

STUDENTS' EVANGELICAL WORLDVIEW IN PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL CONTENT
AREAS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

by

Russell Joseph Allen

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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2021

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ABSTRACT

Although much research has been conducted regarding Christian worldview in private high schools and Christian colleges, very little information exists regarding Christian worldview at public high schools. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to describe how 10 evangelical students in public high schools interpret content areas through their worldview. The study answered the following critical question: How do evangelical students in public high schools interpret content areas through their worldviews? Participants were found using criterion sampling in central Pennsylvania and document analysis, interviews, and focus groups were used to collect data. Moustakas's (1994) approach was used for data analysis, which includes epoché, horizontalization, textural and structural descriptions, and a composite description. Member checks, audits, and codebooks were used in order to ensure the trustworthiness of the study. The results of this transcendental phenomenological study showed that the participants experienced content interpretation through the themes of parallel, truth, presentation, and interpersonal relatability. While these interpretations of content were largely thoughtful and deep, students remained reluctant to express these understandings in the public school classroom. Fowler's (1981) stages of faith framework was used to reveal the theoretical implications of the study, which showed that the participants remained mostly in the synthetic-conventional and individuative-reflective stages. The study suggested that students may benefit from more worldview conversations in the classroom and that churches and parents should emphasize the presentation of content, in addition to the truth of content, as an important aspect of worldview interpretation. Further research using different demographics would be beneficial as a way to highlight potential transferability of results.

Keywords: worldview, evangelical, public high school, Christian, biblical worldview, Christian worldview, adolescent, teenager, religion, phenomenological, transcendental

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents. Thank you for always believing in me and pushing me to be my very best. You have loved me so well for so many years. I am proud to be your son.

Acknowledgments

This project has been many years in the making and there are so many people to thank. I first want to thank my students in the church youth group. You are the inspiration for this topic. My prayer is that you would grow deep in the knowledge of your faith so that you can withstand the lies of the Enemy, proclaiming the gospel boldly wherever you go. I also want to thank the staff at my church who has encouraged me in the completion of this project every step of the way. The professors at Liberty University, especially Dr. Crites, Dr. Necessary, and Dr. Swezey, provided numerous insights that were invaluable to the completion of the project – thank you. My parents and other family members were always a source of motivation and encouragement. To my wife, Lauren – thank you for loving me through the ups and downs as I completed this journey. You completed this with me and the accomplishment is ours to share. I love you, forever. And finally, my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who gives me purpose and meaning – my life and my work would be nothing without Him.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The following chapter will provide a brief background regarding the origins of a Christian worldview and the ways that it is expressed in public schools. The historical context shows that as secularization began to gain ground in public schools during the mid-19th and 20th centuries, the concept of Weltanschauung (worldview) also developed, becoming a common term for evangelicals in the late 20th century. From a social perspective, studies show that many evangelicals fear a secular indoctrination of students in public schools because many Christian students do not know how to engage content areas from a Christian perspective. Fowler's (1981) stages of faith will also be discussed as a useful theoretical framework for worldview interpretation due to its detailed emphasis on faith development. The gap in the literature section reveals that very few sources discuss the Christian worldview of students in public high schools and almost none analyze how public high school students understand their worldview in various content areas. I also will discuss how my personal biases and motivations as the researcher will interact with the study from ontological, epistemological, and axiological perspectives. Finally, problem and purpose statements will be given in addition to research questions and the significance of the study.

Background

The following paragraphs will describe the historical context of public schools and the origins of the term "worldview." It will also discuss the current social implications of worldview and religion in public schools. The section will conclude with a summary of Fowler's (1981) stages of faith theory and why the research fills a gap in the literature.

Historical Context

In the 17th and 18th centuries, American colonists saw the church and state as conjoined entities. Public school, therefore, was meant to create a homogenous nation by instilling “faith, morals, and forms of government” (Fraser, 2016, p. 9) in students. However, after the American Revolution, Americans began to emphasize freedom of religion as a deeply held value. The government severed ties with established religion, leading to a new definition for the purpose of public schools (Fraser, 2016). Horace Mann, the secretary of the Massachusetts state Board of Education in the mid-19th century, led the way in school reformation, proposing that public schools break ties with particular denominations (Justice & Macleod, 2016). While Mann’s generic Protestant foundation remained intact for several years, critics began to question why Protestantism itself should be favored over other forms of religion. As a result, religion was slowly removed from public schools in the process of secularization. In 1934, John Dewey proposed a common faith approach to public schools in which democratic ideals and ethical standards were emphasized (Fraser, 2016).

Interestingly, as secularization in public schools gained ground, so too did the idea of *Weltanschauung* (worldview). First used by 18th century philosopher Immanuel Kant and popularized by theologian James Orr in 1893, the idea of a Christian worldview began to be implemented into Christian (mostly evangelical) universities and colleges in the late 20th century (Naugle, 2002). Defined by Harris (2004) as simply a “personal theory of everything,” (p. 77) Christian worldview proponents believed that the secularization of education often promoted secular worldviews that stood at odds with Christianity. From their perspective, in order for students to avoid the blunders of secular humanism, they had to be trained from a distinctly Christian perspective.

Social Context

Public high schools in the United States today contain a diverse group of students from different backgrounds and cultural contexts that hold various worldviews. Although U.S. law prohibits the ability of public schools to advocate for a particular religious worldview, it does not prohibit students from expressing their own. Yet, the secular stance of public education is often far from neutral (MacMullen, 2007; Moffett, 2015). The ethics of secular humanism are sometimes taught with the same fervor as the religion of private institutions. It is in this sense that Dr. Michael Metarko labeled the public school system a “Trojan horse” (Gunn & Fernandez, Eds., 2012). Many evangelical Christians believe that students are unwittingly indoctrinated into a belief system that does not fit their own, leading some students to completely abandon their faith when they reach college (Dean, 2010; Moffett, 2015; Williams & Williams, 2016). MacMullen (2007) nevertheless saw hope for public schools. He pointed out that public school teachers should more freely allow the expression of student worldviews. Student faith may actually thrive when rightly applied in a secular environment.

However, Christian students in public high schools often do not know how to engage content areas from a Christian worldview (Barna, 2001; Gunn & Fernandez, 2012; Moreno-Knittel, 2012; Theron, 2009). Many students are not taught about the concept of a Christian worldview in their churches and thus lack the skills necessary for engaging in subject areas (Williams & Williams, 2016). Other students feel that their Christian faith is marginalized or frowned upon by secular teachers and a secular atmosphere, causing them to suppress their engagement from a Christian perspective and potentially experience forms of emotional stress (Brandt, Crawford, & Van Tongeren, 2017; Gun & Fernandez, Eds., 2012). For these reasons, fostering a strong Christian worldview is imperative for growing the faith of students and

teaching them how to interact in the world (Barron, 2010; Bertrand, 2007). As Theron (2009) noted, a Christian worldview also goes one step further, by calling students to be “reformers in all spheres of life” (p. 467). It is through a Christian worldview that students can not only rightly understand the world, but also possess the right mindset for changing it.

Theoretical Context

There is little information that exists regarding a specific theoretical framework for worldview understanding. Schultz and Swezey (2013) show that perhaps the best way to understand worldview is a three-dimensional concept in which propositional, behavior, and heart-orientation factors are accounted for. However, this concept is unhelpful in practicality because heart-orientation is a nearly impossible factor to measure and no studies exist that have succeeded in doing so (Schultz and Swezey, 2013). Vygotsky’s (1978) theory of social constructivism may be helpful as a paradigm for contextualizing worldview understanding. His paradigm suggested that people learn and find meaning based upon their own personal influences and “relations in the environment” (p. 51). Vygotsky’s (1978) idea fits closely with current scholarship that emphasizes the personal elements of worldview understanding (Naugle, 2012; Schultz & Swezey, 2013; Sire, 2009). Yet, a constructivist framework, while rightly including the social factors involved in a worldview, does not adequately account for the development of heartfelt faith.

For this reason, the best current theory for worldview understanding is Fowler’s (1981) six stages of faith. For Fowler (1981), faith is a “person’s or group’s way of moving into the force field of life” (p. 4). It is “our way of finding coherence in and giving meaning to the multiple forces and relations that make up our lives” (Fowler, 1981, p. 4). Interestingly, Fowler’s (1981) definition of faith sounds similar to current definitions of worldview that

include meaning, narrative, and heart-orientation elements. Fowler (1981)'s idea that faith is "awakened" (p. 25) and shaped by "images, symbols, and rituals" (p. 25) is similar to Naugle's (2012) notion that worldview creates a "symbolic universe" (p. 329).

Gap in the Literature

Very few sources discuss the Christian worldview of students in public high schools. Almost none analyze how public high school students understand their Christian worldview in various content areas. The closest research to this topic is the dissertation by Moreno-Knittel (2012) that examined how Christian students in public high schools use their worldview to deal with a secular environment. Because Moreno-Knittel (2012) focused on the social implications of students' worldviews, much more research is necessary in order to understand how evangelical students in public high schools think about academic topics from a Christian perspective and how it impacts their coursework and classroom interactions.

Situation to Self

My motivation for conducting this study derives from my own experiences. Like the participants I studied, I too was an evangelical Christian who attended a public high school. However, although identifying as evangelical, I had never heard the term "worldview" and possessed little understanding that my own religious beliefs may contradict the information that was presented to me in academic content areas. As an educator, I desire for all students to understand content through their own worldview in a way that is free of contradiction. As a student ministry director in my local church, I desire for Christian high school students to evaluate everything presented to them through a biblical lens. In order to achieve these goals, I must first understand how evangelical high school students interpret content areas from their worldview. Participants were taken from my local community in central Pennsylvania, although

personal ties to students and schools were avoided. The participants in my study were representative of the students that I work with everyday both in schools and at church.

In addition to the practical biases, I also possess a number of philosophical assumptions that are made apparent in the study. Ontologically, I believe that there is a true objective reality, yet this reality is perceived differently by different people (Sire, 2009). In this sense, I agree loosely with Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist paradigm in that people construct their own meaning from the knowledge presented to them. This does not mean that true meaning is ultimately relative but that it can be interpreted differently (even rightly or wrongly) in different contexts. For this reason, it was important to engage with participants who had similar experiences but multiple perspectives and contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Similarly, my epistemology dictates that the world can be known, and real knowledge can be acquired (Sire, 2009). In order to best understand the knowledge of others and present information (methodology), I immersed myself into the circumstances of the participants being studied (Creswell & Poth 2018). The axiological framework in this study is perhaps the most important. I recognize that everyone possesses different values, including myself, and these values shape the way that I conduct my research (Creswell & Poth 2018). As Naugle (2002) suggested, even my own definition of worldview reveals my worldview. While my personal experiences and biases were bracketed from the research as much as possible in order to understand the essence of the phenomenon, I also acknowledge that the study itself is inherently tied to myself as the "human instrument."

Problem Statement

The structure of most high schools causes students to view themselves within academic, extra-curricular, and personal domains (Moreno-Knittel, 2012; Tengler & Seifert, 2017).

Students of religious faith often struggle to integrate their beliefs within these spheres. Much of the struggle with faith integration may depend on context. Studies suggest that Christian students at public schools often hold different ethical standards than students at private, faith-based schools (Fledderjohann, 2000; Moreno-Knittel, 2012). Although the exact reason for these differences is unclear, one explanation is that students at Christian schools are presented with the wholistic integration of faith and learning (Harris, 2004). Such integration allows students to more clearly bridge the gap between Christian doctrine and everyday experiences, leading to the development of a distinctly Christian worldview.

On a fundamental level, the spiritual maturity necessary for students to possess a Christian worldview corresponds to their level of academic maturity (Thayer, 2004). A Christian worldview does not develop independently of scholastic improvement. As students increase their capacity to think critically, their ability to apply their own worldview will increase as well (Miedema, 2012). While the idea of Christian worldview education originating in colleges has transferred to Christian high schools, public high schools often struggle to encourage student worldviews and spirituality in the classroom (Miedema, 2012; Revel, 2008). Due to the historical tensions between religion and education, as well as personal experiences, many students show timidity in expressing their worldview in the public classroom (Moreno-Knittel, 2012).

Research shows that there are several benefits to emphasizing worldview education in public schools (Justice & Macleod, 2016; Moore, 2014; Valk, & Tosun, 2016). Worldviews are the comprehensive and cohesive framework from which students can think holistically about education (Miedema, 2012; Newell, 2012). Without an understanding of worldviews in the classroom, education is incomplete. However, in order to better encourage worldview education

in the classroom and also develop strong worldviews for evangelical students, educators, parents, and youth leaders must first understand the ways in which high school students think about their worldview. Therefore, the problem for this study is how evangelical students in public high schools interpret content areas through their worldview.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to describe how 10 evangelical students in public high schools interpret content areas through their worldview. “Evangelical” refers to Protestant Christians who emphasize conversion, the supremacy of the Bible, sincere dedication to God, and the centrality of Christ’s death on the cross as the atonement for sin (Bebbington, 1989). “Public high school student” refers to people in grades 9 through 12 at a non-privatized school. “Christian worldview” is defined as an application of commitments, presuppositions, assumptions, and foundations that are formulated from the Christian Bible (Sire, 2009). The theory guiding this study is Fowler’s (1978) stages of faith concept as it explains how people become cognizant of their own religious outlook in comparison to others.

