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A Model for Biblical Worldview Development in Evangelical Christian Emerging Adults

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to develop a model of biblical worldview development for Evangelical Christians during emerging adulthood. Data were collected via personal worldview development timelines, semi-structured interviews, and a focus group. The study provided insight into a maturing biblical worldview, including growth in Sire's dimensions of worldview and also growth in three worldview dispositions: awareness of one's worldview, ownership of the process of worldview development, and commitment to meaningful processing. The Model for biblical Worldview Development in Evangelical Christian Emerging Adults suggests implications for educators who support worldview development in Evangelical emerging adults.

Introduction

Since the 1970s, mainstream Evangelicalism has been marked by significant attention to the concept of a distinctively Christian worldview (Colson & Percy, 1999; Holmes, 1983; Naugle, 2002; Percy, 2004; Schaeffer, 1976; Sire, 1997). According to Naugle (2002), understanding Christianity as a worldview is among the most important developments in recent church history, and many Christian K-12 schools and universities have made developing a biblical worldview in their students a primary aim (Schultz & Swezey, 2013).

In spite of the focus on a biblical worldview in Christian education, comparatively little attention has been given to understanding how a person actually develops a biblical worldview. Though some researchers have hinted at how a person comes to understand and apply a biblical worldview (Brickhill, 2010; Ham et al., 2012; Naugle, 2002), a comprehensive framework for biblical worldview development has not been forthcoming.

Emerging adulthood is a period of significant transition, personal formation, and exploration of possibilities (Arnett, 2007), and much research has focused on individuals in this life stage. However, in regard to the concept of biblical worldview formation, the results of the research have yielded disappointing, inadequate, or incomplete conclusions: disappointing, in that many emerging adults are rejecting Christianity, or do not possess a biblical worldview (Ham et al., 2012); inadequate, in that, a reliable instrument to measure a person's worldview has not yet been developed (Schultz & Swezey, 2013); and incomplete, in that many studies regarding emerging adults focus on only limited aspects of worldview development (King, Clardy, & Ramos, 2014; Nather, 2013; Powell et al., 2012).

Given that as many as six out of ten young adults who were involved in church and in other spiritually focused activities as teens do not maintain their faith in emerging adulthood (Uecker et al., 2007), it is particularly important to understand the processes and experiences that influence the development of worldview during emerging adulthood. Research suggests a disconnect between childhood/adolescent faith and the faith of emerging adults, and individuals in their early twenties are leaving the church in record numbers (Astin, 2004; Barna Research Group, 2006; The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2008). Given these realities and the significance of the emerging adult years (Arnett, 2000; Parks, 2000), this age span may prove to be the most pivotal in the process of worldview development, and therefore a crucial area for research and theory-building.

Research questions

The purpose of this study was to develop a model for biblical worldview development in Evangelical emerging adults. The central research question and sub-questions for this study are described below.

Central research question: How does a biblical worldview develop during emerging adulthood in Evangelical Christians aged 18–23?

Sociologists have identified emerging adulthood as a stage in which individuals evaluate their worldview and make necessary adjustments to that worldview prior to settling upon it as the foundation of future decisions (Arnett, 2007; Fowler, 1981; Parks, 1986, 2000; Smith & Snell, 2009). An individual's worldview is comprised of three central dimensions (Schultz & Swezey, 2013; Sire, 2015): heart orientation, propositional (cognitive), and behavioral. The sub-questions for this study are each based on one of these three dimensions, as follows.

Sub-question 1: How do Christian emerging adults describe the process of developing a heart orientation toward God and His truth?

Sub-question 2: How do Christian emerging adults describe the process of committing to a master narrative or set of presuppositions which is consistent with biblical revelation?

Sub-question 3: How do Christian emerging adults describe the process of aligning their behavior to be an accurate reflection of a biblical worldview?

Literature review

Worldview

The term worldview is roughly parallel to the German word *weltanschauung*, which can be translated as a way of looking at the world (Pearcy, 2004), and which was first used in the context of philosophy by German philosopher Immanuel Kant in his 1790 work, *In Critique of Reason*. Kant (1987) described a worldview as a “supersensible substrate” (p. 37), or the underlying foundation of one’s believing, thinking, and acting in life that cannot be readily perceived by the senses.

Similar to Kant’s usage, the term worldview today has come to mean a vision for life that leads to a specific way of living (Lockerbie, 1989; Percy, 2004; Valk, 2012). According to Naugle (2002) a worldview is a heart-based and cognitively-formed, meaning-making system that guides the human activities of reasoning, interpreting perceptions of reality, and knowing. Worldviews influence every area of life, determining and shaping what is thought of as meaningful or worthwhile, and what are those causes which may require sacrifice. Individuals act according to their worldview, whether they do so intentionally or not (Valk, 2012).

