making Disciples*, by Francis Chan (ISBN: 0781408237). Chan stresses the idea that followers of Christ are called to be disciple-makers themselves, and he walks the reader through what exactly that concept means and how it can be achieved. This book was chosen as a text for the class because of its focus on compassionate care

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<sup>81</sup> Platt, *Follow Me*, 6-7.

<sup>82</sup> Luke 14:26.

<sup>83</sup> Borthwick, *Great Commission, Great Compassion*, 82-83.

for others. “Making disciples isn’t about gathering pupils to listen to your teaching, The real focus is not on teaching people at all—the focus is on loving them.”<sup>84</sup> A large portion of the book is dedicated to learning how to properly study the Bible, which cadets have stated proves very helpful as they consider the true definition and role of a disciple.

- *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?*, by Rick Warren (ISBN: 031033750X). Warren’s best-selling contemporary classic focuses on finding identity and purpose in God through Jesus Christ. Through the study of Warren’s five “purposes,” cadets were challenged in regard to their ideas of what entails being a Christian. During the class, special emphasis was placed on Warren’s purpose #4 (“You Were Shaped for Serving God”) and purpose #5 (“You Were Made for a Mission”). By focusing extra time and attention on these two concepts, cadets were able to give serious consideration to what God’s purpose was for their own lives.
- *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream*, by David Platt (ISBN: 9781601422217). In yet another Platt offering, the Christian faith is addressed from an uncompromising perspective, particularly the call for Christians to help those who are in need. Platt challenges the idea that Christianity is simply about a religion and offers the theory that true Christianity is about following the teachings of Jesus Christ—particularly regarding the treatment of others. A particular focus in the class with this text was a chapter titled “There is No Plan B: Why Going is Urgent, Not Optional.” In this chapter, Platt stresses the importance of living out a faith by going into the world to serve God and others. “The question, therefore, is not ‘Can we find God’s will?’ The question is ‘Will we obey God’s will?’ Will we refuse to sit back and wait for some tingly feeling to

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<sup>84</sup> Chan, *Multiply*, 44.

go down our spines before we rise up and do what we have already been commanded to do?”<sup>85</sup>

- *Seven Men: And the Secret of Their Greatness*, by Eric Metaxas (ISBN: 0718030958). In this semi-biographical book, Metaxas briefly shares the stories of seven men who throughout history relied on their Christian faith in their globally influential lives. The men examined are George Washington, William Wilberforce, Eric Liddell, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Jackie Robinson, Pope John Paul II, and Charles Colson. Metaxas believes that servant leadership is indispensable as a follower of Christ. “Jesus said that he who would lead must be the servant of all... That is God’s idea of strength and leadership and blessing. It’s something to be used in the service of others.”<sup>86</sup> By studying historical figures who exemplified this ideal, cadets could possibly identify role models as they began to focus on serving others. The cadets in the class were fascinated with and very much enjoyed learning about the men’s Christian faith being put into practice throughout history.

It should be noted that not all the above texts were used each time the Applied Christianity class was taught at FUMA. As the class continued to develop from year to year, different texts or combinations thereof were used. On average, three books were used each time the class was taught. Overall, the reading assignments and subsequent discussion of the material were well received by the cadets.

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<sup>85</sup> Platt, *Radical*, 160.

<sup>86</sup> Metaxas, *7 Men*, xx.

## Service Opportunities Component

A noteworthy component to the Applied Christianity class was the implementation of various service opportunities for the cadets. In doing so, the cadets were able to move beyond learning about Christianity and its foundational truths, to an “applicability laboratory” in the world beyond the FUMA campus. These out-of-the-classroom experiences could further enhance the cultivation of compassion in the cadets, as evidenced in experiences in other educational settings. “...[W]hen learning is connected to engagement outside the classroom walls—whether it be through community service learning, attending a religious service, or going on an immersion trip—compassion is likely strengthened.”<sup>87</sup>

