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### Encouraging Media Literacy with ELCA Youth Groups: Equipping Adult Mentors to Guide Youth in Critically Evaluating Messages of TV and Film

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# Encouraging Media Literacy with ELCA Youth Groups

## Equipping Adult Mentors to Guide Youth in Critically Evaluating Messages of TV and Film

Author: Maya Mineoi

Advisor: Erin Valentino

### Abstract

Youth receive conflicting and often unrealistic messages about body-image, health, sexuality, bullying and self-worth from both the mainstream media (i.e. TV, film) and their religious institutions. In attempting to negotiate between these extreme messages, individuals are further challenged because these two institutions do not typically positively interact in the construction of self identity. Thus, when religious institutions surrender to the media on issues of moral concerns, individuals are left with cognitive dissonance and often respond by avoiding either the media or their faith. Moreover, when Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) leaders allow media to be the sole source of dialogue about teen-centered moral concerns, they are depriving youth of the self-affirming messages that are specific to the Christian narrative.

My research project aims to equip adult mentors of the ELCA with tools to empower young people to analyze critically religious and media sources and to form their own attitudes about morality. In order to do so, the project has been divided in to three parts. Part one provides a review of the literature on media literacy, Christian education and adolescent formation studies. This research reinforces the need for Christian youth groups to facilitate discussions on how the media portrays personal values, faith and the world. Part two examines Wave 1 and 2 of The National Study of Youth and Religion to uncover the role of the media in shaping youth identity. The results suggest the need to reform religious practices in order to respond to the specific needs of youth. Part three focuses on in-depth interviews with ELCA youth groups and adult leaders. The goal is to present a synthesis of the research results to the ELCA with the aim of highlighting the strengths and the wealth of existing resources for media literacy conversations in faith-based settings.

### Introduction

#### Problem

The ELCA is holding youth to a high moral standard on many issues, without providing support for youth to explore those issues.

#### Question

How can the ELCA use media literacy with high-school aged youth to address formation of morality?

#### Objective

Gather youth and adult leaders from 15 churches of the ELCA Greater Hartford conference for a conversation about the place of media literacy in their home congregations.

### Media Analyzed in Literature Review



Parker, Trey, and Matt Stone. "Super Best Friends." *South Park*. Comedy Central. 4 July 2001. Television.



Miss Representation. Dir. Jennifer Siebel Newsom. Girls' Club Entertainment, 2011.

LEAD US ~~NOT~~ INTO TEMPTATION. **Saved!**



Save! Dir. Brian Dannelly. Perf. Mandy Moore Macaulay Culkin. United Artists, 2004. DVD.

### Methodology

#### Literature Research

- Interdisciplinary bibliographic research of media literacy, Christian education and adolescent formation case studies reveal concerns specific to each category and resources to address each concern.
- Literature variously addresses: media-literacy copyright issues when dealing with media literacy, translation of difficult faith concepts when teaching Christianity, and professionalism and boundary issues when working with youth.

#### Analysis of Survey Data

- The National Study of Youth and Religion is a sociology project of telephone surveys and personal interviews of 13-18 year olds
- Wave 1 and Wave 2 surveys from the NSYR are used to explore how youth view their religion in tandem with their own behaviors and relationships
- The data offer broad national information about religious lives of youth that informs focus group construction and presentation of results to the ELCA

#### Qualitative Interview Data

- Goals for interviews with adult mentors:
  - identify mentors' past involvement with media literacy;
  - their needs in order to use media literacy in youth group settings.
- Goal of youth focus group interviews:
  - establish the extent to which youth are already critically analyzing the messages of media and their churches/religious institutions.

- Both sets of interviews will be conducted in the first half of the spring 2014 semester.