Significance of the Study

Understanding how evangelical students in public high schools interpret content areas through their worldview will be beneficial to a number of groups. Public high school teachers must learn how they can more effectively foster the engagement of all student worldviews in the classroom. Doing so will lead to greater diversity and depth in the classroom (Justice & Macleod, 2016; Moore, 2014; Newell, 2012; Valk & Tosun, 2016). School administrators must learn how the public school environment is perceived by students of faith. Administrations should learn from this study how to create a more open and welcoming environment for all

students. Youth pastors and parents can learn how to more effectively teach high school students from a Christian worldview perspective in ways that are practical and useful. Similarly, professors at Christian colleges will be able to better understand the thinking of students coming from public high schools and can therefore give efficient instruction in their content area.

Empirically, the study contributes to a growing field of worldview scholarship. Several studies examine the practical worldview implications of teachers and students. Others detail worldview implementation in Christian colleges. The study broadens these areas of knowledge by detailing the interpretive phenomenon rather than simply the implications and consequences. This provides context for implication- and action-driven studies and lays the foundation for future studies. The study also focuses specifically on students in public high schools rather than private schools or colleges. It builds upon Moreno-Knittel's (2012) work that examines the worldview implications of public high school students. However, while Moreno-Knittel (2012) focused mostly on the social aspects of worldview understanding, this study focuses mostly on propositional thinking and academic aspects of worldview understanding.

From a theoretical perspective, the study sheds additional light on Fowler's (1981) stages of faith. While Fowler's (1981) stages apply to people of all faiths, the participants in this study are all evangelical Christians. The participants are also all in the same stage of life (high school). With these variables the same, a deeper analysis was able to be given to their faith development and worldview understanding. Theologians and scholars of religion will be able to better identify not only a person's faith stage but also the practical thought processes associated with it. In this sense, the study serves as a bridge between theory and practice.

Research Questions

The following research questions helped to guide the study:

Central Question: How do evangelical students in public high schools interpret content areas through their worldview?

Sub-question 1: What philosophical assumptions about content information are informed by the lived experiences of evangelical students in public high schools? As worldview scholars show, all worldviews are comprised of underlying philosophical assumptions and presuppositions (Naugle, 2002; Sire, 2009). Other studies reveal that these philosophical assumptions affect the way that people understand content areas such as science, English, and history (Chan & Wong, 2014; Hannson, 2014; Oppewal, 1985).

Sub-question 2: How do the lived experiences of evangelical students impact the way they relate the Bible to topics presented in public high school classrooms? Fowler (1981) and Naugle (2002) both included narrative as a major component of worldview understanding. Those who have strong worldviews are able to describe events, circumstances, and ideas in light of biblical language and stories.

Sub-question 3: How do evangelical students' lived experiences influence the way they comprehend the multiple worldview perspectives involved in content presentation at a public high school? According to Fowler (1981), people who are in the *individuating-reflective stage* become cognizant of their own outlook on life in comparison to others. They recognize the presence of multiple perspectives regarding an event, circumstance, or idea.

Definitions

The following terms were used throughout the study and are defined below:

1. *Evangelical* – a label for Protestant Christians who emphasize conversion, the supremacy of the Bible, sincere dedication to God, and the centrality of Christ's death on the cross as the atonement for sin (Bebbington, 1989).

2. *Worldview* – an individual “theory of everything” that includes propositional conceptions, narrative signs, and heartfelt belief (Schultz & Swezey, 2013)

Summary

Although public high schools continue to become secularized, students, teachers, and even textbook authors all interpret information through their own worldview. Many Christian institutions recognize the importance of a consistent, holistic way of viewing the world and therefore emphasize the importance of a Christian perspective. However, Christian students in public schools do not receive the same worldview-training as their private school peers. Many may not even recognize that the information they interact with in school is sometimes counter to their affirmations of faith. In order to better address the worldviews of high school students, their interpretive lens must first be understood. Using Fowler’s (1981) stages of faith as a theoretical framework, the researcher sought to describe how 10 evangelical high school students in public high schools interpreted academic content areas through their worldview.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This literature review highlights a number of current themes in scholarship as they pertain to Christian adolescents, religion in public schools, and Christian worldview. The review begins with Fowler's (1981) stages of faith theoretical framework and how this concept is the best way to understand worldview development. Christian worldview is then examined from a historical perspective, with an analysis of general definitions. The construction of worldview understanding is then synthesized using a number of current scholarly sources. Finally, the role that worldview plays in education is discussed within the context of faith-based and secular perspectives. The section concludes with why there is a need for further research in worldview understanding.

Theoretical Framework

There is little information that exists regarding a specific theoretical framework for worldview understanding. Schultz & Swezey (2013) showed that perhaps the best way to understand worldview is as a three-dimensional concept. However, their approach remains incomplete. Heart-orientation is a nearly impossible factor to measure and no studies exist that have succeeded in doing so (Beechick, 2004; Brown, 2004; Hamrick, 2005; Huffman, 2011; Morales, 2013; Shultz & Swezey, 2013; Thayer, 2004; Tripp, 1995). Vygotsky's (1978) more general framework of social constructivism may be helpful in contextualizing worldview understanding. His framework suggested that people learn and find meaning based upon their own personal influences and "relations in the environment" (p. 51). Vygotsky's (1978) idea fits closely with current scholarship that emphasizes the personal elements of worldview understanding (Naugle, 2012; Schultz & Swezey, 2013; Sire, 2009). Yet, a constructivist

framework, while rightly including the social factors involved in a worldview, does not adequately account for the development of heartfelt faith.

Some of the best efforts to understand Christian worldview formation have come within the context of curriculum and pedagogy at Christian schools (Lindemann, 2018). Studies like Lindemann's (2018) are helpful because they emphasize the developmental processes at work in worldview formation that often continue throughout one's entire life, a concept first proposed by Fowler (1981) and supported by other worldview scholars (Dockery, Thornbury, & Colson, 2002; Gibson, 2004; Percy, 2004; Phillips, Brown, & Stonestreet, 2008). Other recent studies, such as Ignelzi's (2000), have affirmed this perspective, albeit from a secular position. Meaning-making is a developmental process that "accounts for the variety of changes humans go through" (Ignelzi, 2000, p. 7). Similarly, Koltoko-Rivera (2004) and Lindemann (2018) noted that a person's worldview is a socio-psychological process that can change depending on their intellectual, social, cognitive, and moral development. However, Koltoko-Rivera (2004), Lindemann (2018, and Ignelzi's (2000) studies are not sufficient theoretical frameworks because Lindemann (2018) assumes content instruction from a Christian school or curriculum and Ignelzi (2000) and Koltoko-Rivera (2004) do not consider the worldview implications of a heartfelt faith.

Two promising, albeit incomplete, frameworks for religious development came from Peacocke and Wilson (Overman & Johnson, 2003) and Gibson (2004). Both studies posited 4 stages of development. However, these theories differ from Lindemann's (2018) because they do not connect worldview with specific cognitive processes. Instead, Peacocke and Wilson's (Overman & Johnson, 2003) and Gibson's (2004) concepts are more similar to Fowler's (1981) because they highlight developmental stages. However, while Gibson (2004) deals with the overarching idea of Christian maturity, Peacocke and Wilson's (Overman & Johnson, 2003)

stages are directly related to worldview. Gibson (2004) includes worldview development as the third step in Christian maturity, just before a Kingdom-centered commitment to God's glory. Peacocke and Wilson (Overman & Johnson, 2003), on the other hand, focus directly on worldview development itself. It is therefore possible to synthesize each of these studies together, with Peacocke and Wilson's stages fitting within Gibson's (2004) broader framework. Although Gibson's model is insightful, it does not provide the depth of worldview understanding that Peacocke and Wilson's (Overman & Johnson, 2003) study does.

In Peacocke and Wilson's (Overman & Johnson, 2003) first stage of worldview development, individuals are "influenced" (Overman & Johnson, 2003, p. 30) by the worldview of others. Opinions are shaped by the ideas of others rather than personal conviction. People in this stage are generally unable to describe what they believe and why they believe it. In the second stage, people are "intercepted" (Overman & Johnson, 2003, p. 30). Although the term itself is unexplained by Overman and Johnson (2003), this stage is where individuals assent to a particular worldview. In a Christian understanding, people in this stage make a personal confession of faith and commit their lives to follow Christ. However, Overman and Johnson (2003) make clear that this stage does not negate outside influence from competing worldviews. A personal faith may include incoherent aspects of an overarching worldview.

The third stage proposed by Peacocke and Wilson and expounded upon by Overman and Johnson (2003) is "integration" (p. 30). Individuals in the third stage begin to ask difficult questions about their beliefs and the beliefs of others. People not only come to understand what they believe in greater depth, but also why they believe it. Worldview inconsistencies are identified and reimagined in this stage, leading to a more coherent worldview understanding that relates to all areas of life.

The fourth and final stage is that of being an “influencer” (Overman & Johnson, 2003, p. 30). According to Peacocke and Wilson, a fully developed worldview does not end with cognitive understanding but rather practical application. Individuals in the fourth stage take action based on their worldview’s commands and implications. From a Christian perspective, this is a fulfillment of the Great Commission as people love their neighbors and bring others to an understanding of the Gospel. While Peacocke and Wilson’s (Overman & Johnson, 2003) worldview development stages are helpful, they are not thorough. The stages themselves were not published in any scholarly writings and were instead deduced from Peacocke’s personal website. Although helpful in providing context, the 4 stages are not extensive enough to form the theoretical framework for studies on worldview understanding.

For this reason, the best current theory for worldview understanding is Fowler’s (1981) 6 stages of faith. Fowler draws upon the psychological developmental tradition of Jean Piaget and Robert Kegan who sought to understand how humans create and interpret meaning throughout their lifetimes (Webb, 2009). Similar in many ways to Kegan’s 6 stages of development, Fowler moved beyond Kegan’s study of consciousness of meaning to a more specified study of consciousness of faith (Webb, 2009). For Fowler (1981), faith was a “person’s or group’s way of moving into the force field of life” (p. 4). It was “our way of finding coherence in and giving meaning to the multiple forces and relations that make up our lives” (Fowler, 1981, p. 4). Interestingly, Fowler’s (1981) definition of faith sounds similar to current definitions of worldview that include meaning, narrative, and heart-orientation elements. Fowler (1981)’s idea that faith is “awakened” (p. 25) and shaped by “images, symbols, and rituals” (p. 25) is similar to Naugle’s (2012) notion that worldview creates a “symbolic universe” (p. 329).

In his book, Fowler (1981) recognized the possibility of using the term “worldview” rather than “faith.” Although he did not expound upon his choosing of one word over the other, Fowler (1981) did state that faith seems to better connote (at least at the time) the “interrelated dimensions of human knowing, valuing, committing, and acting” (p. 92). From this statement, it seems clear that while worldview may be a suitable term, Fowler (1981) was concerned with it being perceived as only propositional thinking.

As a result, Fowler (1981) developed a generalizable structural-developmental theory of faith that took into account personal knowing and acting. From 3 to 7 years of age, humans engage in imaginative processes that are uninhibited by logical thought. They develop strong ideas of story and images that correlate to their intuitive understandings of the ultimate conditions of existence (Fowler, 1981, p. 133). In the next stage, the symbolic and narrative elements of childhood are deepened. In adolescence, people enter into the *synthetic-conventional stage* of faith in which beliefs and values are deeply felt but “tacitly held” (Fowler, 1981, p. 172). People in this stage seldom examine their views systematically and rarely analyze differences of outlook with their peers.

In late adolescence or early adulthood, people sometimes enter into the *individuating-reflective stage*. Fowler (1981) described this as a “demythologizing stage” (p. 182) in which symbols are translated into conceptual meanings. Adolescents and adults remove themselves from the meaning that faith derives from interpersonal connections and instead forge a faith identity comprised of its own boundaries. In this stage, people become aware of their own outlook in relation to others and recognize that they have a “world view” (Fowler, 1981, p. 182). Those in stage 4 often wrestle with conflicting outlooks and sometimes “overassimilate” the perspective of others into their own worldview (Fowler, 1981, p. 183). In the next stage,

symbolic power is “reunited with conceptual meanings” (Fowler, 1981, p. 197). Adults in stage 5 embrace paradox and pursue justice, with a keen awareness of the contextual differences that exist between people. Stage 6, although extremely rare, builds off of the framework of stage 5. Those in stage 6 seek an ultimate environment for all of humanity. Labeled as “Universalizers” (Fowler, 1981, p. 200), Fowler (1981) noted that people in this stage are often martyrs for humanitarian causes.