A biblical worldview in particular is a “framework of assumptions about reality, all of which are in submission to Christ” (Schultz & Swezey, 2013, p. 232). Central to this framework are two foundational truths: (a) God exists, and (b) God is who he has revealed himself to be in creation, the Bible, and the person of Jesus Christ (Phillips et al., 2008). All other elements of a biblical worldview proceed from these two truths. As a meta-narrative, a biblical worldview is essentially a logical story, made up of three broad sub-narratives: creation, fall, and redemption (Naugle, 2002).

The term worldview has been popularized over the last 50 years among Evangelicals by several prominent thinkers and writers, with Francis Schaeffer being among the most notable of these (Naugle, 2002). Undergirding his understanding of the concept of worldview was one central thesis: “the basic problem of the Christians in this country in the last eighty years or so ... is that they have seen things in bits and pieces instead of totals” (Schaeffer, 1981, p. 17). In contrast, he suggested that the biblical worldview covers all of reality in a cohesive whole (Schaeffer, 1976).

Sire's (2015) updated three-dimensional concept of worldview was used as the central conceptual framework for worldview to inform this study. Sire refined the definition of worldview since it was first published in *The Universe Next Door* in 1976. The most significant change was to affirm the central role that the heart plays in one's worldview, while earlier iterations of the definition focused primarily on the cognitive aspects of worldview (Sire, 1997). This development in approach to worldview by Sire (2015) roughly parallels the recent emphasis on the heart as the core of one's worldview in writers such as Smith (2009) and Naugle (2008).

According to Sire (2015), a worldview is:

A commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being. (p. 141)

In Sire's revised conception of worldview, the first dimension of a person's worldview is a spiritual orientation (Sire, 1997). According to Willard (2002), the heart is the core of a person's being or the executive center of a person's life and it is within the heart that decisions are made, which are evidenced by thoughts, speech, and bodily actions. Smith (2009) posits that what a person loves is what constitutes that person's ultimate identity, even going so far as to say that "we are what we love" (Smith, 2009, p. 40). The core commitments of individuals make up the essence of their worldviews, and according to Smith (2009), these core commitments or desires are themselves shaped by the practices to which one commits and habitually does.

The second dimension of a person's worldview is cognition, which is the act of holding a thought or series of thoughts or conceptualizations in the mind for consideration, processing, and/or extension (Moreland, 1997). In terms of the relationships among heart orientation, cognition, and behavior, (the three dimensions of one's worldview) the decisions and affections of the heart influence the way one thinks and acts (Naugle, 2008; Sire, 2015; Smith, 2009; Willard, 2002). In turn, the thoughts of the individual impact one's decisions (Willard, 2002). Smith (2009) elaborates on this cycle by suggesting that the embodied habits of one's life are the primary shapers of one's heart orientation.

While Sire has not offered a formal model for worldview development, he has acknowledged that a person's worldview is formed throughout the entire course of life (Sire, 1997, 2015). He pointed to life experience in general, and crisis and ordinary times in particular, as the primary shapers of a person's worldview, which is consistent with Smith (2009), who also did not offer a comprehensive model for worldview development. However, it

is reasonable to infer that considering the life experience(s) of individuals should yield helpful clues regarding how their worldviews (heart orientation, cognitive presuppositions, and behavioral patterns) have been shaped.

Emerging adulthood

In this study, the only life stage examined was the emerging adult stage. While one's worldview certainly develops across the lifespan (Sire, 2015), emerging adulthood is a particularly important stage of personal development as it functions as a transitional stage between adolescence and adulthood (Arnett, 2007; Fowler, 1981; Parks, 1986; 2000; Smith & Snell, 2009). Emerging adulthood is a newly identified stage of human development, suggested by sociologist Jeffrey Arnett (2000), who characterized emerging adulthood as a time of massive personal change and internal upheaval. Spanning roughly the ages of 18–29 years, individuals in this period tend to actively explore the possibilities in life including who they will love, what they will do for work, and upon which worldview they will base the balance of their adult life (Arnett, 2000).

According to Arnett (2006), there are five main features of emerging adulthood: identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feelings of being in-between, and exploration of possibilities. Tanner (2006) suggested that part of the uniqueness of emerging adulthood is in its function as a critical developmental turning point for individuals. Called *recentering*, this turning point involves shifting one's locus of control from others to self, toward the ultimate aim of achieving adult sufficiency (Parks, 1986; Tanner, 2006). Tanner (2006) went on to suggest that the close of the emerging adult stage (at whatever age) involves the consolidation of a life-system (worldview) that is organized around an individual's life choices and decisions.