Various organizations were chosen for this component of the class, with an eye on diversity of constituencies served. During the first year of the class (the 2015-16 academic year), the class made trips to the following organizations, listed alphabetically:

- Crossroads Camp and Conference Center – a Virginia Baptist ministry partner to FUMA in Lowesville, Virginia. Cadets participated in various projects, most involving facility maintenance and upkeep. Subsequent Applied Christianity classes were able to make this trip an overnight event, staying on grounds, which included fellowship and Bible study opportunities among the roster.
- Eagle Eyrie Camp and Conference Center – another Virginia Baptist ministry partner to FUMA near Lynchburg, Virginia. Cadets painted a large outdoor pavilion, split wood for heating use, and helped with housekeeping chores around the facility. This was an overnight trip, which allowed for more work and fellowship.

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<sup>87</sup> Rashedi, Roxanne, Thomas G. Plante, and Erin S. Callister. “Compassion Development in Higher Education.” *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 43, no. 2 (2015). 137.

- Fluvanna chapter of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) – a local branch of a national organization working primarily to re-home stray or abandoned dogs and cats. Cadets helped exercise dogs by walking them, facilitated dog and cat grooming, and cleaned out kennels and cages that housed the animals.
- National Kidney Foundation (NKF) – a national organization dedicated to educating the public on kidney health, as well as raising money for research. During the course of the Applied Christianity class, cadets wrote over 500 cards of encouragement that were to be distributed to people undergoing kidney dialysis treatments. Cadets also visited the NKF’s Richmond headquarters to learn about the organization’s work and were given an informational presentation on kidney health.
- Peaceful Passings Senior Animal Rescue – a small local non-profit organization near the FUMA campus dedicated to rescuing senior dogs and cats and placing them in loving homes. This husband-and-wife effort very much appreciated the cadet help and showed the cadets the power of finding purpose and dedicating oneself to a cause. Cadets helped clean the outdoor shelters at the facility, exercised the resident dogs, and helped demolish and dispose of a dilapidated storage shed.
- Ronald McDonald House in Richmond – a national organization that provides lodging and services for families that must travel away from home for children to receive critical health care. Cadets were able to help with landscaping around the Richmond facility and helped with light housekeeping duties while on site. The organization’s staff also gave the cadets a tour of the facility and explained their location’s history and organizational mission.

- West Central Elementary in Fluvanna County – local elementary school near FUMA. Cadets helped teachers with various in-class duties for first- and second-grade students, such as reading to the classes, helping with arts and craft projects, and playing classroom games. Cadets were also able to assist with activities and events at the school’s end-of-year Field Day during a second trip to the school.
- White Bird Appaloosa Horse Rescue – located about an hour south of FUMA, this is a small non-profit organization “dedicated to the rescue and rehabilitation of abused, neglected and at-risk Appaloosa and other horses, especially those in urgent need and in danger of slaughter.”<sup>88</sup> Cadets built a fence enclosure, cleaned out stalls, walked and fed some of the horses, and cleaned out and organized several storage areas. The service trips to this organization are consistently among the most well-received and favored by the cadets in the Applied Christianity classes.

Most of these trips involved physical tasks, which is not surprising given the relative strength and health of a group of adolescent males. But these service opportunities were so much more than manual labor. In all these instances, cadets were able to learn each organization’s mission and vision while actively interacting with the organization’s employees. In addition, many times cadets were able to interact first-hand with the various constituencies served by each organization, whether those constituents were human or animal.

The intended goal for the service trip opportunities was to take the young men to places where—in many cases—many had ever been before and to encourage them to step out of a comfort zone. In some cases, cadets found themselves thoroughly enjoying themselves as they participated in the service opportunities, and in some cases young men were able to definitively

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<sup>88</sup> White Bird Appaloosa Horse Rescue. “About Us.” Whitebirdapps.com, accessed June 4, 2019, <http://www.whitebirdapps.com/about/>.



identify what was not enjoyable to them. One of the first-year participants reported to this researcher that he had sought out the local SPCA near his college so he could volunteer there because of his experiences in the Applied Christianity class at FUMA.