#### Final Product

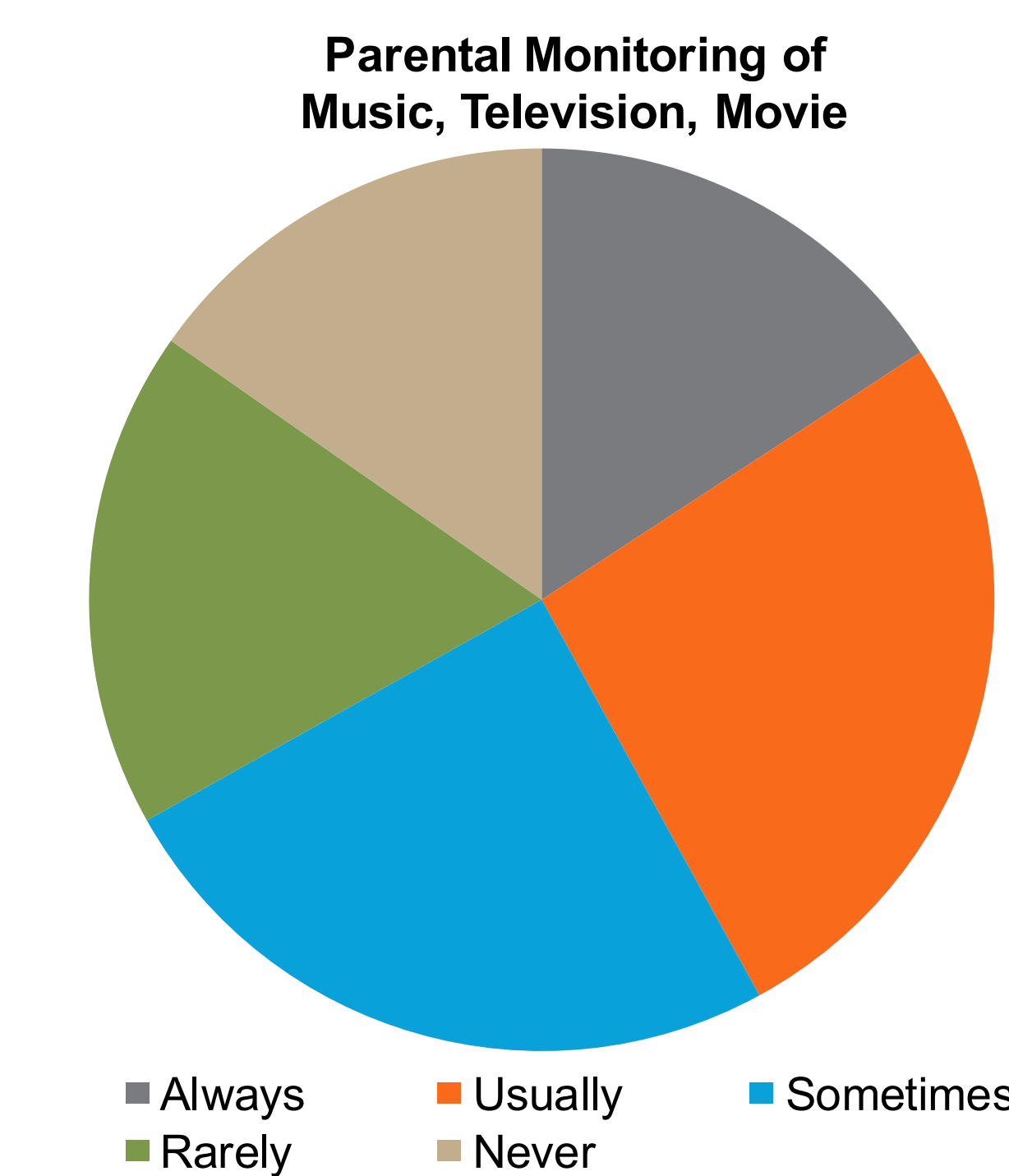
Produce final report and hold workshop with youth and adult leaders from the Greater Hartford conference