Emerging adulthood is a time when major questions about life and reality are asked and basic beliefs about life and the world are processed and decided upon (Garber, 1996; Parks, 1986). It is a time of crisis when one grapples with what one believes to be real and true and right. This is a crucial developmental period when a turn one way or the other is unavoidable (Parks, 2000). Garber (1996) has recommended that the emerging adult years are best spent in an environment that will support the quest for answers to life's big questions and setting those answers in a coherent framework. The longing for this coherence is the core task of constructing one's worldview, occurring most consciously and intentionally during emerging adulthood (Garber, 1996; Parks, 2000).

Related research

Several researchers examined the dynamics of human experience that are related to biblical worldview development. Mayhew (2012) examined the

predictors of ecumenical worldview development in a longitudinal study of undergraduate students, with an ecumenical worldview being defined as a worldview that allows for varying faiths to coexist and that promotes an acceptance of others' spiritual convictions. Conclusions from the study suggest that emerging adults examine and refine their worldview as they encounter difficult questions about their religious beliefs, a process categorized by Mayhew (2012) as a religious struggle. Mayhew and Bryant (2013) concluded that adults can assist emerging adults to clarify their worldview and solidify their commitment to that worldview by encouraging the evaluation of competing worldviews in a respectful and open-minded manner.

Brickhill (2010) utilized comparative data analysis to examine the interplay of four independent variables (church attendance, type of elementary school attended, personal faith commitment, and parent beliefs) with the worldview of middle school students. Results suggest that only church attendance and personal faith commitment have a statistically significant impact on worldview. Further, Rutledge (2013) demonstrated from correlational research that students' participation in educational programs in their local church and their parents' record of church attendance did not influence students' worldview. Alternatively, in a micro-ethnographic study, Van Meter (2009) determined that families, in general, do exert influence on their children's worldview.

Taylor (2009) compared worldview assessment scores of 12th-grade students who had differing worldview training, but who had generally similar church experiences. The results of the study suggest that biblically integrated classes have a positive impact on the development of the biblical worldview in high school students. Additionally, results indicate that when worldview training in the school and the church is consistent (Taylor, 2009), students perform better on worldview assessments.

According to research on undergraduate campuses conducted by Mayhew and Bryant (2013), coercion had a negative impact on individuals' worldview commitment. Students who experienced what they perceived as negative pressure to conform to a certain worldview tended to be less committed to their own worldview when compared to others who were given the freedom to explore alternate worldviews. Further analysis suggested that the more students engaged in religious activities, the stronger their commitment to their chosen worldview.

Swaner (2007, 2012) reviewed the literature on college students' cognitive, moral, and civic development, concluding that students develop over time toward more "complex ways of thinking, knowing, and making meaning" (pp. 75–76). This process includes areas such as cognitive, ethical, moral, faith, and racial identity development. Swaner (2012) pointed to the impact of college attendance on fostering increasing complexity in multiple

dimensions of student development, for which there is much empirical research (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Methods

Design

The grounded theory method of inquiry is well suited to the study of how a biblical worldview develops in emerging adults, since a comprehensive model of worldview development does not exist, and the construct of worldview itself does not easily lend itself to quantitative inquiry (Arnett, 2006; Creswell, 2015). For this grounded theory study, I collected and analyzed individuals' stories about how they are presently developing a biblical worldview during the early emerging adult years (ages 18–23 years). These stories were collected via timelines, interviews, and a focus group.

Sampling

Theoretical sampling was employed for this study, which is a method of sampling that is informed and guided by the concepts and themes that emerge from the focus of the study, the research questions, and the data itself (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Patton, 2015). Theoretical sampling involved identifying potential participants from among emerging adults who were nominated by others as having a strong biblical worldview. Snowball sampling also occurred, as participants nominated other participants who were then qualified for the study (Creswell, 2015; Patton, 2015).

Participants

Participants (who were given pseudonyms for the purpose of this study) were 20 Evangelical Christian emerging adults between the ages of 18 and 23, all of whom were nominated as individuals with a well-developed Biblical worldview. A total of 46 potential participants were nominated by 12 nominators and the participation rate was 44%.

To establish a basic validation of participants' worldview, participants were asked to complete the 3-Dimensional Worldview Survey—Form C (*3DWS-Form C*) (Schultz, 2010). Individual results of the *3DWS-Form C* suggest that participants possessed a strong biblical worldview.