### **Class Day Structure**

A typical class day for FUMA's Applied Christianity offering began with a daily devotional based in biblical study. One example would be a verse-by-verse exploration of The Epistle of James (chosen for its emphasis on acting on one's faith through works that reflect a life changed by the teachings and divine claims of Jesus Christ). The One-Subject Plan at FUMA allowed for an in-depth personal analysis that a mere five- or ten-minute Bible reading and quick reflection might provide.

Included early in the class day were a brief review of the previous night's readings and a short quiz on the readings, followed by a more exhaustive discussion of the subject covered in them. Class discussions could take place at a small-group level (3-4 cadets per group) or at a class-wide level. The instructor, acting predominately as a discussion facilitator, ensured that active and productive discussion took place, and also encouraged all class members to participate. Cadets were reminded often, in order to encourage healthy and candid discussions of some very sensitive topics, that all opinions were to be respected and all comments should be presented in a mature fashion.

Many times, cadets were encouraged to research topics discussed and give presentations based on their findings to the rest of the class. For example, the section on poverty in Platt's *Counter Culture* book was the topic, cadets researched organizations at the local, national, or global level which work to fight poverty. Many times, the cadets would be encouraged to

research lesser-known organizations to help educate their peers about the variety of groups working to make a positive impact on the world around them.

The class structure itself encouraged active discussion and personal reflection. This researcher believes that this approach is most effective at encouraging active growth in adolescent males and helps keep students engaged and interested in the class material. The Applied Christianity offering at FUMA has also proven rather diverse in its class rosters. Racial diversity reflects the overall student body at the school, and the class roster every year has included young men from other organized religions (Muslim, Buddhist) and even an occasional self-proclaimed agnostic cadet. The diversity has led to wonderfully dynamic class discussions and intellectual and spiritual growth by the class cadets. It is this researcher's hope that seeds of future growth have been planted in all the hearts of the enrolled cadets, particularly those who do not profess to be Christians.

### **Assessments**

In order to assess a cadet's progress during the class, several methods of evaluation were used. The use of quizzes, tests, a midterm exam, and a final exam were complemented by daily journaling, reflection papers, and participation in classroom discussions. Personal reflection was emphasized, not only in the use of journals and reflection papers, but also in the types of questions asked in the academic assessments. Questions on these were primarily in either short answer or essay format, so that each cadet was pushed to truly process the information and experiences he encountered during the class. In the case of quizzes, some multiple-choice type questions were used, largely to ensure a cadet was completing his reading assignments.

The use of these assessments was a crucial component in the class. The reflective nature of the evaluations encouraged a cadet to internally process what he was learning during the class.

As the class progressed, the assessments revealed that cadets began to realize the class was much more than simply basic Christian spiritual formation or providing manual labor to good organizations, but rather a personal growth experience and the development of a sense of purpose through the utilization of God-given talents and abilities in helping others. Much like watching a seedling burst through topsoil and continue its growth, this researcher experienced young men realizing they were created for a larger purpose and the nurturing of values such as compassion.

### **From Class to Thesis**

The inaugural Applied Christianity class offering at FUMA coincided with the point in this researcher's doctoral studies that a thesis project was to be identified. Reflection on the Applied Christianity class experience inspired this researcher to theorize that an effective strategy within the educational system to cultivate compassion in adolescents was not only possible but desperately needed. As a result, the Applied Christianity class was used as inspiration for related research with the class itself offered as a case study for the thesis project. Investigation for this project ostensibly confirmed many of this researcher's thoughts regarding the presence of compassion as a trait in adolescent males. Further research was added to measure possible external factors negatively affecting levels of compassion in the target demographic. Much of the research findings for this thesis project have helped improve the curriculum and overall approach for the Applied Christianity class at FUMA.