Although listed as stages, Fowler (1981) claimed that the entire process of faith development is “dynamically connected” (p. 274). Some people may be in transition between two stages and others may remain in one stage for their entire life. In relation to the worldview understanding of Christian high school students, stages 3, 4, and 5 are of particular interest. Fowler’s (1981) stages allow for deeper analysis of student thought, especially their struggles in relating their own worldview to the worldviews presented to them in content areas. It is likely that many high school students remain in transition between stage 3 and stage 4, making them aware of a Christian perspective but unsure of how to process the worldviews of other people (McDowell & Wallace, 2019).

Related Literature

Christian worldview research is a fairly new area of study. Although the concept of *Weltanschauung* (worldview) was adopted in 1893 by James Orr, the term was not popularized in the realm of education until the late 20th century (Naugle, 2002; Sire, 2015). Since the 1980’s, there has been an explosion of sources regarding the construction and application of a Christian worldview. However, most of the current literature focuses on the teaching of a Christian worldview in higher education and at private religious institutions. Therefore, in order to understand the context of worldview in public high schools, a broad examination of individual

concepts must first be made. As a result, the following section analyzes current research in the three main areas of inquiry:

1. Christian worldview
2. Christian high school students
3. Religion in public school

Christian Worldview

Religion is not only a set of culturally-influenced behaviors and doctrines, but also represents a way to view the world as a whole. The following section outlines the definition of a worldview, discusses how a Christian worldview is understood by high school students, and concludes with an examination of current studies regarding worldview education.

Worldview definition. The term *Weltanschauung* (worldview) first appeared in Prussian philosopher Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment* in 1790 (Goheen & Bartholomew, 2008; Hiebert, 2008; Naugle, 2002; Sire, 2015). Although it was used by Kant in reference to sensory perception, theologians and philosophers proceeding Kant built upon the term's implications for a person's conception of the universe (Naugle, 2002). According to Naugle (2002), the term reached a climax in the beginning of the 20th century, becoming one of the "central intellectual conceptions in contemporary thought and culture" (p. 66). The term was popularized in Christian circles by theologian James Orr in 1893, who saw benefits in viewing Christianity as an entire system. For Orr, the Christian worldview was not just a set of beliefs and presuppositions but was rooted in the person of Christ (Dockery, Thornbury, & Colson, 2002; Goheen & Bartholomew, 2008; Naugle, 2002; Sire, 2015). Gordon H. Clark and Carl F. Henry built upon Orr's work, as did Abraham Kuyper, who understood worldview as a comprehensive vision of the Christian faith (Dockery, Thornbury, & Colson, 2002; Naugle, 2002; Sire, 2015).

Despite the prevalence of the term in both the 20th and 21st centuries, worldview remains a difficult topic to define. Although it has become increasingly common in Christian schools and universities, the term itself does not appear anywhere in the Bible. Many have defined it as a set of presuppositions or assumptions guided by the Bible that inform reality (Bertrand, 2007; Carpenter, 2015; Dockery, Thornbury, & Colson, 2002; Goheen & Bartholomew, 2008; Harris, 2004; Hiebert, 2008; Lindemann, 2018; Moreland, 2017; Naugle, 2002; Palmer, 1998; Sire, 2009; Sire, 2015; Smith, 2015; Wilkens & Sanford, 2009; Williams & Williams, 2016). Daniels, Franz, and Wong (2000) created a useful visual framework for worldview in which the horizontal axis of a graph represented the metaphysical dimension of a worldview with “material and “transcendent” (p. 542) extremes. The vertical aspect of the graph represented the epistemological dimension with “subjectively known” and “objectively known” (Daniels, Franz, & Wong, 2000, p. 542) extremes. The result was four quadrants representing post-modern, mystical, modern, and theistic worldviews.

Other scholars described worldview even more simply as a “personal theory of everything” (Harris, 2004, p. 77), an “inner frame of reference” (Overman & Johnson, 2003, p. 14), or “personal story” (Schlitz, Vieten, Miller, Homer, Peterson, & Erickson-Freeman, 2011, p. 4) about reality. Olthius (1989) related worldview to a person’s “vision of life” (p. 26) that gives them direction and meaning. In contrast, Page (2009) saw a Christian worldview not as a personal theory but rather as conforming to God’s view of the world. Still other scholars have sought to emphasize the more practical, communal aspects of worldview (Baumann, 2011; Kennedy & Humphreys, 1994; Noble, 2018; Smith, 2009). Although Baumann (2011) did not dismiss the propositional nature of worldview, he nevertheless saw a detriment in framing

worldview understanding only through the analogy of a lens or eyeglass. To both he, Noble (2018), and Smith (2009), the academic, intellectual emphasis of worldview is unhelpful.

Noble (2018) asserted that when worldview is understood only from a presuppositional perspective, it “pushes us to draw hasty conclusions about actual people” (p. 51). Consequently, some scholars emphasize a focus on the cultivation of a worldview culture that is lived out through strong community (Baumann, 2011; Kennedy & Humphreys, 1994; Olthius, 1989). Similarly, Smith (2009) saw habit as the foundation of human practices and reframed Christian perspective within regular liturgical rhythms. In response to Smith (2009), Clark and Naugle (2017) sought a return to a balanced understanding of worldview and Christian behavior. All of these scholars echo foundational claims that worldview has a direct and profound effect on both psychological functioning and behavior (Kearney, 1984; Kennedy & Humphreys, 1994; Koltko-Rivera, 2004; Olthius, 1989). However, while a purely propositional concept of worldview is incomplete, so is a perspective that overemphasizes habit and culture. Instead, worldview can only be comprehended through a balanced understanding of multiple factors. Therefore, in later editions of his book, Sire (2009) added behavior, story expression, and “orientation of the heart” (p. 20) as key elements comprising the term.

In his critique of Sire’s original edition, Naugle (2002) noted that Sire’s definition of worldview is influenced by his own Christian faith, a concept that Sire himself later affirmed (Sire, 2015). According to Naugle (2002), all “models about ‘worldview’ are definitely *not* the result of presuppositionless thinking, but reflect the perspectives and interests of their originators” (p. 254). Here Naugle (2002) emphasized a specific point that underscores a much larger qualification for worldview understanding. All worldviews, including one’s own definition of worldview, is influenced by a number of factors, including culture and

socioeconomic context (Hiebert, 2008; Koltko-Rivera, 2004; MacCullough, 2016; Moffett, 2015; Naugle, 2002; Noble, 2018; Olthuis, 1989; Schlitz, Vieten, & Erickson-Freeman, 2011; Sire, 2015; Smith, 2015).

If worldview encompasses the entirety of a person's perspective, it stands to reason that everyone has a worldview and no two worldviews are ever exactly the same (Dockery, Thornbury, & Colson, 2002; Goheen & Bartholomew, 2008; MacCullough, 2016; Moffett, 2015; Nash, 1999; Noble, 2018; Sire, 2015; Smith, 2015). From an anthropological perspective, worldview is closely associated with the idea of culture. Like culture, worldview incorporates patterns of learned beliefs and behavior, providing individuals with a "way of mentally organizing the world" (Hiebert, 2008, p. 16). Each individual views the world not just through a series of intellectual assertions and presuppositions, but also from their own unique background and history. As a result, scholars often noted the variance in worldview as, at best, a reason to highlight the multifaceted nature of worldview, or at worst, reject the serious study of worldview analysis (Baumann, 2011; Clark & Naugle, 2017; Noble, 2018; Smith, 2009).

Despite the complexity and multi-faceted nature of worldview understanding, leading scholars nevertheless assert the ability to identify overarching worldview perspectives (Dockery, Thornbury, & Colson, 2002; Goheen & Bartholomew, 2008; Kearney, 1984; Moffett, 2015; Nash, 1999; Naugle, 2002; Overman & Johnson, 2003; Schultz & Swezey, 2013; Sims, 2009; Sire, 2009; Sire, 2015). Worldviews can be broadly defined even though relatively significant differences may exist within them. These overarching perspectives can be derived because all people must reconcile "worldview universals" (Hiebert, 2008, p. 19) such as causality, time, self, space, other humans, and human experiences.

Not all Christian worldviews are exactly the same because not all people are exactly the same. Christian worldviews may differ depending on one's "interpretive community" (Lindemann, 2018, p. 12). Nevertheless, they can all be identified as Christian because they assent to overarching assertions about God's ultimate redemptive plan (Goheen & Bartholomew, 2008; Moffett, 2015; Naugle, 2002; Overman & Johnson, 2003; Sire, 2009; Sire, 2015; Wilkens & Sanford, 2009). Naugle (2002) posited worldview as a "semiotic phenomenon" (p. 291) composed of narrative signs that create a symbolic universe. God's story of redemption, as outlined in the Bible, provides this series of narrative signs for a Christian worldview (Goheen & Bartholomew, 2008; MacCullough, 2016; Naugle, 2002; Overman & Johnson, 2003; Palmer, 1998; Walsh & Middleton, 1984). Naugle's (2002) narrative emphasis perhaps drew from Palmer's (1998) six-element proposition of worldview that included ideology, narrative, norm, ritual, experience, and social elements.

As a result of the inherent complexity in worldview understanding, Christian scholars have struggled to articulate how worldview fits within the notions of faith, philosophy, and theology. Fowler (1981) and Harris (2004) both understood faith as being separate but related to worldview. Naugle (2002) and Sire (2009) on the other hand, believed that a genuine worldview also expresses a genuine faith. To Olthius (1989), worldview functioned as a "medium of mediation" (p. 28) allowing for healthy reciprocity between faith and living. As he noted, "a worldview first shapes itself to faith and then shapes the world to itself" (Olthius, 1989, p. 32). Strom (2009) suggested that worldview is grounded in a personal, covenantal relationship with God that is based upon God's great care for humanity.

In independent works, Sims (2009) and Schultz and Swezey (2013) examined the inconsistencies of Christian worldview definitions by scholars and each developed a worldview

framework comprised of three parts. For Sims (2009), worldview included “a set of beliefs about life’s ultimate questions, a fundamental commitment or orientation of the heart, and a narrative structure” (p. 10). Sims’s (2009) concept was similar to other scholars who also emphasized a narrative structure in their definitions (Naugle 2002; Kennedy & Humphreys, 1994). Sims (2009) and Naugle (2002) both pointed to the biblical narrative’s fundamental aspects (creation, fall, and redemption) as the foundational way for Christians to view the world. Yet, these scholars and several others stress that worldview is not only a model for viewing the world, but also a guide for acting in it (Dockery, Thornbury, & Colson, 2002; Goheen & Bartholomew, 2008; Hiebert, 2008; Naugle, 2002; Schlitz et al., 2011; Sims, 2009). The transition from conceptualization to action, however, is an aspect of worldview that is difficult to articulate. Like Sims (2009), Schultz and Swezey (2013) and Morales (2013) sought to explain this transition by including heart-orientation as a main component of worldview, along with propositional and behavioral elements. Heart orientation is a descriptor that includes the genuineness of faith as part of worldview understanding, something that Strom (2009) and Huffman (2011) placed as the foundation of worldview formation. However, heart-orientation is an unknowable factor that is impossible to measure (Morales, 2013). For this reason, while heart-orientation may be important, it is unreliable when examining empirical worldview data.

Worldview understanding. According to Smith (2005), Christian high school students have a particularly strong desire for meaning and purpose. While the purpose of worldview is to provide coherence, ironically, students’ Christian worldviews can be unbalanced and undefined, as they focus on particular issues that matter most to them (Lindemann, 2018; MacCullough, 2016; Smith, 2015). One large implication of students’ worldview incoherence is the tendency to compartmentalize the world. A growing number of young people think about the world in

sacred and secular spheres. Religious beliefs taught in church are subconsciously separated from daily life. To many students, faith has almost no practical impact on work, school, or politics (MacCullough, 2016). Even what can be considered a mature worldview understanding by emerging Christian adults takes time to develop. A cohesive Christian worldview is developed gradually and is influenced by a number of factors, including past influences, promptings, and intentional actions (Nash, 1999).

Worldview also promotes different interpretations of content (Dockery, Thornbury, & Colson, 2002). Several studies show that information is presented differently in different contexts or when teachers hold certain beliefs (Chan & Wong, 2014; Harris, 2004; Lindemann, 2018; Oppewal, 1985; Schweber, 2006; Walker, 2004). When students do not possess a strong, theologically-based understanding of their worldview, they are more likely to absorb belief systems that are contrary to their stated faith (Harris, 2004; MacCullough, 2016; Olson, 2017; Oppewal, 1985; Williams & Williams, 2016). Olson (2017) labeled this absorption as “unconscious syncretism,” (p. 13) and suggested that it results from a cultural emphasis on tolerance as well as a lack of philosophical and theological teaching in American churches. In stressing worship and lifestyle rather than deep matters of the mind, many Christians are unequipped to identify secular worldviews proposed in a number of content areas (Chang & Wong, 2014; Olson, 2017). Without strongly held foundational beliefs, people lack the standards from which they can make rational judgements (MacCullough, 2016). As a result, students are unable to think critically about the information being presented to them, making them more susceptible to the influence of underlying unbiblical worldviews.