Data collection methods

Grounded theory principles (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) guided the collection of data, which derived from personal timelines, semi-structured interviews,

researcher memos, and a focus group experience. All data collection methods were designed to elicit an understanding of how participants experienced the worldview development process and to identify steps in that process (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Personal worldview development timeline

Participants in the study first completed a written worldview development timeline, which documented the factors and experiences that shaped their worldview, from birth to their current age. Additionally, the timelines served as effective preparation for the interviews, as participants were prompted to think deeply about their worldview development. Timelines varied in form according to the preference of the participants, from a one-page graphical representation of major events to a multi-page list and detailed textual explanation of milestones and other important events and relationships.

Semi-structured interviews

Interviews were approximately one hour in length and were conducted via video calls, with the exception of one which was conducted in person. An interview protocol was used to ensure that the same general lines of inquiry were followed in each interview while at the same time allowing for spontaneous exploration based on participant answers and feedback.

Theoretical memoing

Writing memos aided reflection and theory construction, and memos were written concurrently with data collection and analysis. Memoing provided an ongoing structure for reflection and processing the themes and ideas that were emerging from the data. Memos often suggested elements of the eventual model that was generated.

Focus group with select study participants

Ten participants who provided rich data in their interviews were invited to participate in the focus group. Five study participants agreed to participate in the focus group. Questions for the focus group interview guide were informed by the data that was collected from the individual interviews.

Data analysis procedures

Data analysis was performed as data were collected using the grounded theory framework, steps, and techniques outlined by Corbin and Strauss

(2015) and articulated below. All data were imported into the *ATLAS.ti* (version 7, 2015) qualitative data analysis software application for analysis.

Open coding

Open coding began with me reading through the timelines and transcriptions in order to immerse myself in the data (Patton, 2015) and went on to include micro-analysis, digging deep into the data to discover initial concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). As multiple interviews were coded, I employed constant comparison among the data sources (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Open coding resulted in a set of 275 initial codes.

Axial coding

Axial coding involves developing patterns and constructs by grouping concepts identified in open coding while elaborating on initial codes (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The product of axial coding was a working list of categories of data and emergent themes, which were essentially combinations and re-combinations (patterns) of the original concepts discovered and developed during open coding (Patton, 2015).

As axial coding progressed, I was sensitive to the concept of saturation, when no novel concepts were emerging from the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Saturation was reached after 18 interviews and the focus group session was conducted and coded. At that point, I decided to wait to conduct the final two interviews of my originally projected 20, until after I created the first draft of the model. The final code list included seven categories and 54 codes.

Creating a conditional/consequential matrix

Once axial coding was complete, I created a conditional matrix of themes and concepts, which located the data in the broader context of the phenomenon being studied. The conditional/consequential matrix was a tentative version of the eventual model of biblical worldview development and was a first attempt at explaining the contextual/causal relationships that were becoming evident in the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

Integration

The culminating phase of grounded theory data analysis is integration, in which core categories are finalized and interrelationships among them are refined to the level of a central model for the phenomenon under consideration (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). As the model was developed, it was applied to the data and earlier categories to ensure that it truly emerged from the data itself and to test its validity.

After drafting an initial synthesis of the results, I completed the final two interviews to test the model. After coding the final interviews, I was confident that the model effectively captured the concept of worldview development. The model was sent to three individuals for review and input: an expert in qualitative research, an esteemed, published author on the concept of worldview, and a college professor who teaches worldview courses. Each of these reviewers offered feedback that affirmed the model and provided suggestions for minor clarifications. The model was also sent to all participants as a form of member checking. Participants did not offer any substantive suggestions for alterations to the model.

Trustworthiness

According to Corbin and Strauss (2015) typical criteria for trustworthiness are not applicable to grounded theory. Instead, they suggest that quality research will deeply resonate with readers' own life experience and will stimulate further research. However, in keeping with standard practice in qualitative research in general, I sought to establish trustworthiness by focusing on credibility; dependability and confirmability; and transferability.

Credibility was pursued in several ways (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). After coding the first few data sources, I employed rater tests by inviting an expert in qualitative research to review and confirm my coding scheme. I also employed a form of member checking by providing transcripts of individual interviews and the first draft of the model to the participants for confirmation of truthfulness, accuracy, and applicability. Additionally, during the analysis, and particularly during the integration stage, I triangulated the data via multiple means of data collection including written timelines, interviews, a focus group, and memoing (Patton, 2015).

To facilitate dependability and conformability, I kept an audit trail of all work in the study. Additionally, various iterations of the coding scheme were preserved and referred to throughout the entire process of analyzing the data. To ensure maximum transferability of results, I focused on generating a thick explanation of how biblical worldview develops. Finally, I invited select biblical worldview experts to examine and evaluate the emerging model of biblical worldview development, for the purpose of gaining expert input (Creswell, 2015; Patton, 2015).