### Results and Discussion

#### Part 1: Analysis of Data

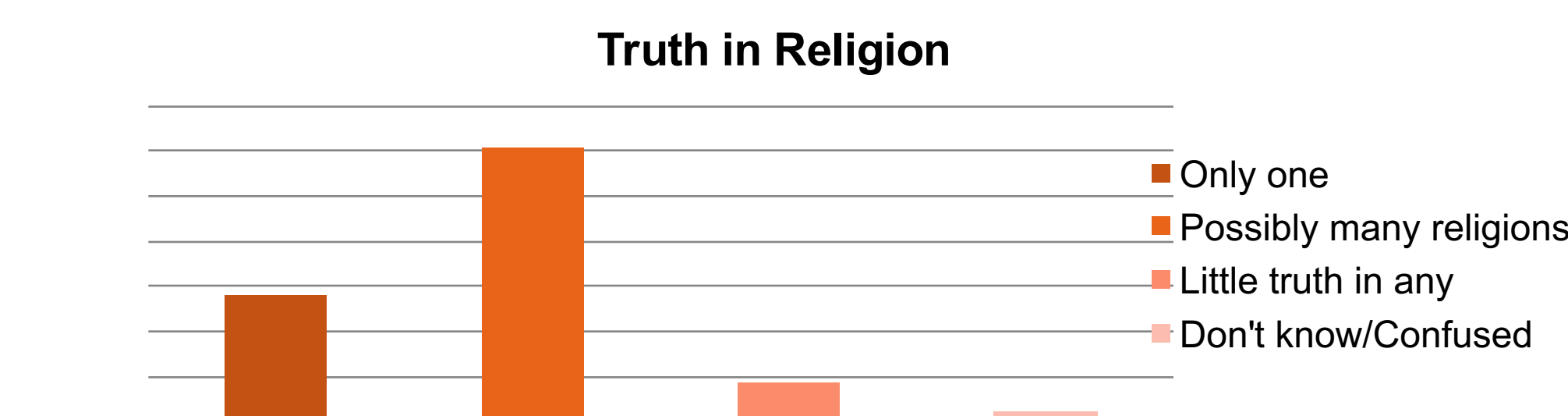
The National Study of Youth and Religion relates directly to media literacy in youth groups in three areas of youth life: media engagement, religious understanding, and youth group participation.

##### Media engagement



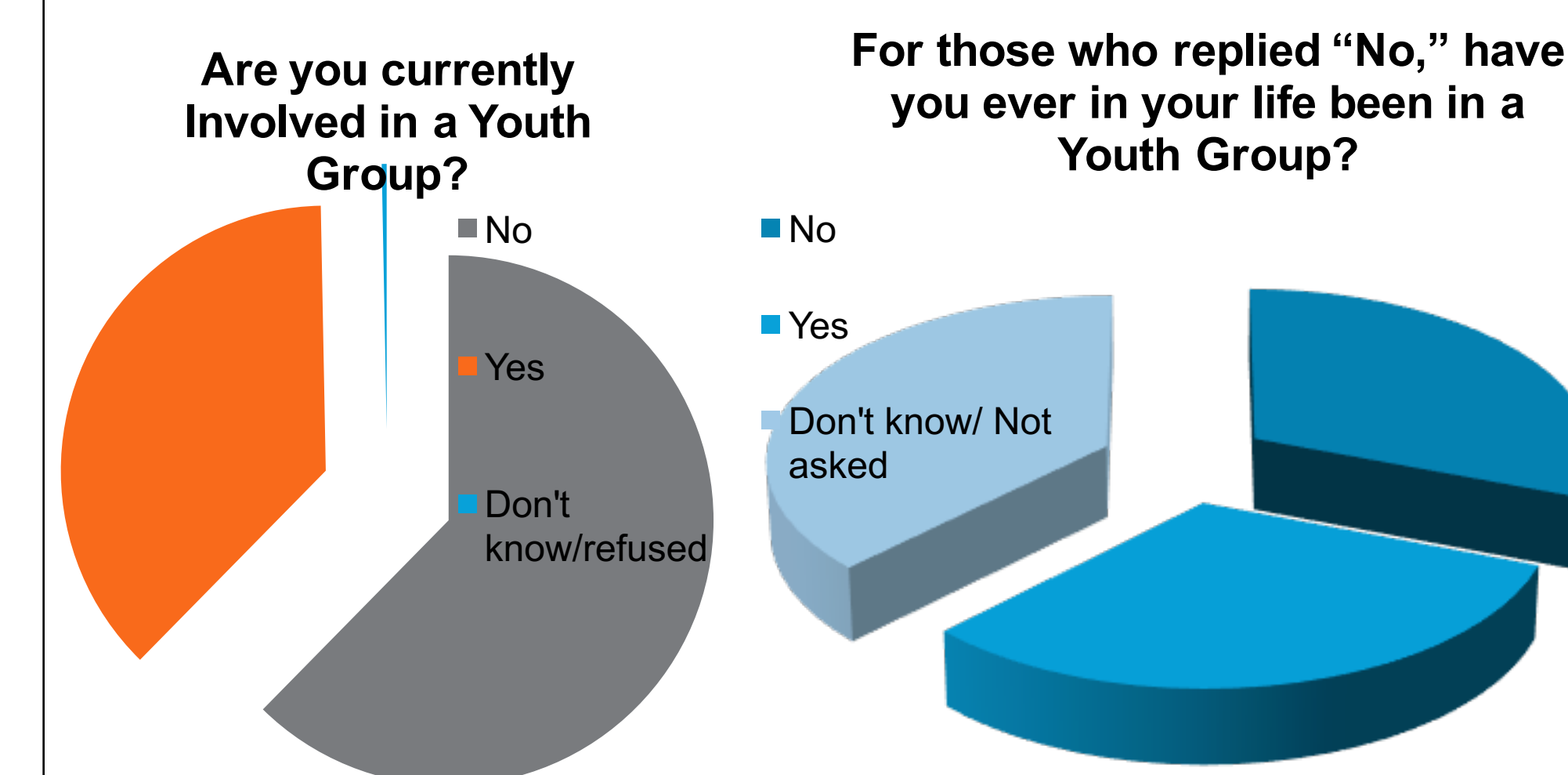
The results that 41% of parents always or usually monitor is significant because it gives insight into youth media diets.