The content area that has received the most attention regarding worldview understanding is science. Worldview scholars are quick to point out the tendency of secular science

curriculum to present information from the perspective of scientism and philosophical naturalism (Dockery, Thornbury, & Colson, 2002; Harris, 2004; MacCullough, 2016; Moreland, 2017; Palmer, 1998; Walsh & Middleton, 1984). Many Christian students in public schools question the compatibility of evolution with biblical creationism. Some are even willing to disagree with the teacher during class (Moreno-Knittel, 2012). While evolution is an obvious area of disagreement for many Christian students, there are other areas of science, such as biology and biotechnology, that pose similar issues, challenging not just theological foundations, but the ethics built on theological foundations (Venema & Paulton, 2009).

It is the underlying worldview of many approaches to modern science that perhaps show the strongest contrast to a Christian worldview (Cobern, 1996; Dockery, Thornbury, & Colson, 2002; Hanson, 2014; Matthews, 2009; Moreland, 2017; Venema & Paulton, 2009; Wilkens & Sanford, 2009). According to Hanson (2014), there is often a difference between students' own views concerning the value of a methodological reductionist approach to understanding the universe and the view they associate with science. Science curriculum at public schools tends to be presented from a naturalistic perspective, implicitly denying the existence of a divine force that oversees or even interferes with natural laws and processes (Cobern, 1996; Dockery, Thornbury, & Colson, 2002; Hanson, 2014; Matthews, 2009; McDonald, 2009; Noebel & Edwards, 2002; Wilkens & Sanford, 2009). Even with the best intentions, a secular concept of science education seeks to highlight the "interplay between science and culture" (Matthews, 2009, p. 643). Yet even this represents a broader worldview in which religion is often synonymous with culture and science is a separate arbiter.

As a result, some students come to believe that science and faith are contradictory or incompatible. Many are quick to exchange their prior views that emphasized meaning and

purpose for scientific views that emphasize knowledge and reductionism, even though the two serve different ends (Cobern, 1996). However, as Noebel and Edwards (2002) suggested, science is a “fairly successful means to obtain knowledge about God’s design in the universe” (p. 39). A mature Christian worldview perspective will therefore affirm the benefits of science but deny its naturalistic assumptions and tendency to replace meaning and purpose (Falk, 2004; Noebel & Edwards, 2002).

Other content areas, such as English literature, receive comparatively little attention in relation to worldview. While English literature taught in public schools may have less apparent contradictions to biblical texts than science, there are nevertheless potential divergences from a Christian understanding of the world. Deconstructionism is a popular approach to literature proposed by Jacques Derrida in the late 1960’s which questions the certainty of textual interpretation (Anonby, 2009). The implications of this approach have left many philosophers and literary scholars contending that the meaning of words is ultimately unknown. As Anonby (2009) points out, theories like Deconstructionism are often hidden in secular presentations of English literature and contradict Christian perspectives. In a Christian worldview, words have meaning because God himself places a high value on words. He spoke the world into being and sent the Word to dwell among men (Anonby, 2009; Dockery, Thornbury, & Colson, 2002; Moreland, 2017). In reality, many Christians are quick to accept secular theories such as Deconstructionism without thinking through how the implications would undermine interpretations of the Bible and assertions of biblical truth (Anonby, 2009; Dockery, Thornbury, & Colson, 2002).

Similar underlying philosophies prevail in many public schools as they relate to history. Tied to literary criticism in many ways, some scholars assert that history is wholly unknowable,

a concept that directly contradicts the reality of historical events declared in scripture (Burkinshaw, 2009). Other approaches, especially those of eastern origin, view history as cyclical rather than linear in nature. In contrast, a Christian perspective asserts that history has a definite beginning and is moving towards an ultimate conclusion (Burkinshaw, 2009). The philosophy of history perhaps most prevalent in the secular realm, however, is that of Marxism. Marxism and its derivations view history solely as a power struggle between people due to economics, race, gender, or other factors (Burkinshaw, 2009). As Burkinshaw (2009) showed, a Christian worldview as it relates to history does not deny the influence of struggles for power. However, Christians also recognize a multitude of overarching factors that influence people, such as ideas and religion, that are not always tied to an acquisition of power (Burkinshaw, 2009). As with English literature, the worldview philosophies that underlie presentations of history in public schools are often accepted by students without an understanding of their origins or implications (Burkinshaw, 2009).

In order to dispel unconscious inconsistencies, Harris (2004) proposed that educators implement a critical thinking approach to worldview. According to Harris (2004), students must be taught to be “cautious, even a little skeptical about information” (p. 13). They cannot assume that the information presented to them in the classroom, or even the methodology behind it, is always consistent with their own worldview. A critical thinking approach to worldview allows students to understand the beliefs of others, reflect on their own commitments, and separate themselves from an “unthinking adherence to dogma that is indicative of authoritarianism” (Justice & Macleod, 2016, p. 132). Rather than imposing its own dogmatic system on students, a Christian worldview highlights the importance of discernment. Christian worldview proponents

urge students to test the compatibility of secular theories with the truths found in the Bible (Justice & Macleod, 2016; MacCullough, 2016; Olson, 2017; Walsh & Middleton, 1984).

Worldview education. Studies show that there is a strong connection between classroom instruction and worldview understanding (Ahs, Poulter, & Kallioniemi, 2016; Gardner, Soules, & Valk, 2017; Glanzer & Talbert, 2005; Miedema, 2012; Newell, 2012; Olson, 2017; Schlitz et al., 2011; Thayer, 2004). On a fundamental level, the spiritual maturity necessary for students to possess a Christian worldview corresponds to their level of academic and intellectual maturity (Gibson, 2004; Schlitz et al., 2011; Ter Avest, Bertram-Troost, & Miedema, 2012; Thayer, 2004). A Christian worldview does not develop independently of scholastic improvement, which often relies on life experience and intrinsic motivation (Gibson, 2004; Lindemann, 2018). As students increase their capacity to think critically, their ability to apply their own worldview will increase as well (Barron, 2010; Dockery, Thornbury, & Colson, 2002; Gibson, 2004; Miedema, 2012; Percy, 2004; Phillips, Brown, & Stonestreet, 2008; Schlitz et al., 2011; Ter Avest et al., 2012; Wilkie, 2015).

As Ter Avest, Bertram-Troost, and Miedema (2012) show, the natural exploratory nature of adolescent brain development may be harnessed by educators for the purposes of religious education. The inherent curiosity of teens perhaps allows the teaching and development of worldviews to flourish (Ter Avest et al., 2012). In addition, worldview formation is inherently tied to a number of educational issues, such as ethics, identity formation, citizenship, and understanding systemic relationships (Gardner et al., 2017; Gibson, 2004; Lindemann, 2018). More specifically, the ability to understand meaning and hold epistemological assumptions relies on reflective thinking rather than quasi-reflective or prereflective thinking (King, 2000).

Reflective thinking allows students to accept uncertainty in some areas without being immobilized by it, while still making reasonable assertions about reality (King, 2000).

The most consistent place where worldview is applied to the classroom is in Christian colleges. Many Christian educators noticed both the larger culture's and the academy's bias toward Christian truth and the necessity of combating worldly philosophies (Harris, 2004; Shantz, 2009). College is viewed by educators as an especially significant time in a young person's life, where they develop and grow their own perspective and ideas (Carpenter, 2015). Christians in particular understood the vital role that college education could play in shaping students' faith. Therefore, as *Weltanschauung* became more popular within Christian circles, Christian colleges and universities were quick to adopt the term for their educational purposes. Harris (2004), one of the leading proponents of faith and learning integration, encapsulated the sentiment of many Christian college educators by stating that "theological knowledge on the one hand and non-theological academic knowledge on the other hand need to be brought together in some coherent manner in order for the learner to have a unified understanding" (p. 24).

Generally speaking, integration refers to the "biblical-Christian metaphysical perspective on reality" (Olson, 2017, p. 239). Overman and Johnson (2003) simply define Christian worldview integration as "making the connections between the pieces of life and God's larger frame of reference" (p. 28). Proponents of faith-learning integration believe that because God is the creator of the world and upholds everything that exists, all truth comes from God, regardless of its source (Dockery, Thornbury, & Colson, 2002; Harris, 2004; Knight, 2006; MacCullough, 2013; MacCullough, 2016; Sites, 2008; Van der Walt, 2017). A non-Christian could teach content that is true and beneficial to humans as long as it does not contradict what is found in the Bible (Dockery, Thornbury, & Colson, 2002; Harris, 2004; Knight, 2006; MacCullough, 2013;

MacCullough, 2016; Sites, 2008). Therefore, Christians should be willing to read, and even embrace, curriculum materials and content that are not written explicitly from a Christian standpoint. However, according to Christian worldview integration scholars, students should have opportunities in the classroom to discuss the worldviews of curriculum authors and discern how they are similar or different from a biblical perspective (Harris, 2004; Knight, 2006; MacCullough, 2013; MacCullough, 2016; Sites, 2008).

Faith-learning integration proponents also hold that a biblical worldview is rooted in divine revelation and that the essential positions of Christianity are not affected by scientific views of the world (Dockery, Thornbury, & Colson, 2002; Harris, 2004; Knight, 2006; MacCullough, 2013; MacCullough, 2016; Olson, 2017; Sites, 2008). This position implies that the Bible is the highest authority and that science is limited in its ability to explain reality. Sites (2008) revealed that many Christian college instructors are implementing contemporary scholars' ideas of integration into their classrooms.

While the idea of Christian worldview education originating in colleges has transferred to Christian high schools, public high schools often struggle to encourage student worldviews and spirituality in the classroom (Miedema, 2012; Miedema, 2017; Revel, 2008). Due to the historical tensions between religion and education, as well as personal experiences, many students show timidity in expressing their worldview in the public classroom (Moreno-Knittel, 2012). However, research shows that there are several benefits to emphasizing worldview education in public schools (Ahs et al., 2016; Arweck & Penny, 2016; Justice & Macleod, 2016; Moore, 2014; Moyaert, 2018; Schlitz et al., 2011; Valk & Tosun, 2016).

Worldviews are the comprehensive and cohesive framework from which students can think holistically about education (Dockery, Thornbury, & Colson, 2002; Miedema, 2012;

Newell, 2012). Without an understanding of worldviews in the classroom, education is incomplete. According to Lindemann (2018) and Kavonius, Kuusisto, and Kallioneimi (2016), worldview education makes people aware of the presuppositions that they and others hold, a concept that Schlitz et al. (2011) refer to as “Worldview Literacy” (p. 5). An absence of this literacy, on the other hand, may cause internal conflict and “social bewilderment” (Lindemann, 2018, p. 14). Worldviews allow students to develop as useful citizens and teaches them how to engage in a pluralistic society by fostering empathy and understanding (Ahs et al., 2016; Gardner et al., 2017; Kavonius, Kuusisto, & Kallioniemi, 2016; McDonald, 2009; Miedema, 2012; Moore, 2014; Moyaert, 2018; Schweber, 2006). Worldview education also leads to happier and more productive classrooms (Justice & Macleod, 2016). In classrooms where worldview education is emphasized, students have more positive thoughts and attitudes towards others (Valk & Tosun, 2016).

Not only is it beneficial for students to hear about the worldview of their classmates, but it is beneficial for the teacher as well. Bidjiev, Borlakova, Klushina, Petrova, Pivnenko, Uzdenova, and Kharchenko (2017) showed that when teachers knew the worldview attitude of students, they were able to include content that was relevant to each attitude. All students have a worldview attitude that has a particular being or phenomenon at the center of it (Bidjiev et al., 2017; Carr & Mitchell, 2007; Moffett, 2015; Naugle, 2002; Sire, 2009). For some this is God, while for others it is humanity, logic, nature, or society (Bidjiev et al., 2017; Carr & Mitchell, 2007; Moffett, 2015; Naugle, 2002; Overman & Johnson, 2003; Schultz & Swezey, 2013; Sims, 2009; Sire, 2009). Although worldview education is not a central aspect of most public school curriculums, proponents of worldview literacy nevertheless assert that there are skills that can be

fostered among students to promote introspection, discernment, and critical thinking regarding worldview understanding (Schlitz et al., 2011; van der Kooij, de Ruyter, & Miedema, 2013).