### **Results**

The first year of the class proved a success for the participants and this researcher, and the class was enthusiastically added as an offering for the 2016-17 academic year. Evidence of the course's popularity and success was found in the subsequent years' enrollment in the class;

every year the Applied Christianity class has been taught at FUMA it has sustained a full class size of 12 cadets, with a waitlist.

As part of their final exam for the class each year, cadets have been given the opportunity to provide class-related feedback through free-response questions. Some of the feedback from class members is below:

- “It has really made me assess my faith, challenge it, and then come back to it. It has made me a stronger Christian. I notice that I pray a lot more since I have been in this class. A lot of the questions that I’ve had for all these years have been answered, and for that I want to say thank you, Sir.”
- “The class has really opened up my eyes to a part of Christianity that I never realized before. Because of this, I’ve decided to change and do my best to implement this into my life.”
- “In the past seven weeks, I have grown in my consideration of every act as an act of worship. On a lot of the trips we have taken, I have been put in situations where I was not happy with my environment. I had to muck stalls, split logs, clean bathrooms, pressure wash dog houses, but in it all, I had to put on a good face and assume a position of service beyond a position of personal gain.”
- “At the start of the class I felt very distant to Christ and hadn’t felt his presence in a long time. I wanted to gain that back hopefully through this class... which I believe I have.”

The Applied Christianity class has afforded young men at FUMA the opportunity to learn more about the Christian faith and its imperatives to serve God and others. Cadets become self-aware regarding their God-given purpose in life and learn about worthwhile organizations effecting positive change in today’s world. While a complete and immediate transformation is

unrealistic to expect in every case, seeds were planted in the cadets to help cultivate their compassion as they move forward along life's journey.

### **Future Enhancements for the Class**

As the Applied Christianity class continues at FUMA, improvements and new approaches should be considered on a year-to-year basis. Service opportunities will be evaluated, with feedback from the participating cadets. This feedback is collected via short essay questions on the course's final exam each year (see Appendix C). Feedback is similarly collected about the texts used in the class as the resources are considered on a year-to-year basis. New service trip opportunities and new texts are studied between academic years.

A possibility to utilize the data collected for this thesis project would be to include a study and discussion of current entertainment choices and how they might affect compassion levels in adolescent males. Seeking out the perspective of the target demographic, with the enrolled cadets as a viable sample of the group, may help to maximize results for this educational strategy. Such a tactic would benefit not only the researcher as he continues to improve the Applied Christianity class and its goals, but also the individual cadets as they consider how their entertainment choices affect them and their peers directly.

### **Research Conclusions, Implications, and Applications**

This project has examined the role of compassion in young male adolescents, the role and effects of entertainment choices on compassion levels, and a possible strategy currently enacted at Fork Union Military Academy. The project supports the theory that the types of entertainment choices, coupled with societal and cultural roles, can negatively affect the positive development of compassion in maturing adolescent males. Low compassion levels are also detrimental to the

work of the Christian church; therefore, it is essential to make every effort to cultivate compassion in the hearts of those who would work to further the kingdom of God.

An educational institution can and should play a key role in cultivating compassion in adolescent males. “An education that cultivates the spirit invests mental and emotional resources into doing something ‘good’—something caring and useful for others’ happiness. By fostering such an environment, educators, teachers, administrators, and counselors create ‘visitors’ who cultivate a more compassionate planet.”<sup>89</sup> By using the classroom environment to help build the “why” in the minds and hearts of young people, the “how” experiences outside the classroom can be more productive and meaningful to all involved.

This researcher believes that, while the Applied Christianity model has been incredibly successful at FUMA, it is not a perfect solution for every setting and environment. Secondary educational institutions and their students would benefit from the implementation of a similar academic offering, taking into consideration their specific needs, resources, location, and constituency. The goals and mission should remain the same, but the methodology may have to be adjusted and attuned to each specific setting. What worked at FUMA may not work elsewhere and, likewise, what works elsewhere may not work at FUMA.