Results

Figure 1 (Erdvig, *in press*) provides a graphical representation of the Model of Biblical Worldview Development in Evangelical Christian Emerging Adults as generated in this study. Since the process of biblical worldview

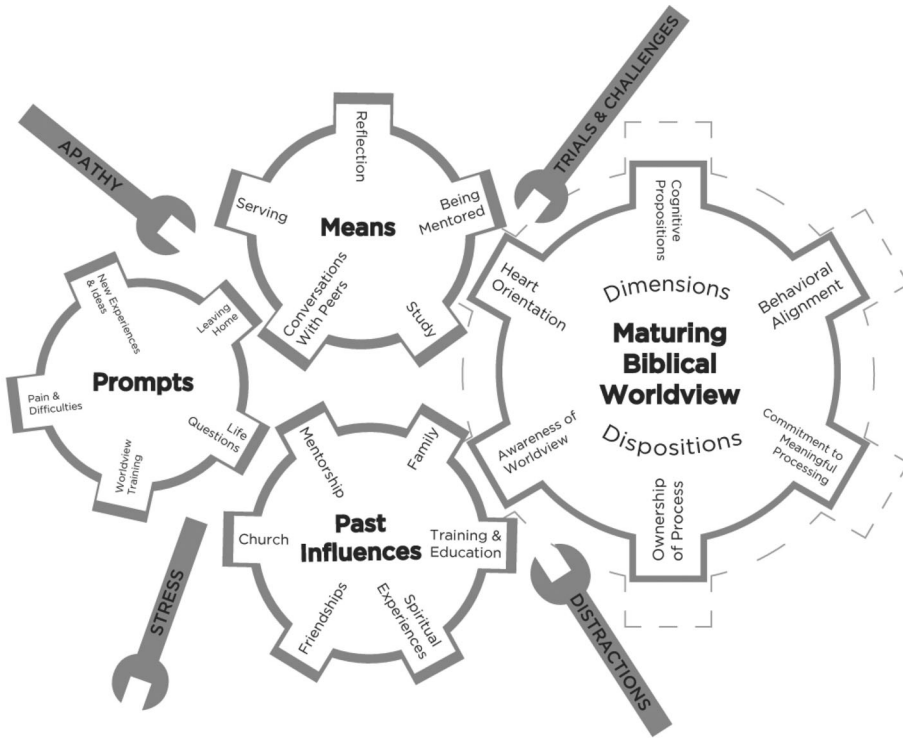


Figure 1. A model for biblical worldview development in Evangelical Christian emerging adults.

development is not tidily linear, but rather a series of inter-related experiences and actions, the graphical model needed to reflect this reality. As such, gears were chosen to represent the concepts that emerged from the data, showing both their individual components and also demonstrating how they function together as actual gears do in larger mechanical systems.

The goal of biblical worldview development in the emerging adult years is to produce a serviceable “gear” of a maturing biblical worldview, made up of Sire’s (2015) three dimensions of worldview and the three dispositions which were identified in this study. This gear (which is surrounded by a dotted line, suggesting future growth) drives future worldview development. Maturation in one’s biblical worldview is prompted by certain conditions and experiences, nurtured through effective means of processing the prompts and threatened by common derailleurs. In addition, the overall development process is influenced by experiences from childhood and adolescence.

Past influences

Participants in this study were aware of the shaping influences that preceded emerging adulthood. While they did not share identical past

experiences, a consistent profile emerged from the data. Almost universally, participants grew up in stable Christian families, were very involved in the church, had significant spiritual experiences, received biblical worldview training, enjoyed positive Christian friendships, and had multiple adult mentors.

Participants expressed a clear understanding of the impact these past influences had on their worldview development during emerging adulthood. For example, Kevin stated, “I don’t think it is possible to separate who I am today from the family that I grew up in.” Marty suggested that he is in the “hundredth percentile of kids that have been raised in [strong Christian] homes.” In speaking of his church background, Kevin also shared that “Everything I do is grounded in Evangelical Christianity... as I’ve grown up in pretty much that culture all my life.” Noting the influence of childhood and teen peers, Philip said “You become who you surround yourself with.” In speaking of her Christian school experience, Shawna said, “I can attribute... the basis of my worldview... to the education I got there... . We were taught how to recognize [a biblical worldview] in every single subject.”

Prompts

The emerging adult life-stage is replete with opportunities to see new things and be confronted with decisions for which the individual is now fully responsible. For participants in this study, these encounters with the unfamiliar became prompts, or catalysts, to process what they encountered, allowing their understanding of the world around them to be further shaped. The data suggest several common prompts for worldview development, including leaving home, encountering new experiences and ideas, engaging in worldview-related training, facing pain and difficulties, and considering big questions about life.