In order to provide a holistic education, teachers must recognize the basic orientation of students' worldviews and develop content that both highlights and challenges their assumptions (Bidjiev et al., 2017; Lindemann, 2018; McDonald, 2009; Miedema, 2012; Miedema, 2017; Moyaert, 2018; Newell, 2012; Walker, 2004). To do this effectively, however, teachers must be trained adequately in both religious and secular worldview education (McDonald, 2009; Gardner et al., 2017; van der Kooij et al., 2013; Walker, 2004). Students can only learn beneficially from the worldview of their peers when there is strong facilitation and opportunities are presented in the classroom.

Despite the numerous benefits of worldview education, it is often unclear to what extent worldviews are presented, even in "worldview friendly" classrooms. Many of these classrooms may follow current trends that teach worldview as part of a religious studies or multicultural unit (Fraser, 2016; Justice & Macleod, 2016; Moore, 2014). A new approach to worldview education, however, highlighted in a study by Ahs, Poulter, and Kallioniemi (2016), emphasized integrative models where students could voice their own worldview when discussing various topics. Although some students who held secular worldviews expressed reservations about the extent of religious talk in the classroom, most students in this model valued the ability to learn from their peers and "encounter lived religiosity" (Ahs et al., 2016, p. 221). The integrative model allowed students to think deeply about subject matter, especially where differing worldviews appeared to contradict textbooks, and gain a better appreciation for multiple perspectives. As a result, perhaps future research should focus more on integrative models of

worldview education as well as schools that consistently emphasize student worldviews in all content areas.

Christian High School Students

Studies of Christian high school students often highlight their complexity. Barna (2001) noted that adolescents, even those concerned about their faith, are heavily influenced by their perceived identity, accomplishments, and relationships, facing many of the same struggles as their non-Christian peers (Moreno-Knittel, 2012; Tenger & Seifert, 2017; Van der Walt, 2017). They find difficulty in navigating a healthy balance between academics, extra-curricular activities, and social events. These factors make behavior sometimes unpredictable and irrational. The prevalence of social media, as well as the ability to access seemingly unlimited amounts of information via new technologies, expounds the complexity of teenagers' lives (Loubser, 2012; Van der Walt, 2017). Students can project their identity and gain knowledge immediately. However, high school students continue to lack the requisite ability to intentionally process this identity and knowledge in coherent ways. Modern teenagers have access to the world but do not maintain a consistent worldview (Loubser, 2012; Van der Walt, 2017; Wilkie, 2015).

The structure of most high schools causes students to view themselves within academic, extra-curricular, and personal domains (Moreno-Knittel, 2012; Tenger & Seifert, 2017). For many Christian students, faith is just another aspect of a compartmentalized life (Dean, 2010; Tenger & Seifert, 2017). According to the National Study of Youth and Religion, many students who identify as Christians are also beholden to a “do-good, feel-good spirituality” (Dean, 2010, p. 4) that is labeled as Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. Moralistic Therapeutic Deism's emphasis on personal happiness and kindness to fellow humans, while not always

contradicting Christianity, does not require the serious worldview considerations that Christianity has always implied (Dean, 2010; Smith, 2005).

Moralistic Therapeutic Deism's diluted version of Christianity points to a lack of theological depth as a key factor in students' faith compartmentalization. The pervasiveness of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism is also likely increased by the generic moral ideals expressed in the curriculum of public high schools (Deckman & Prud'homme, 2014; Fraser, 2016; Lindemann, 2018). Without deeply held theological convictions, students are less likely to see the claims of the Bible as all-encompassing. As a result, Christian students do not have the depth to understand the foundations of their religion and how it applies to different areas of their lives (Barna, 2001; Carpenter, 2015; Dean, 2010; Lindemann, 2018; Noebel & Edwards, 2002). For example, students raised in a Christian home may have a biblical sense of morality regarding behavior such as sex before marriage and abortion, but they do not often possess the ability to articulate why these things are wrong (Dockery, Thornbury, & Colson, 2002). According to Williams and Williams (2016), "less than ten percent of Christian teens have even a basic Biblical worldview" (p. 54). Consequently, the vast majority of Christian teens who transition into adulthood without a thoroughly biblical worldview disengage from Christianity as adults (Van der Walt, 2017).

Much of the struggle with faith integration may depend on context. Studies suggest that Christian students at public schools may hold different ethical standards than students at private, faith-based schools (Fledderjohann, 2000; Moreno-Knittel, 2012). Although the exact reason for these differences is unclear, one explanation may be that students at Christian schools are presented with the wholistic integration of faith and learning (Harris, 2004; Olson, 2017). Such integration allows students to more clearly bridge the gap between Christian doctrine and

everyday experiences. Students at Christian schools are often exposed to biblical teachings in both curricular and extra-curricular activities, making it less likely for compartmentalization to occur and more likely for moral relativism to exist (Thornbury & Colson, 2002). These struggles, even at schools where a biblical worldview is explicitly taught, point to the pervasiveness of moral relativism within society at-large (Carpenter, 2015; Dockery, Thornbury, & Colson, 2002; Wilkins & Sanford, 2009). If these differences exist among students at Christian schools, the implications for public schools are profound.

Interestingly, however, Baniszewski (2016) suggested that the differences between worldview understanding by students at Christian and non-Christian schools may be minimized as they mature. Baniszewski's (2016) research revealed no statistical significance in biblical worldview scores among graduate students at secular colleges based on their previous attendance in Christian schools. While students with a Christian school background tended to score higher in propositional aspects of a biblical worldview, the results perhaps give support to the developmental stages of worldview understanding (Baniszewski, 2016). Baniszewski's (2016) study perhaps imply that worldview development is accelerated at younger ages for students at Christian schools but becomes minimized with age. While exposure to worldview teaching seems to increase biblical worldview understanding, the extent of the teaching may be less important (Baniszewski, 2016).

While school context is one explanation for the variety and complexity of Christian high school students, another likely factor is home context. Although many people lament the apparent erosion of students' religious commitments, research shows that high school students are quick to adopt the mainline religion of their parents (Barna, 2001; Dean, 2010; Williams & Williams, 2016). Students remain open to the various religious pursuits of others, but are most

content to remain conventional (Barna, 2001; Smith, 2005). According to Strom (2009), parents are the “strongest and most determining influence” (p. 17) on the worldview of children.

However, while adopting the religion of their parents, it is also true that many parents rely on youth groups and student ministries to educate their students theologically (Dean, 2010). Despite the many successes of youth ministries in strengthening the faith of students, church leaders acknowledge that deeply rooted faith can best occur when theological education is the primary responsibility of families (Dean, 2010; McGarry, 2019). Students at public and private high schools who have committed Christian parents are most likely to possess comprehensive biblical worldviews and hold firmly to their faith throughout adulthood (Barna, 2001). However, this does not mean that biblically-based churches have no impact on students’ spiritual growth. Williams’s (2017) study suggests that some improvements to worldview understanding can be made when intentional worldview discipleship is implemented. However, the extent of improvement and feasibility of this approach is uncertain and remains minimal compared to the importance of worldview education by parents (Williams, 2017).

Religion in Public School

The history of religion in public schools is as old as the United States itself. In the 17th and 18th centuries, American colonists saw the church and state as conjoined entities. Public school, therefore, was meant to create a homogenous nation by instilling “faith, morals, and forms of government” (Fraser, 2016, p. 9) in students. However, after the American Revolution, Americans began to emphasize freedom of religion as a deeply held value. The government severed ties with established religion, leading to a new definition for the purpose of public schools (Fraser, 2016). Horace Mann, the secretary of the Massachusetts state Board of Education in the mid-19th century, led the way in school reformation (Justice & Macleod, 2016).

Mann proposed that public schools remove any commentary from required Bible reading, allowing individual denominations to teach the particulars of faith (Justice & Macleod, 2016). What would remain in the schools, Mann believed, was a generic moral foundation for a thriving democratic society (Justice & Macleod, 2016).

Throughout the years since Mann's public school reform, the role of religion remains a point of strong contention. Critics began to see that even Mann's broad Protestant foundation for education represented a favoring of one type of religion by the government over another (Justice & Macleod, 2016). Slowly, forthright religion was removed from public schools in the process of secularization (Noebel, Baldwin, & Bywater, 2007). John Dewey, considered the father of modern education, once stated that "Faith in the prayer-hearing God is an unproved and outmoded faith. There is no God and there is no soul" (Williams & Williams, 2016, p. 36). As a secular humanist who believed in Marxist ideals, Dewey sought to remove Christian morality from the schools as well as centralize them under government control (Noebel et al., 2007; Williams & Williams, 2016). However, despite the formal teaching of religion in public schools, education scholars continued to recognize the need for common forms of morality. In 1934, John Dewey proposed a "common faith" (Fraser, 2016, p.136) approach to public schools in which democratic ideals and ethical standards were emphasized, albeit within his concept of a socialist system. Many Christians viewed these changes to America's educational system as not only negative, but hostile to religion (Noebel et al., 2007). Former Director of the Humanities Program at the University of North Carolina concluded that "public schooling clearly and forcefully discourages students from thinking about the world in religious ways" (Williams & Williams, 2016, p. 48).

Today, religious proponents continue to question how democratic ideals can be taught without a biblical foundation. Many Protestant Christians worry that the removal of biblical views of the world from the public school system will give way to other pervasive views that will affect society-at-large (Justice & Macleod, 2016; Noebel et al., 2007). Recent scholarship seems to lend support to some of these fears (Moffett, 2015; Noebel et al., 2007; Schweber, 2006; Williams & Williams, 2016). Public school content, despite efforts of secularization, is far from unbiased. Individual teachers possess their own set of beliefs that influences everything from their pedagogy to day-to-day classroom operations and greatly impacts the perspective of students (Glanzer & Talbert, 2005; Nelson, 2010; Noebel et al., 2007; Revel, 2008; van der Kooij et al., 2013; Walker, 2004). Textbook examination shows that information is frequently derived from secular humanistic presuppositions (Noebel et al., 2007; Oppewal, 1985).

Curriculum content is often presented in ways that promote secular philosophies, such as multicultural universalism, existentialism, humanism, pragmatism, positivism, pluralism, and hedonism (Carpenter, 2015; Moffett, 2015; Noebel & Edwards, 2002; Noebel et al., 2007; Schweber, 2006). Many Christian scholars view each of these secular philosophies as unsuspectingly subverting the Christian worldview of students in public schools (Moffett, 2015; Noebel et al., 2007; Schweber, 2006; Williams & Williams, 2016). Existentialism elevates the importance of feelings over the soul, humanism asserts an anthropocentric view of reality, pragmatism focuses on achievement rather than understanding, positivism views theology and metaphysics as outdated, pluralism finds no ultimate unity for the human experience, and hedonism highlights the quest for personal fulfillment and pleasure (Moffett, 2015). As such, each of these philosophies runs counter to a wholistic Christian view of the world.

Some Christian students in public schools face struggles directly related to their faith. Moreno-Knittel's research (2012) included the stories of two Christian students at public high schools who had a teacher that degraded their Christian views. Other students expressed a reluctance for speaking about their views because they feared negative repercussions despite their legal right to incorporate a Christian perspective into all of their content areas (Williams & Williams, 2016). Williams and Williams' (2016) study highlighted the hostility that many Christian students face in public school classrooms. Their work encouraged parents and churches to better equip students for the secular influences in public schools and to better inform students of their legal rights to exercise their faith.

Unfortunately, the role of religion in public education continues to be ambiguous. Many teachers purposefully omit religious conversation from their classrooms (Hillier, 2014; Nelson, 2010; Noebel et al., 2007). While this may reflect a personal opposition for some, many others report being unprepared for religious conversation or uncomfortable with policies regarding religious integration. Part of this uncertainty may also stem from fear of criticism by outside sources, thus leading to job insecurity (Hillier, 2014; Nelson, 2010; Waggoner, 2013). Religious advocates may criticize teachers for inaccurate representations of their religion while non-religious advocates may criticize them for mentioning religion in a way that could be perceived as favorable. With such controversies surrounding religion in public schools, educators remain content to avoid religious discussion where it is not explicitly required in curriculum, even though it may be relevant to a particular topic (Hillier, 2014; Nelson, 2010).

Teachers who do pursue religious topics in the classroom do so in two ways. In the first way, educators teach about particular religions as part of mandated curriculum (Byrne, 2014; Hillier, 2014; Overman & Johnson, 2003). This form of religious instruction is academic rather

than devotional and aims at expanding students' understanding of religious topics (Byrne, 2014; Hillier, 2014; Waggoner, 2013). Educators are not seeking to promote a particular view but rather to inform students of a plethora of views (Byrne, 2014; Waggoner, 2013). As Feinberg and Layton (2014) noted, this type of religious education promotes autonomy in students by causing them to understand different ways of deriving "the good" (p. 4). Students are not taught what religion to believe, but they are instead taught how to think about religion (Feinberg & Layton, 2014; Waggoner, 2013). In the second way, teachers allow students to express their personal religious opinions on a topic relating to cultural diversity and provide little personal commentary (Byrne, 2014; Hillier, 2014; Nelson, 2010; Overman & Johnson, 2003). In this method, the main goal of educators is to enable religious understanding rather than control it (Byrne, 2014). Rather than learning about religions, the emphasis is instead learning from religions. Both methods reflect wider movements for religious inclusion in public schools.

