

Yet research also suggests that compassion can be taught throughout the lifespan too. For example, research in my lab here at Santa Clara University has found that college students who attend service learning immersion trips spending a great time with those who are poor and marginalized in either domestic or international location do, in fact, become more compassionate (at least after their immersion experience and for several months later when assessed in follow up testing). We are currently examining a large university data set to determine which college activities (e.g., selected major, extracurricular activities) are associated with compassion development over time. Curiously, in some of our preliminary analyses we find that partying and alcohol consumption is negatively associated with compassion development.



Source:

Additional research in my lab and elsewhere also highlights the power of observational learning and modeling of compassion. We watch and learn from important others and do what they do. Often these models are close to home such as friends and family, co-workers, and so forth. Yet, we also value and observe the more famous models too. Perhaps one of reasons for the popularity of leaders such as the Dalai Lama and Pope Francis is their modeling of compassion. Collaborative research through our Spirituality and Health Institute (SHI) here at Santa Clara has found how important models can be in learning compassionate behavior.

So, compassion can be taught for sure. And if we want to live in a more compassionate world we need to both teach and model it to everyone. Will you do your part? So, what do you think?

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