The Christian church universal cannot solely preach God’s Word, especially to young people seeking purpose in life. It is one thing to tell them that Jesus taught the greatest commandments were to love God and to love others.<sup>90</sup> It is quite another to give young people opportunities to actively carry out those two commandments. When the crowds came to John the

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<sup>89</sup> Rashedi, Plante, and Callister, 137-138.

<sup>90</sup> Matthew 22:37-40.

Baptist, they did not ask what the scriptures said; rather, they asked “What then should we do?”<sup>91</sup> People, particularly younger generations, want to be called to active service. The battle then is not motivation to action, but instead the battle to overcome external and internal influences that inhibit the cultivation of compassionate hearts. By aggressively charging into this battle, the church will energetically engage young people who are thirsting to drink the water that “will become a well of water springing up within... for eternal life.”<sup>92</sup>

### Further Research

While there is substantial research currently available regarding compassion and strategies to improve the trait, there are opportunities for future researchers to add value to this subject matter. Specifically, more detailed studies targeting a high school age group might prove beneficial in the development of educational stratagems to help enhance compassion levels. Even more valuable would be research involving different geographic areas, socio-economic groups, and culturally diverse adolescents. Such research would help tweak an educational strategy to maximize the goal of compassion growth in specific settings and locations.

For example, would an educational institution serving a specific cultural demographic need to adjust the materials covered in a class modeled after the Applied Christianity offering? The gospel message and teaching of Christ could possibly be better ingrained in the students’ hearts and minds if the approach were tailored to their specific environment or consideration of external factors affecting the students’ compassion levels. In addition, the service opportunities offered in such a situation might have to be specifically tailored according to possible limitations such as geographic location or transportation availability.

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<sup>91</sup> Luke 3:10.

<sup>92</sup> John 4:14.

## Summary

It is unquestionable that levels of compassion overall in adolescent males are lacking. It is also apparent that various external factors in the lives of young people can have a negative effect on these compassion levels. The role of an educational institution, especially one embracing a Christian worldview, in countering negative factors and working instead to cultivate a healthy level of compassion in young adults is essential. By engaging young people in active study of the Christian faith that focuses on serving others and providing opportunities to energetically apply these lessons in the “real world,” progress can be made in making this a more compassionate society. The Applied Christianity experience at FUMA has helped to confirm this hypothesis. Only by doing so can we embrace and live out Jesus’ commandments of loving God and loving others—the two most crucial actions that reflect lives obedient to a holy God.



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## APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

### CONSENT FORM

You are invited to be in a research study of compassion in teenage males and factors that may affect a person's level of compassion. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a male between the ages of 15 and 25. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

James A. Benson, Jr., a doctoral candidate in the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

**Background Information:** The purpose of this study is to develop a strategy for a school to increase compassion in teenage males.

**Procedures:** If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Take an online survey that should take about 15-20 minutes.

**Risks and Benefits of Participation:** The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

**Compensation:** Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

**Anonymity:** Participants in the online survey will do so on an anonymous basis. No participant names or identifying information will be collected during the survey.

**Confidentiality:** The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:** Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time prior to submitting the survey without affecting those relationships.

**Contacts and Questions:** The researcher conducting this study is James A. Benson, Jr. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at [jabenson@liberty.edu](mailto:jabenson@liberty.edu). You may also contact the researcher's faculty advisor, Dr. Steve Vandegriff, at [svandegriff@liberty.edu](mailto:svandegriff@liberty.edu).

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 1887, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

*Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.*

**Statement of Consent:** I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS IRB APPROVAL INFORMATION WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN ADDED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

I agree to participate (link to survey)

I decline (link to close webpage)

## APPENDIX B: PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

### PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM

Your child is invited to be in a research study of compassion in teenage males and factors that may affect a person's level of compassion. He was selected as a possible participant because he is a male between the ages of 15 and 25. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to allow him to be in the study.

James A. Benson, Jr., a doctoral candidate in the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

**Background Information:** The purpose of this study is to develop a strategy for a school to increase compassion in teenage males.