##### Religious Beliefs



How youth understand the authority of truth of their own religion affects their moral formation.

##### Youth Group



The majority of youth are or have been involved in a youth group.

Smith, Christian, and Lisa Pearce. *National Study of Youth and Religion*. Association of Religious Data Archives. The Lilly Endowment, Apr. 2003.

#### Discussion of Data

NSYR offers evidence to the importance of religious youth education reform.

NSYR highlights specific moral issues that youth are facing which helped outline the values to discuss during focus groups.

NSYR illustrates youth religious family engagement, youth group involvement and interest in various media among young people and provides a platform for focus groups.

#### Part 2: Literature Review Results

The literature review cited resources from both academic and faith-based institutions to help adult mentors find and tailor existing resources to their ELCA context.

##### Media Literacy Organizations

These are secular organizations that have experience working with young people and resources that can be applied in Christian youth group settings.

Action Coalition for Media Education (ACME)	Center for Media Literacy (CMA)	National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE)
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The following **Media Literacy Core concepts**, derived from the literature review, provide the basis for the adult mentors in the final media literacy presentation to understand the ways that media influences morality. The literature review also provides the basis for the example questions for use in youth group settings.

All media messages are constructed

- What is the central message of the film/episode?

Media messages are constructed using creative language with its own rules

- What tools did the director use to convey that message?

Different people experience the same media message differently

- How does this film/episode relate to Lutheran messages of grace, faith and scripture?
- What are the ways in which you viewed the film/episode differently from others?

Media have embedded values and point of view

- How did the directors/producers want the audience to respond?

Media are organized to gain profit

- Who were the directors/producers?
- Who benefited from the message of the film/episode?

Share, Jeff, and Douglas Kellner. "Toward Media Literacy: Core Concepts, Debates, Organizations and Policy." *Discourse* 26.3 (2005): 369-86.

### Focus Group Question Outline

#### Media Use

- Most favorite TV/movies/characters
- Least favorite TV/movies/characters
- Change in media use
- Discussions about media use with friends and family

#### Values

- Violence
- Body Image
- Health
- Premarital Sex
- Self Worth

#### Youth Group Settings

- Experience talking about media
- Media that is not comfortable to talk about

### Conclusion

Next semester, I will hold focus groups with youth and interviews with adult leaders to inform the final media-literacy presentation. I also intend to meet with representatives of the New England Synod in order to discuss the continuation of sustainable media-literacy initiatives in the ELCA.