Participants spoke of the prompts that they experienced as emerging adults. Shae strongly believes that leaving home gave her the “freedom and ability to process through things... to figure it out on [her] own [without] the help and aid of [her] parents.” As Kevin shared about new experiences, he concluded that those experiences have impacted his development: “I think that... when you encounter something in a class, in a book, with a person where it forces you to not dwell within your own worldview, you come back to your worldview and can see it a little clearer.” Jacob also spoke of this concept, adding an element of intentionality to new experiences: “I really try to intentionally place myself in a circumstance that I’m going to be challenged to think critically.”

Means

Evangelical emerging adults with a maturing biblical worldview are not passive objects of experience; those in this study were also actors in the process of developing their worldview. Their experiences prompted them to do something with and about what they were seeing, experiencing, or feeling. Several common means of processing were suggested by the data, including conversations with peers, reflection, study, being mentored, and serving others.

Among these means, talking with peers was by far the most common and significant means of processing prompts, identified over 100 times in the data. Marshall's experience was typical: "It's those intimate times together with people. Those have become the most shaping times for me... . Yeah there might be something that happens in a chapel service or church, but in the end of the day, taking those things, getting together with people in two-three or a little bit larger small group setting and really... sharing these things and sharing life together."

Derailers

Worldview development for the Christian emerging adult is not a smooth cycle of prompts and constructive responses to prompts. Participants also identified several obstacles to worldview development. Of note, they saw the damaging influence of these obstacles in their peers who did not seem to have a well-developed biblical worldview. Four derailers (pictured as wrenches in the graphical model) surfaced in this study: apathy, stress, distractions, and trials, and challenges.

Chief of the obstacles identified by the participants was apathy, where individuals see no reason to intentionally develop their worldview. Shae termed this apathy as "contentment and laziness." In speaking of his peers at college, Mark said, "I feel like a lot of students here are very complacent... so there's no need to reflect on anything because they're not growing."

Stress was almost as significant a derailer as apathy. Thomas, a resident assistant at his college, shared this observation about his peers: "They don't know how to deal with stress, so they don't even get to the shaping of what they believe... . A lot of students just [say] 'I don't know how to deal with what's going on in life, so I don't even care about what I believe.'" Tiffany admitted to her own struggle with stress as a derailer for worldview development when she shared, "I can be very self-centered... where I don't think about [my worldview]. I'm more focused on... all these things I need to do."

Maturing biblical worldview

The aim of biblical worldview development for Evangelical Christians in the emerging adult years is not a fully-formed or complete worldview; none of the participants felt that their worldview was fully developed, and they all expressed a desire and an intention to keep growing. This dynamic growth process is represented in [Figure 1](#) by the dotted lines surrounding the gear of maturing a Biblical worldview. Cheryl shared, “I think in a general sense, my worldview is pretty developed... [but] I definitely want to continue thinking about certain things and keep reading about them.” The developmental goal, then, in emerging adulthood (as demonstrated by participants) is to exhibit a maturing biblical worldview marked by three dimensions of worldview, as identified by Sire (2015) and by possessing three core worldview dispositions, as newly identified in this study.

Sire’s three dimensions of worldview

Participants in this study exhibited all three dimensions of worldview (Sire, 2015).

Cognitive propositions. All of the participants spoke confidently about what they believed to be true in areas central to one’s worldview. For example, Marshall expressed a commitment to looking at all of history as a big God story, with major sections of that story being, “creation, fall, rescue, and restoration.” When asked what makes up her worldview, Shawna readily replied, “I think the biggest part would be... that I very strongly believe everything that’s in the Bible,” demonstrating resolute confidence that the Bible is the inspired word of God.

With their grasp of truth claims that fundamentally align with a biblical worldview, participants did not characterize their emerging adult years as a season in which they acquired much new knowledge. Instead, they viewed it as a season of deepening and expanding the things they already knew to be true. In our interview, I asked Shae how much of what she knows to be true was developed in her after the age of 18. She answered, “I would say the head knowledge... was basically 75–80% drawn out in high school and middle school... I would say for the most part, the pillars of my worldview are in place.”

Heart orientation. Of the three worldview dimensions, participants spoke most often of matters of the heart (121 occurrences in the data). Participants understood their core motivations to be related to the concept of the heart, frequently using the term heart as a synonym for the core of their being. In describing his career aspirations, Marshall summed up his

perspective by saying, “I think that may be where my heart is.” Kevin was also able to sum up his heart inclinations, even using that phrase to describe the core of his motivations: “There’s something in me that the inclination of my heart is to dig in and to know more.”