For many education scholars, religious instruction plays an important role in promoting peace and tolerance (Arweck & Penny, 2016; Feinberg & Layton, 2014; Fraser, 2016; James, Schweber, Kunzman, Barton, & Logan, 2015; Justice & Macleod, 2016; Moore, 2014; Waggoner, 2013). These scholars believe that religious or worldview-based conflicts are derived not through inherent differences but rather through misunderstandings. Fraser (2016) suggested that a lack of religious literacy often leads to "prejudice and antagonism" (p. 223). Framed positively, Arweck & Penny (2016) confirmed that when students understand the complexity of religious beliefs, intolerance and prejudice are diminished. These ideas were explicitly stated in 2001 by the United Nations' International Consultative Conference on School Education in Relation to Freedom of Religion or Belief, Tolerance, and Non-discrimination (Byrne, 2014). The conference concluded that proper religious education in schools is a "vehicle for

preventative action” (Byrne, 2014, p. 40) and can be used to “counter emerging religious extremism” (Byrne, 2014, p. 40). Advocates of this form of religious education therefore seek to highlight the similarities between religions and portraying none as better or worse than another (Werther & Linville, 2012). As a result, the moral value and truth-claims of religions are not part of the religious education curriculum (Noebel et al., 2007; Werther & Linville, 2012).

In the United States, public school religious education not only seeks to prevent discrimination, but also to emphasize the American values of democracy, diversity, and cultural pluralism (Arweck & Penny, 2016; Feinberg & Layton 2014; Fraser, 2016; James et al., 2015; Justice & Macleod, 2016; Moore, 2014; Waggoner, 2013). According to Justice and Macleod (2016), public school is where future citizens can practice democratic ideals by being exposed to a wide variety of cultural and religious beliefs. As several studies suggest, religious education is most effective when students share their own beliefs and practices rather than through generic content instruction (Arweck & Penny, 2016; Justice & Macleod, 2016; Moore, 2014). In order for American democracy to work, the citizenry must be both religiously informed and religiously tolerant (Arweck & Penny, 2016; Feinberg & Layton, 2014; Fraser, 2016; James et al., 2015; Waggoner, 2013). Therefore, public schools must teach religion through the lens of multiculturalism (Feinberg & Layton 2014; Fraser, 2016; Waggoner, 2013). Similarly, Moore (2014) affirmed a religious studies approach in public schools that has the aim of “deepening understanding about religious diversity and the roles that religion plays in political, economic, and cultural life across time” (p. 65).

Although laudable in many ways, both a multicultural and religious studies approach to religion brings its own set of assumptions (Lundie & Conroy, 2016; Noebel et al., 2007). Scholars who advocate for these approaches are quick to caution against the presentation of

beliefs that “advocate the exclusion or persecution of others” (Justice & Macleod, 2016, p. 5) and hold that “they are right and everyone else is wrong” (Fraser, 2016, p. 6). Such scholars tend to view religion not as a potentially valid truth-claim, but rather as a “sophisticated social-cultural phenomenon” (Moore, 2014, p. 113). According to these scholars, in order for a set of beliefs to hold value in a public school, it must first conform to a preconceived set of democratic ideals (James et al., 2015).

The major emphasis in a secular study of religion is not the thoughtful analysis of a religion’s claims or beliefs, but instead a concentration on equity (Hovdelien, 2016). All religions must be presented equally, with no one religion being presented as more valid or truer than another. However, as Lundie and Conroy (2016) point out, it is problematic to assume that a secular presentation of religion is value-neutral. When meaning and truth are detached from the religions themselves, meaning and truth are placed in the secular presentation. This form of religious instruction has the potential to indoctrinate students in the same way that a faith-based presentation would (Lundie & Conroy, 2016; Noebel et al., 2007). Teaching students how to think about religion (or any topic) is indeed indoctrination. While all forms of indoctrination are unavoidable and not necessarily wrong, religious advocates continue to bemoan the false indoctrination of public school religious curriculums (Lundie & Conroy, 2016; Noebel et al., 2007). Carr and Mitchell (2007) and van der Kooij, de Ruyter, and Miedema (2015) showed that true character education goes beyond the simple teaching of values and cannot be detached from the truth-claims of religious worldviews. The values themselves are formed by underlying ontological beliefs, causing student worldviews to be shaped as they are taught what to value (van der Kooij, de Ruyter, & Miedema, 2015). While values are simply cognitive affirmations, character “involves the activation of knowledge and values” (Carr & Mitchell, 2007, p. 298).

Religious belief, or belief about religion, directly affects moral convictions and ethical actions (Carr & Mitchell, 2007; Lundie & Conroy, 2016).

Summary and Gap in the Literature

The literature provides a comprehensive overview of the nuances in a Christian worldview and the factors that contribute to high school students' Christian perspectives. Controversy continues to exist regarding the role of religion within public schools. Teachers and students are both often reluctant to integrate the two. Perhaps consequently, most worldview research and implementation takes place at the college level and in Christian high schools. Very few sources discuss the Christian worldview of students in public high schools. Almost none analyze how public high school students understand their Christian worldview in various content areas.

The closest research to this topic is the dissertation by Moreno-Knittel (2012) that examined how Christian students in public high schools use their worldview to deal with a secular environment. However, Moreno-Knittel (2012) approached the research from the position of a counselor rather than an administrator or teacher. Much detail is given to the social applications of a Christian worldview and very little is given to the academic applications. Much more research is necessary in order to understand how Christian students in public high schools think about academic topics from a Christian perspective and how it impacts their coursework and classroom interactions. The following research therefore builds upon the current literature, especially Moreno-Knittel's (2012) work, in order to better describe Christian worldview perspectives in relation to public high school classrooms.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The following chapter outlines the nature of the study. It first explains why a transcendental phenomenological design is appropriate for the study and then outlines the main questions guiding the study. The rationale for choosing central Pennsylvania as the site as well as for choosing criterion sampling as the sampling method for participants is detailed. Next, the procedures for the study are explained in addition to the researcher's personal role. Finally, the data collection methods of document analysis, interviews, and focus groups are explained, concluding with Moustakas's (1994) approach to data analysis and the trustworthiness and ethical considerations present in the research.

Design

The research for the design is qualitative in nature because it seeks to examine a phenomenon. Naugle (2002) stated that worldview is a "semiotic phenomenon" (p. 291), implying that people use familiar signs and symbols to make meaning of the world. The study used a transcendental phenomenological approach (Moustakas, 1994). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the goal of a phenomenological study is to find what "all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon" (p. 75). This experience can then be reduced to a "universal essence" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 75) that provides insight to a given topic. A phenomenological design is valid for the research because it sought to describe the common meaning for several individuals (10 evangelical students in public high schools) of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon (interpreting content areas through a worldview). Phenomenology, due to its emphasis on perception and experience, is inherently tied to the idea of worldview because worldviews themselves are perceptions of reality informed by a number of

factors (Bertrand, 2007; Harris, 2004; Hiebert, 2008; Noble, 2018; Overman & Johnson, 2003; Sire, 2015). A transcendental approach was used because my own biases and perspectives needed to be bracketed out of the study in order to arrive at the true essence of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

The specific transcendental phenomenological design that was used in this study is Moustakas's (1994) approach. Moustakas's (1994) situated his outline of transcendental phenomenology within its philosophical foundations. According to Moustakas (1994), transcendental phenomenology, like all phenomenological studies, seeks to explain the essence of phenomena, which are the "building blocks of human science and the basis for all knowledge" (p. 26). Like Descartes and Husserl before him, Moustakas (1994) sought to move beyond the empirical, objective notions of reality to the perceptions that lay behind them. The approach was labeled transcendental because it capitalizes on this philosophical assumption by analyzing phenomena from a fresh perspective, "as if for the first time" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34). Similarly, Moustakas's (1994) approach is a phenomenology because it only examines the appearance of objects according to one's consciousness. As a result, understanding phenomena is as much about analyzing a subject as it is analyzing an object. For this reason, Moustakas (1994) was able to claim that from a phenomenological perspective, "whether the object actually exists or not makes no difference at all" (p. 50). It is the relationship between the subject and perceived object, and the subsequent experience of this relationship, that was the focus for Moustakas (1994). As it relates to this study, the students' perception and application of their own Christian worldview is itself the phenomena. Put another way, their understanding of worldview revealed their actual worldview as it relates to lived experiences. Worldview understandings and definitions are formed by worldviews (Naugle, 2002).

Moustakas's (1994) approach was used in the study because it is a scientific, logical procedure for explaining the essence of a phenomenon. The study followed Moustakas's data collection and analysis procedures in order to explain worldview phenomena in high school students. The processes of epoché helped me set aside my personal biases and preconceived knowledge (Moustakas, 1994). Document analysis, interviews, and focus groups were used in the study in order to highlight the phenomenon from the participants' perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). The process of horizontalization allowed me to note key statements made by the participants, and through imaginative variation I was able to analyze the contextual factors as well as the happening of experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Finally, the structural and textural descriptions were combined into a composite description in which the essence and meaning of the experience was explained (Moustakas, 1994).

Research Questions

The following research questions helped to guide the study:

Central Question: How do evangelical students in public high schools interpret content areas through their worldview?

RQ1: What philosophical assumptions about content information are informed by the lived experiences of evangelical students in public high schools?

RQ2: How do the lived experiences of evangelical students impact the way they relate the Bible to topics presented in public high school classrooms?

RQ3: How do evangelical students' lived experiences influence the way they comprehend the multiple worldview perspectives involved in content presentation at a public high school?

Setting

The sites chosen for the study were River Valley High School, Cumberland High School, Rothburg High School, and Downey Hill High School. All of these schools are large public schools in central Pennsylvania. Closely approximated, each of these schools is located outside of a large city. Almost 95% of people in these school districts are white with 1% being black. Most families are upper-middle-class with 37% of households making more than \$100K per year. A large number of people, regardless of their demographic, profess an evangelical Christian faith. Almost 75% of Pennsylvania residents identify as Christians, 20% of whom are evangelical. The presence of highly attended evangelical churches in central Pennsylvania indicates that the number of evangelicals may be even higher in the school districts selected for the study. Consequently, these sites were selected for their high population of evangelical Christians and close proximity to myself as the researcher. The high population of evangelical Christians provided depth to the population pool, allowing me to select the participants most suitable for the study. The close proximity of the site allowed me to easily gather data from the participants and provided more opportunities for interaction with them.

Participants

The participants in the study were 10 evangelical students that attended four different public high schools near the same geographic location. All 10 of these students participated in the document analysis and interviews. Five of them participated in the focus group. Purposive sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018) was used in the study because the participants needed to meet the qualifications of the study (evangelical high school students at public schools). According to Creswell and Poth (2018) the best type of purposive sampling for phenomenological studies is criterion sampling. As part of the criterion sampling, students were chosen based on the

recommendation of local youth pastors at evangelical churches. The recommendations took into consideration high involvement in church activities, demonstrated willingness to grow in biblical knowledge, and genuine passion for their Christian convictions. The pastoral recommendations helped to ensure that each of the participants has a genuine evangelical faith and identifies as an evangelical Christian. After purposive sampling was completed, consent forms were sent to the guardians of the potential participants. The guardians signed the consent forms and students signed the assent forms before they became participants in the study. There were four females and six males selected as participants in the study. All of the students were from white middle-class evangelical Christian families. Andrea is a sophomore from River Valley High School, Chelsea is a junior at River Valley High School, Megan is a junior at Cumberland High School, Kyle is a senior at Cumberland High School, Reed is a junior at Cumberland High School, Eve is a sophomore at Rothburg High School, Tim is a senior at Rothburg High School, Landon is a Junior at Rothburg High School, Travis is a senior at Downey Hill High School, and Blake is a senior at Downey Hill High School. All participants were under 18 years old during the data collection.

Procedures

Before beginning the study, I received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval through Liberty University. An application was sent to Liberty's IRB committee detailing the methods, procedures, and participants of the study as well as any potential risks of the study. After receiving IRB approval, I contacted local evangelical churches in central Pennsylvania to receive participant recommendations from pastors. Pastors were asked to provide contact information for students who attend public high schools and exhibit a genuine Christian faith. From the list of recommendations, I contacted the students and their families to discuss their

potential participation in the study. Assent and consent forms were given to the parents and students, respectively. After 12 participants agreed to the study, I began data collection. Although the target number of participants for the study was 10, I purposefully recruited more than the needed number in order to account for attrition and offset any unusable data. Two participants left the study before completion, leaving 10 that finished. Document analysis, interviews, and focus groups were used to collect data from the participants. An audit trail was maintained throughout the process, in which I kept a chronological record of events and a description of my logical processes. All sessions with individuals were audio recorded and the focus group was video audio recorded for later transcription. The video audio allowed me to identify more easily which participant was speaking. Moustakas's (1994) method was used for data analysis.