# Popular Music, TV and Film: Influencing Christian Youth, Offering Alternative Approaches

Community Partner: New England Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Advisor: Erin Valentino

Student Researcher: Maya Mineoi

Youth engage more with popular media than with Christian leaders.  
Does it make sense for adult leaders to pay attention to media when planning religious formation programming?

## Dimensions of religiosity

- 1) Belief
- 2) Spiritual connection
- 3) Behavior

Pearce, Lisa D., Jessica Halliday Hardie, and E. Michael Foster. "A Person Centered Examination of Adolescent Religiosity Using Latent Analysis." *Scientific Study of Religion*. 52.1 (2013): 57-79.

## Common Christian Caricatures in Film and TV

Hypocritical

Comic Relief

The representations of Christians in the media are inauthentic.  
Healthy and genuine relationships with adult youth leaders are key to healthy beliefs, connections and behaviors among youth.

Davies, John J., and Vauna Davis. "Religiosity, Parent and Peer Attachment, and Sexual Media Use in Emerging Adults." *Journal of Media and Religion*. 12.3 (2013): 112-127.

## Youth Ministers – Relevant or Reverent?



I used to bite my tongue and hold my breath  
Scared to rock the boat and make a mess  
So I sat quietly, agreed politely  
I guess that I forgot I had a choice  
I let you push me past the breaking point  
I stood for nothing, so I fell for everything

-Katy Perry "Roar" lyrics

"I often have to use my pastoral judgment concerning music with both adults and young people. Songs that we understand to be secular often have appropriate sacred significance"

-Interview with Pastor

Don't avoid conversations of violence, relationships, and self-image that come up in TV, film and music with young people; instead, use the Christian narrative when engaging these topics:

### 1 Corinthians 6

<sup>19</sup> Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own?

### Genesis 1

<sup>26</sup> Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness."

### Isaiah 2

<sup>4</sup> They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

### 1 Corinthians 8

<sup>13</sup> Therefore, if food is a cause of their falling, I will never eat meat, so that I may not cause one of them to fall.

-New Revised Standard Version

## Youth choose media to reinforce beliefs

- Cognitive consonance: stimulus matches familiar understanding
- Cognitive dissonance: stimulus challenges preconceived understanding

Bobkowski, Piotr S. "Adolescent Religiosity and Selective Exposure to Television." *Journal of Media and Religion*. 8.1 (2009): 55-70.

## Youth have little ownership and low representation in the media

- Similar, "ideal" body types and skin tones are overrepresented
- Youth are not making decisions about representation

Kellner, Douglas, and Jeff Share. "Toward Critical Media Literacy: Core concepts, debates, organizations, and policy." *Discourse*. 26.3 (2005): 369-386.

## Youth gain and lose social status based on media

- Knowledge of popular culture is valued by peers
- Identities represented with power in media gain power in society

"Drake is a talented artist and I appreciate his music. When his songs come on in the car, I don't censor the radio. I love challenging my kids on the lyrics they're singing. They often have brilliant responses"

-Interview with Youth Minister



I got my eyes on you  
You're everything that I see  
I want your high love and emotion endlessly  
I can't get over you

You're mine you're mine  
I just want to say you're mine, your mine  
F\*ck what you heard your mine, you're mine  
As long as you know who you belong to

-Drake "Just Hold on We're going Home" and "Mine" lyrics

## Solitary

Have youth pick favorite song lyrics and an applicable bible verse to reflect on.

## AND

## Social

Watch Pitch Perfect during a sleepover and have casual, unguided dinner discussion.

## Goal

- 1) Encourage spiritual and emotional maturity
- 2) Encourage empathy and respect for people who are different
- 3) Encourage understanding of the "emotional, moral, ethical and spiritual implications" of supporting messages from popular TV, film and music industries.

Bosacki, Sandra, Anne Elliot, Spogmai Akseer, and Mira Bajovic. "The Spiritual Component of Children's Lives: The Role of Media." *British Journal of Religious Education* 32.1 (2010): 49-61.