When talking about the concept of the heart, participants most commonly discussed the struggle of figuring out what a full heart commitment to Christ looks like in emerging adulthood and beyond. Cheryl confessed to struggling with a commitment to Christ during her early emerging adult years. However, she was consistently drawn toward what was right, good, and true. On her timeline, when describing her worldview development, she wrote about how reading works of classic literature such as *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Princess and Curdie*, caused her to want “desperately to be good and pure, like [their] characters.”

Behavioral alignment. The third component of worldview is that of behavioral alignment with one’s heart orientation and the cognitive propositions one holds to be true (Sire, 2015). Participants were very concerned about cultivating a lifestyle that is consistent with what they say is most important to them and what they say they believe to be true. Missy stated in her interview that “I think your actions are ... a reflection of your worldview.” This was consistent with what she wrote in her timeline about the linkage between the heart, the head, and behavior: “People make choices based off their values and those choices ... determine one’s life course.”

Participants expressed a longing for a life of consistency and integrity, where their heart, the truths they hold to be true, and their behavior all align. Joshua demonstrated an understanding of the dynamics involved in this concept when he said,

I suppress a lot of times my inner heart, because I want to do something, versus when I submit the inner heart, and I find that my heart is much more in line with the good things and the things that are truth [cognitive propositions]. When I suppress the heart, I find myself chasing after things [behaviors] that aren’t as good.

Kevin also identified value-belief-behavior alignment as a non-negotiable facet of a well-formed worldview. When he sees someone who has not “put too much work into discerning what their actions and thoughts and worldview should be by studying the word,” he concludes, “I don’t think they’ve pursued a biblical worldview.”

Three worldview dispositions

The three worldview dimensions discussed above are components of a person’s worldview. Three worldview dispositions also emerged from the

data: awareness of one's worldview, commitment to meaningful processing, and ownership of the process.

Awareness of one's worldview. Participants in this study were aware of their own worldview. David noted that he became highly aware of his worldview when he took a worldviews course during his first semester of college. As a result of that class, David stated that "things came together" for him. Similarly, Philip stated that he became aware of his worldview in the emerging adult years as a result of being in a small group at his church, where his peers consistently talked about worldview issues. This experience exposed him to the term worldview and helped him to recognize that he had a worldview and how that worldview impacted his actions. As a result, Philip stated, "I feel like I'm coming to the point where I'm going to have a very concrete idea of what my worldview is."

Commitment to meaningful processing. The second disposition of a maturing worldview is that of being committed to meaningful processing. Crystal captured the concept of commitment to meaningful processing when she said, "The reflective part of me is I just don't let go until I can find an answer to it." Others were just as tenacious. Keith related a story about thinking through and mulling over a question constantly over the course of weeks. In referring to a challenging worldview question, he said, "probably for the next week or two, just not being able to be at peace because that was always on my mind, no matter what I was doing."

Most of the participants noted that completing the timeline was relatively easy, and that both the timeline and the interview were enjoyable experiences, suggesting that they were accustomed to processing. Missy said, "I would say it [the timeline] was fairly easy because it's something I've thought about before." Marty recognized that he has entered a period of life when he is more reflective than in previous life stages. "Something's changed," he said, "and I have a different take on life, and I think it's just the season that I'm going through... being in a reflective stage where I can learn from what I'm going through."

Ownership of the process. The final disposition of a maturing worldview was ownership of the process. Participants consistently noted the importance of owning the process of pursuing further development of their worldview. Kevin had significant insight into the concept of owning the process of developing one's worldview. In his interview, he said, "If you want to help someone with their worldview development... it has to be done in a way that forces them to take responsibility for it." Jared, at 19 years old, recognized that he is in control of his own worldview development. He said, "I'm at a point in life where I'm going to process things on my own and

no one's going to be able to just tell me something is right because they say it is.”

Several participants noted the difference in their ownership of the worldview development process between when they were younger and now in emerging adulthood. Shae remarked that various trials in life “kind of helped force me to think through what I believe and actually come to my own understanding apart from just the influence of what I experienced growing up.”

Implications

Theoretical implications

The primary theoretical implication from the results of this study is that biblical worldview development is a long-term process and that process itself is in a sense a goal as well. The model derived from this study suggests that one does not actually possess a *fully-mature* biblical worldview during emerging adulthood and that a more useful and appropriate aim for the emerging adult years is to possess a *maturing* biblical worldview.

A second related theoretical implication is that while a maturing biblical worldview includes the three dimensions outlined by Sire (2015), it also includes the three dispositions identified in this study. Commitment to meaningful processing, awareness of one's worldview, and ownership of the process emerged in this study as critical dispositions that individuals with a maturing biblical worldview demonstrate.