**Procedures:** If you agree to allow your child to be in this study, I would ask him to do the following things:

1. Take an online survey that should take about 15-20 minutes.

**Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:** The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

**Compensation:** Your child will not be compensated for participating in this study.

**Anonymity:** Participants in the online survey will do so on an anonymous basis. No participant names or identifying information will be collected during the survey.

**Confidentiality:** The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:** Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to allow your child to participate will not affect his current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to allow your child to participate, he is free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time prior to submitting the survey without affecting those relationships.

**Contacts and Questions:** The researcher conducting this study is James A. Benson, Jr. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at [jabenson@liberty.edu](mailto:jabenson@liberty.edu). You may also contact the researcher's faculty advisor, Dr. Steve Vandegriff, at [svandegriff@liberty.edu](mailto:svandegriff@liberty.edu).

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 1887, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

*Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.*

**Statement of Consent:** I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to allow my child to participate in the study.

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO ALLOW YOUR CHILD TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS IRB APPROVAL INFORMATION WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN ADDED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

## **ASSENT OF MINOR TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY**

### **What is the name of the study and who is doing the study?**

The name of the study is “Love your neighbor: An educational strategy to cultivate compassion in teenage males.” The study will be conducted by James A. Benson, Jr.

### **Why are we doing this study?**

We are interested in studying compassion to help develop a strategy to more effectively cultivate this value in high school aged males.

### **Why are we asking you to be in this study?**

You are being asked to be in this research study because you are a male, aged 15-25.

### **If you agree, what will happen?**

If you are in this study you will take a 15-20 minute online anonymous survey.

### **Do you have to be in this study?**

No, you do not have to be in this study. If you want to be in this study, then tell the researcher. If you don't want to, it's OK to say no. The researcher will not be angry. You can say yes now and change your mind later. It's up to you.

### **Do you have any questions?**

You can ask questions any time. You can ask now. You can ask later. You can talk to the researcher. If you do not understand something, please ask the researcher to explain it to you again.

Signing your name below means that you want to be in the study.

---

Signature of Minor

Date

---

Signature of Parent

Date

---

Signature of Investigator

Date

## APPENDIX C: SAMPLE APPLIED CHRISTIANITY CLASS FINAL EXAM

### Applied Christianity Final Exam - May 23, 2017

Please answer the questions below completely. Use as much space as you need to answer each question.

1. Give your impressions on each of the texts used in class. Identify, in your opinion, each book's strengths, weaknesses, and value to this particular class.
  - a. *What on Earth Am I Here For?*, by Rick Warren
  - b. *Counter Culture*, by David Platt
  - c. *Radical*, by David Platt
  - d. *Multiply*, by Francis Chan
2. For each of the organizations the class has visited to this point for service work, give your impressions. Include your favorite memory for each, and how each service trip was beneficial to the class.
  - a. White Bird Appaloosa Horse Rescue
  - b. West Central Elementary
  - c. Crossroads Camp and Conference Center
  - d. Peaceful Passings Senior Animal Rescue
  - e. Eagle Eyrie Camp and Conference Center
3. Which service trip is one that you feel the class **must** do next year, and why?
4. Which service trip is one that you feel doesn't necessarily have to be done next year, and why?
5. Describe, in detail, how this class has changed you in the past seven weeks.
6. Describe, in detail, the aspects of this class that you felt were strengths.
7. Describe, in detail, the aspects of this class that you felt were weaknesses and must be eliminated or improved.
8. If you could go back seven weeks in time, what advice would you give Chaplain Benson to improve the Applied Christianity class experience for either yourself or the other students?
9. What Bible verse do you find most inspirational, or which verse serves as your personal life mission statement? Why?
10. EXTRA CREDIT: Coke or Pepsi? Defend your answer.



# LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

## INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

June 26, 2017

James Benson

IRB Approval 2905.062617: Love Your Neighbor: An Educational Strategy to Cultivate Compassion in Teenage Males

Dear James Benson,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,



**G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP**

*Administrative Chair of Institutional Research*

**The Graduate School**

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