The Researcher's Role

The researcher for the study is Russell Allen. As the researcher, I am also the "human instrument" in the study. This means that my own perspective plays an integral role in the interpretation of the phenomenon. Moustakas's (1994) transcendental phenomenological approach was used in this study, making it necessary for me to engage in bracketing and epoche in order to remove as much of my personal bias from the study as possible. However, Moustakas (1994) recognized that this can only be done to a certain extent, as it is impossible to fully eliminate all personal bias. In my transcendental approach I recognize that despite my efforts to transcend my personal perspective, it nonetheless remains an important part of the study. Throughout my analysis of the data I considered how my own perspective may influence my interpretation of the experience. In doing so I remained honest with the readers of the study and upheld the credibility of the research.

I am currently enrolled in a Doctor of Education program at a large Christian university with an emphasis in secondary school curriculum and instruction. I am also employed at an evangelical church as the Director of Senior High Ministries. As an undergraduate student, I attended a small secular liberal arts college and majored in history. As a Christian myself, I was faced with the challenge of engaging secular class content from a Christian perspective. My idea of a Christian worldview grew exponentially as I proceeded to complete my Master's degree from a large Christian university. Together, my experiences as both an undergraduate and graduate student, as well as my current role as a church director, significantly influenced the topic of this study.

Additionally, I attended a similar high school to the participants in this study and possess a deep understanding of their context. My experiences have given me a strong Christian faith and an in-depth understanding of the Christian worldview. Although I did not have a personal relationship with any of the participants in the study, the participants live in the same geographic location as myself and it is possible that I may have indirect connections with their families or friends. While I sought to avoid directly influencing the responses of participants in the data collection phase, I attempted to ask questions based on my experience of the participants' context that allowed for clear articulation of the phenomenon. Because I was unable to fully remove my personal biases from the research, it is my hope that the biases I possess are made clear in this study and will instead aid in a deeper analysis and reflection of the data.

Data Collection

Data was collected using a number of different methods, including document analysis, interviews, and focus groups. The multitude of data sources provided triangulation, revealing corroborating evidence that aided in analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Document Analysis

Document Analysis was used for this study in order to highlight the reasoning processes behind the participants' worldviews as they related to specific content. For the intended study, I used a form of document analysis in which the participants were asked to read excerpts (provided by me) from academic public school textbooks. These excerpts were derived from different content areas, such as history, biology, health, and English, and all had strong worldview implications. The participants were then asked to analyze the documents from a Christian perspective and to talk through their reasoning orally with me. I conducted document analysis with each of the 10 participants in sessions that lasted approximately 60 minutes. The sessions were audio-recorded, and I took hand-written notes on the participants' logic and thought processes. Upon coordination with each of the participant's guardians, the document analysis for each participant took place online via Zoom due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The participants were also encouraged to make hand-written notes on the textbook excerpts that I later analyzed.

Document analysis sought to answer research Sub-Questions 1 and 2. Students with a strong Christian worldview, while not expected to use technical terminology, should be able to articulate, in their own words, the incompatibility (for example) of naturalistic views found in science textbooks or relativistic views found in English and history texts. Responses relating to these topics show an understanding of the philosophical assumptions and presuppositions related to worldview (Naugle, 2002; Sire, 2009). Additionally, careful attention was paid to how students integrated the Bible into their responses. Students with a strong Christian worldview should be able to relate the truth assertions found in academic texts to the overarching story and message of the biblical narrative (Fowler, 1981; Naugle, 2002). All audio recordings from the

document analysis were transcribed for later analysis.

Interviews

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), interviews are one of the primary sources for data collection in a qualitative study. The researcher engages with participants in a conversational manner and tries to better understand the phenomenon from the participant's perspective. In this study, I conducted one face-to-face semi-structured interview with each of the 10 participants. Interview participants were selected based on criterion sampling. The participants needed to be evangelical students at public high schools. Local pastors were asked to give suggestions for students who fit this criterion. The semi-structured interviews allowed for consistency in content but also provided room for probing and in-depth discussion. Each of the interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes and were audio recorded for later transcription and analysis. Upon coordination with each of the participant's guardians, the participants met me online via Zoom due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Zoom interviews took place in the participant's and researcher's own homes to ensure the confidentiality of the information. In each of the interviews, the following standardized open-ended questions were asked:

1. Who are you? Give a brief introduction of yourself.
2. What role does your faith play for you as a student?
3. How does your faith impact the way you understand content in class?
4. Rank each of the texts (from the document analysis) in order from most to least compatible with your faith. You may also deem some to be equal. Why did you choose this order?
5. How similar do you think textbooks at a public school are to textbooks at a Christian school? Explain.

6. What subject area or topic in school is hardest to reconcile with your faith? Why?
7. What subject area or topic in school is easiest to reconcile with your faith? Why?
8. Explain how the Bible influences your view of reality.
9. How do you think the Bible relates to what you learn in the classroom?
10. How big of an impact does the Bible have on how you respond to teacher's questions?
11. What is the role of perspective in your classes?
12. How valid do you think other students' answers are to controversial questions, such as evolution?
13. If you quoted the Bible in one of your classes, what do you think the reaction would be by the teacher and students? Why?

The first two questions build upon one another and provided an easy transition into deeper conversations. The participant began by introducing themselves and was asked to explain their faith experience and its role for them as a student. Although the participant may not have given a response related to academics, it caused them to focus their faith experience in a more refined way. The third introduction question served as the final transition between personal faith more broadly and faith as it relates to content areas, which was the focus of the interview. The third question is straight-forward and sought to answer the study's central question directly. This question revealed participants' initial understanding of the topic.

The second four questions relate to Sub-Question 1 and sought to uncover the role that philosophical assumptions play in the participants' worldviews. Worldviews are comprised of philosophical assumptions and presuppositions that greatly affect the way that people understand various content areas (Chan & Wong, 2014; Hanson, 2014; Naugle, 2002; Oppewal, 1985; Sire, 2009). Question four references the document analysis that each of the participants already

completed. In forcing students to rank the compatibility of the documents, the participants implicitly revealed how they relate the philosophical assumptions of the text's authors to their own. Question five also forced students to consider philosophical assumptions by comparing public school textbooks to Christian school textbooks. Participants not only needed to explain what is different about the books, but also why they thought these differences existed. In doing so, participants implicitly indicated their understanding of philosophical assumptions. Questions six and seven are similar because they asked students to reconcile academic subjects with their faith. In ranking the subjects, students showed what subjects and topics they believe most obviously contradict their faith. Answers to this question revealed the level in which students engaged in philosophical assumptions and which philosophical assumptions showed to be most and least obvious.

Questions eight, nine, and ten all relate to Sub-Question 2. In question eight, students were asked, in a broad sense, how the Bible influences their view of reality. Naugle (2002) and Sire (2009) both show that Christian worldviews make claims on the nature of reality based on the words of the Bible. Fowler (1981) discussed the importance of narrative as a component of worldview understanding. Question nine is an open-ended question that revealed the extent to which students understand the Bible as a larger narrative that influences their view of the world and not only individual issues. This question spoke to the interpretive lens of worldview and how the participants processed information through it (Fowler, 1981; Naugle, 2002; Sire, 2009). Question ten relates directly to question nine but goes a step further. It not only implies an interpretive lens, but also sought to answer the response or action that is given through this interpretive lens (Fowler, 1981).

Questions eleven through thirteen all relate to Sub-Question 3. According to Fowler (1981),

as people advance through the stages of faith they become more aware of their own outlook on life in comparison to others. Question eleven addresses the issue of perspectives in the classroom directly while remaining open-ended. Participants demonstrated not only who they believe give perspectives in the classroom (classmates, teachers, textbook authors, etc.) but also showed how they value each of these perspectives. Question twelve showed how students relate perspective to worldview. Perspective includes how context and experience impact a person's view, while worldview also includes truth-claims and philosophical assumptions about reality (Naugle, 2002). Question thirteen is less content-oriented than the previous questions but provided useful information about worldview perception. While earlier questions focus on the participant's worldview, question thirteen revealed how the participants believe other people perceive the participant's worldview. This question adds a layer of depth to the topic of perspective and provided more conclusive evidence regarding where the participant falls within Fowler's (1981) stages of faith.

It is important to note that within the interview the term "worldview" was not directly mentioned. This remains consistent with Fowler's (1981) focus on faith and also served as a simplification of terminology for the participants. Students revealed their worldview through the answers to the interview questions without first hearing a definition of worldview or defining it explicitly themselves. This approach also upholds Mustakas's (1994) approach to transcendental phenomenology by minimizing the use of everyday knowledge and seeking to uncover the essence of how the phenomenon is experienced without preconceived notions or biases.

Focus Group

Focus groups are another reliable source of data collection in qualitative studies (Creswell & Poth, 2018). While similar to interviews, focus groups introduce peer interaction as

another dynamic that can be useful for the researcher. In the study, I conducted one focus group comprised of five participants that lasted approximately 60 minutes. The five students selected for the focus group were taken at random from the 10 interview participants. Upon coordination with each of the participant's guardians, the participants met me online via Zoom due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Zoom session took place in the participants' and researcher's homes to help ensure the confidentiality of information. I assumed a more passive role during the focus group, allowing the participants to dialogue with one another. I asked the participants to discuss topics related to the meaning of Christian worldview, worldview perspectives, and responses to worldview engagement. Special attention was paid to areas of agreement and disagreement within the group. The entire session was videotaped for future transcription and observation. The following questions served as a guide for the focus group discussion:

1. What is the best and worst thing about being a Christian in a public school classroom?
2. Have you ever heard the term, "worldview?" What do you think it means?
3. How would you describe to a non-Christian teacher your Christian worldview?
4. How would you describe the worldview of most Christian students in public schools?
5. What are the positives and negatives of learning content at a public school?

The focus group had less structured questions than the individual interviews. Participants were asked to not only respond to the questions, but also to interact with the responses of the other participants. The questions were used to guide the discussion, but some topics in the focus group changed based on the responses. Each of the five questions for the focus group are reflective in nature and address the term "worldview" more explicitly than the interview questions.

The first question was designed to propel discussion in the group and was less focused on

specific content although responses to the question were revealing. This question resulted in answers that highlighted how evangelical students feel in the classroom and how confident they are in their worldview. The second question introduced the term “worldview” to the students for the first time. As Sire (2009) and Fowler (1981) show, a key aspect of developing a coherent worldview is being able to define a worldview. In this instance, students were not asked explicitly about their Christian worldview but were instead asked to explain the general concept. This question helped to answer Sub-Questions 1 and 3 that deal with philosophical assumptions and multiple perspectives, respectively.

The third question introduced students to the concept of a Christian worldview by asking them to explain their worldview to a non-Christian teacher. This question caused students to consider not only their own perspective, but also the perspective of a teacher who does not share their worldview. The participants’ ability to articulate their worldview to a non-Christian showed the development of their own worldview and how well they can compare their outlook on life to the outlook of others (Fowler, 1981). As such, this question incorporated Sub-Question 2, which relates to the Bible and an explicitly Christian perspective, and Sub-Question 3 which relates to multiple perspectives.

The fourth question focuses on the participants’ perception of the phenomenon in relation to their peers. This question made the topic less personal and was designed to invoke more honest answers from the participants. It was designed to elicit answers to each of the sub-questions, depending on student responses relating to philosophical assumptions, the biblical narrative, and multiple perspectives. The final question returns to the topic of school content. In considering the positives and negatives of learning content at a public school, the students were forced to explain how the underlying philosophical assumptions of some school content

contradict a Christian worldview and how this may be detrimental to faith. This question connects with Sub-Question 1 that highlights philosophical assumptions and presuppositions in relation to worldview (Naugle, 2002; Sire, 2009).

As noted, all of the data collected were transcribed and organized by data type in computer-based folders. Document analysis transcriptions were placed in a folder for each participant along with the documents that they analyzed and any notes that they recorded. Interview transcriptions were placed in a folder for each participant as well. The focus group transcription was placed in a separate folder.

Data Analysis

With each of the instruments used in data collection I followed a step-by-step process of analysis based on Moustakas's (1994) approach. Creating a process of analysis provided consistency in arriving at the results of the study. I begin with epoché for each instrument. My personal experiences and perspectives were bracketed in order to arrive at the universal essence of the phenomenon. In order to do this, I began the study by stating my own biases and personal experiences regarding the phenomenon (LeVasseur, 2003). Then, during the data collection and analysis phases, I did not interject my own interpretation into the participant responses but instead let their perspectives speak for themselves (LeVasseur, 2003). As Moustakas (1994) notes, epoché is an essential aspect of transcendental studies because the term "transcendental" means that "everything is perceived freshly, as if for the first time" (p. 34).