Implications for PreK—12 Christian schools

Over the last few decades, many Christian schools have made a well-formed biblical worldview a centerpiece of their vision and mission statements and their conceptions of an ideal graduate (Schultz & Swezey, 2013). However, the model generated as a result of this study suggests that even exemplar graduates from high school do not yet possess a well-developed biblical worldview, at least in the sense that they are ready to be deployed into the world fully-formed in this regard.

Christian schools should still focus on developing a biblical worldview in their students. However, it may be wise to be more realistic in what to expect and what to promise. For instance, instead of claiming to produce graduates with a “well-formed biblical worldview,” they can make the more credible assertion that they “produce students who are well prepared for the next stage of their worldview development.” Specifically, they can aim to produce graduates who are equipped with a good understanding of the three dimensions of a biblical worldview and who are well-practiced in the

three dispositions necessary for further biblical worldview development. Working backward from that more developmentally appropriate aim, they can then choose curricula and pedagogies that are consistent with that aim.

In order to help construct a solid biblical worldview foundation, curricula in Christian schools should be overtly focused on biblical worldview integration. Every opportunity should be taken to present, explain, expand, and fortify the biblical perspective on reality, as reflected in each subject area. Beyond the actual content taught though, pedagogies should also be evaluated and aligned to support biblical worldview development and those which emphasize experience, reflection, interaction, collaboration, and the presentation should be preferred or at least used in proportional measure to less engaging pedagogies. Using such methods consistently over time can build in students a readiness to employ the more sophisticated means of processing the worldview development prompts that they will encounter in the emerging adult years.

Implications for Christian colleges and universities

When Christian emerging adults go on to higher education at Christian colleges and universities, they are in an exciting and challenging stage of their worldview development. Christian colleges should leverage the unique developmental readiness in students by providing insight into their worldview courses about how worldviews actually develop in a person, as opposed to merely presenting detailed information about a biblical worldview.

Instructors can help students to grow in the three dispositions through specific activities and assignments tailored toward such growth. Every course offered in a Christian college should have specific and intentional biblical worldview elements that require students to reflect upon, articulate, and perhaps even defend their beliefs about how a biblical worldview informs the subject matter of that specific course or discipline. Pedagogical practices of this kind can help students to become more aware of their own worldview, give them practice in meaningful processing, and also challenge them to take greater ownership for evaluating and refining their own worldview.

Mentoring was a significant means whereby participants processed their life experiences. Christian colleges should continue to give priority to outside-the-classroom interactions between professors and students, providing a context for mentoring to take place. Further, training for resident assistants could include instruction and practice in the art of mentoring, so that older, more experienced students can mentor younger students. As this study suggested, serving as a mentor was actually part of an individual's

worldview development process. By having older students intentionally mentor younger students in worldview development, a cycle of development can be created and sustained as a part of the college culture.

The emerging adult years are an ideal time for individuals to be exposed to worldviews that differ from their own, as this exposure serves as a prompt for worldview development. Christian colleges should offer ample opportunities for students to encounter alternative worldviews. This exposure can come via lectures or special events where individuals who do not espouse a biblical worldview can address students about important cultural issues, framing these issues according to their own worldview. Additionally, students can participate in service-learning experiences as part of their academic requirements in all disciplines. Service-learning has been shown to be an effective means to engage with different worldviews, aiding students' own worldview development as a result (Swaner & Erdvig, 2018).

Limitations

This study was marked by limitations which may limit the generalizability of the findings. First, though there was adequate variety among the participants in K-12 educational backgrounds, denominational affiliation, and gender, there was very little variety in ethnic background and geographical location. Additionally, only one of the participants did not attend college, a factor that likely had a significant impact on their development (Swaner, 2012). Another limitation arose from the nomination process. Three of the nominators provided a total of 12 successful nominations, meaning that over half of the participants came from only three relational networks, each of which was based in a specific organization.

Conclusion

This grounded theory study contributed the Model of Biblical Worldview Development in Evangelical Christian Emerging Adults to the literature and was the first to identify and name the three dispositions of a maturing biblical worldview: awareness of one's worldview, commitment to meaningful processing, and ownership of the worldview development process. Christians between the ages of 18 and 24 years who are known to possess a strong biblical worldview to enter emerging adulthood with positive influences from their past—influences that provide a solid basis for further worldview development. As they progress through the emerging adult years, they encounter various prompts, which cause them to employ effective means of processing those experiences, thereby evaluating and refining their worldview. As these Christian emerging adults continue to engage these prompts with effective means of processing, they deepen and expand

their biblical worldview, comprised of three dimensions and three dispositions.

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