Throughout the entire process of analysis, I used memoing to keep track of my ideas and emerging themes (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). These memos were comments on the transcripts and participant notes that use specific words related to the thought, allowing for easy retrieval in the search bar (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). In addition, I also provided a digital audit

trail, in which the chronology of the events and my logical processes were recorded in detail (Silver & Lewins, 2014).

Document Analysis

Transcriptions of the audio recordings from the document analysis were downloaded into a computer document. Pictures of the participants' notes on the documents that they were asked to analyze were also taken. These pictures were downloaded into a computer document. I read through all of the transcriptions and participant notes multiple times before beginning horizontalization (Agar, 1980; Moustakas, 1994).

In the horizontalization phase, I highlighted significant statements in the transcripts and notes made by the participants. In order for the statements to be considered significant, they needed to relate to the participants' lived experience of the phenomenon. All of the significant statements were copied and pasted to a separate computer document. Using these statements, I created codes for recurring ideas. The codes were one or two words that captured the feeling or attitude expressed by the participant in their statement.

Interview Analysis

After each of the interviews was transcribed, all of the transcriptions were placed together into a computer document. I read through each of the transcriptions entirely several times, as suggested by Agar (1980). Next, I engaged in horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994). In this step, significant statements by the participants were highlighted in the transcriptions and the highlighted statements were then placed together in a separate computer document. Significant statements were statements that captured the participants' lived experience of how they interpret content through their worldview. From these statements I then began creating codes for the

recurring ideas found in participants' significant statements. These codes were based off of a particular feeling or attitude that the participant expressed in their statement.

Focus Group Analysis

The focus group analysis followed similar steps to the document and interview analyses. A transcription was made of the focus group video, indicating who made each statement and how other participants responded to each statement. This transcription was placed in a computer document and was read multiple times in its entirety (Agar, 1980). Horizontalization was then used to highlight significant statements made by participants in the transcript (Moustakas, 1994). Significant statements were statements that revealed the participants' lived experience of the phenomenon. Each of these highlighted statements were placed in a separate computer document. Using these statements, I created short one- or two-word codes based on recurring ideas. The codes were written in a comment next to each of the statements. Codes were based off of the participants' attitude or feeling revealed in their statement.

Instrument Synthesis Analysis

As stated above, for each of the instrument analyses I used horizontalization and coding to highlight significant statements and recurring ideas in the documents. The codes were eventually finalized into a manual digital-based codebook that noted the name of the code and description of the code (Bernard & Ryan, 2009). Using the codebook as a guide, I then developed themes based on recurring ideas. Themes are a foundational aspect of phenomenological studies because they begin to describe the common experience of the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Based on the themes and list of significant statements, textural and structural descriptions were given to the participant's perceptions (Moustakas, 1994). Textural descriptions focused on how participants described the phenomenon. Structural statements focused on the surrounding

context of the participants and their statements (Moustakas, 1994). Finally, the textural and structural descriptions were combined in order to develop the “essential, invariant structure” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 80). This composite description emphasized the underlying structure of participant experiences by arriving at the essence of the phenomenon.

When the analysis was completed, I used member checks to assess the credibility of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The analysis was presented to each of the participants and they were allowed to comment on how accurately they were represented in the study. If a participant felt that they were misunderstood, the data was reexamined.

Trustworthiness

Ensuring the credibility, dependability, and transferability of the research is an important part of qualitative studies. Special steps must be taken by the researcher to make sure that data and analysis is accurate. In order to aid in the trustworthiness of the study, I used a number of methods, including member checks, an audit, and a codebook. Each of these three methods examines trustworthiness from a different perspective, allowing for triangulation.

Credibility

Lincoln and Guba (1985) note that credibility is an essential aspect of establishing the trustworthiness of a study. Credibility is parallel to the concept of internal validity and seeks to establish credibility “in the eyes of the information sources” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 213). In establishing credibility internally, the source can then be found credible by the readers of the study (Bazeley, 2013). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), member checks are “the most critical technique for establishing credibility” (p. 314). A member check is when the researcher takes his analysis and interpretations back to the participants so that they can judge the accuracy of the account (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Member checks ensure the accuracy of the study

from the perspective of the participants. For the study, I allowed each of the participants to read and review the researcher's analysis of students' Christian worldview engagement with academic content in public schools. If participants felt that they were misunderstood or misrepresented in the results, I re-examined the data.

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability and confirmability are the qualitative equivalents of reliability and ensure the consistency of results in the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Dependability helps to provide an "external check" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 323) on the steps taken regarding trustworthiness. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the best method for establishing dependability and confirmability is using an audit. An audit ensures the accuracy of the study by outlining the record of events and logical processes of the researcher (Silver & Lewins, 2014). This is useful because it provides verification for the methodology and insight regarding the development of the analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In the intended study, I kept a digital audit trail throughout the research process (Silver & Lewins, 2014). This audit trail included a chronological record of the events as well as a description of the logical processes I developed.

Transferability

Transferability is the extent to which a study can be generalized in similar contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). When a study has transferability, the hypothesis or conclusion of the research can theoretically be applied to a similar situation. Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe transferability in terms of "fittingness" (p. 124). Transferability is important because it ensures that the setting, processes, and other key factors in the study are presented accurately and could be repeated without error in a comparable setting. One of the best methods for obtaining transferability is through the use of a codebook, which establishes the accuracy of the study from

the perspective of the researcher (Bernard & Ryan, 2009). A codebook allows the researcher to organize codes and distinguish between boundaries, letting themes naturally develop (Bernard & Ryan, 2009; Creswell & Poth, 2018). For the study, I used a manual digital-based coding method. Transcriptions and documents were examined, and codes were established that corresponded to certain segments of the data. Definitions were given to each of the codes, providing for greater consistency in their application.

Ethical Considerations

The intended study includes several potential ethical concerns that must be addressed. Based on the data that was collected, the findings of the study could portray some participants in a negative light. Therefore, pseudonyms were used for all participants and other names that could be easily-identifiable. Secondly, the data may contain sensitive and private information, especially as student participants shared their experiences and struggles in the public school environment. The data and materials were consequently stored in a secure location and will remain there for the duration of five years. After five years, all of the data will be deleted. Lastly, to help prevent students from feeling pressured to participate in the study due to their pastor's recommendations, I designed a clear consent and assent form for both students and parents to assure students that their participation is voluntary.

Summary

A transcendental phenomenological design was used for this study. Each of the research questions was answered in the data collection stage of the research in order to arrive at the universal essence of the phenomenon. The participants in the study were 10 evangelical students from public high schools in central Pennsylvania. Criterion sampling was used in order to meet the requirements of the shared phenomenon. Although I possess a number of experiences and

biases that could influence the study, I attempted to bracket out my biases in order to better understand the lived experiences of the participants. Data was collected using document analysis, a unique method in which participants orally analyze textbook excerpts. Interviews and a focus group were also used as part of data collection. Moustakas's (1994) approach to data analysis was then implemented in order to arrive at the essence of the phenomenon. Throughout the process, triangulation was used for data collection and to ensure trustworthiness of the results. Member checks, audits, and codebooks checked for trustworthiness from multiple sources. Finally, ethical implications were considered during the study so that identities and information were adequately protected.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

After collecting data through document analysis, interviews, and a focus group, the data was analyzed using Moustakas's (1994) approach. The participants are described in detail and the results of the analysis are given. Through the processes of epoché and horizontalization, codes were given to significant statements by the participants. The codes were then used to create four themes: *parallel*, *truth*, *presentation*, and *interpersonal relatability*. The themes are used to answer the central question and three sub-questions of the study. A textual statement was created based on the themes and sub-question answers and, through imaginative variation, a structural statement was formed. The textual and structural statements were combined to develop a composite description, which explains the essence of the phenomenon.

Participants

Ten evangelical Christians from four public high schools in central Pennsylvania participated in the study. All four schools are in the suburbs outside of a large city and have similar demographics. The majority of the students, and all of the participants, are white and middle class. The schools range in size from moderate to large. Downey Hill High School is the smallest, with just over 1,000 students and Cumberland High School is the largest, with over 2,500. Of the 10 participants in the study, four were girls and six were boys.

Andrea

Andrea is a sophomore at River Valley High School where she plays field hockey and runs track. She is also on her school's debate team and participates in the Science Olympiad. Andrea attends church regularly, serving as a volunteer teacher in the children's ministry, and has a leadership role in her youth group. In the document analysis and interview, Andrea

showed that she is intelligent and humble. She supremely values her Christian faith and is eager to express it however she can. Andrea noted how she sees the non-Christian influence of content in the classroom but remains committed to her Christian perspective and being a good example to others.

Chelsea

Chelsea is a junior at River Valley High School in central Pennsylvania and is the vice-president of her student council. She enjoys both club and school swimming and is involved in several honor societies. Outside of school, Chelsea works as a lifeguard and is actively involved in her church's youth group in addition to the Christian club, YoungLife. In the document analysis, interview, and focus group, Chelsea revealed herself as a deep and thoughtful thinker. She easily made connections between public school content and her Christian faith. She also recognized how her own view of the Bible impacted her perspective on a variety of topics, such as evolution and the government's role in LGBTQ issues. Chelsea expressed how the Bible teaches her right from wrong and gives meaning to her life. While she believed in the separation of church and state, she did affirm the benefits of having students share their own views and perspectives in the public school classroom.

Megan

Megan is a junior at Cumberland High school where she plays on the girl's lacrosse team. She is actively involved in her church youth group and started her own small group for people interested in deepening their relationship with Christ. Megan's passion for her Christian faith has also led her to create a YouTube channel, where she posts videos to inspire people and lead them to know their worth through God. In the document analysis, interview, and focus group, Megan presented herself as someone deeply committed to her faith and eager to tell others about

Christianity. In fact, she recalled an instance where she confronted a teacher about his inaccurate portrayal of the religion. Megan easily related public school content to her own Christian worldview and was quick to note her trust in the truthfulness of the Bible. She also recognized the different perspectives of her peers, affirming that their experiences and backgrounds all contributed to how they saw the world.

Kyle

Kyle is a senior at Cumberland High School and is involved in a number of programs, including the musical, choir, band, an a capella group, and marching band. Kyle regularly attends his church and is actively involved in the Christian club, YoungLife. He spends much of his time with church friends during the week as well as on church retreats and other youth group events. In the document analysis, interview, and focus group, Kyle revealed himself as a deeply faithful and knowledgeable Christian. He not only made biblical references throughout his interactions, but also spoke lengthily about the state of society and the ways in which contemporary culture strays from biblical principles. Kyle readily labeled specific worldview perspectives and gave complex answers about how they were different than his own Christian perspective. His responses highlighted his focus on the spiritual realities at work in the world and how “worldly” forces are constantly trying to work against the good word of God.

Reed

Reed is a junior at Cumberland High School where he participates in soccer, plays clarinet, and sings in the choir. Outside of church, Reed attends church regularly and is actively involved in the Christian club, YoungLife. In the document analysis and interview, Reed showed a strong Christian understanding and dedication to biblical truth. He was quick to point out contradictions between content information and Bible passages, noting that the Bible is his

highest authority. Yet even with his high estimation of the Bible, Reed still acknowledged the different views of his peers in the classroom and expressed a desire to hear their opinions.

Eve

Eve is a sophomore at Rothburg High School where she is involved in the orchestra as well as speech and debate team. She is actively involved at her church, serving in the nursery and with elementary students on Sundays. She helps lead a group of sixth grade girls in her youth group and plays multiple instruments for her church worship team. Like many of the other participants, Eve's dedication to the Christian faith was apparent in her responses. The document analysis, interview, and focus group revealed Eve as intelligent and confident in her convictions. Eve especially showed a thoughtfulness in how she represented her Christian faith to others. She expressed a desire to share her faith and answer any questions that her peers might have. It was apparent that Eve thrived in one-on-one conversations about the deep elements of religion and life.

Tim

Tim is a senior at Rothburg High School where he is the captain of the Quiz Bowl team. He is also the co-founder and co-anchor of a local sports podcast. Tim is actively involved in his church youth group and helps to lead a small group of eighth grade boys. The document analysis and interview revealed Tim as a very intelligent and well-reasoned thinker who cares deeply about his Christian faith. Tim, more than many others, highlighted the nuances involved in the Christian worldview as it relates to public school content. He was keenly aware of various perspectives in the classroom and noted how these perspectives could easily deceive Christians who did not have a rooted faith. Like other participants, Tim desired to be a good Christian

witness to his classmates. His deepest desire was to not only think like a Christian, but to act like one too.

Landon

Landon is a junior at Rothburg High School where he is involved in the ultimate frisbee club. Landon regularly leads worship for his church on Sunday mornings and consistently attends youth group events, even helping to disciple a small group of middle school students. The document analysis, interview, and focus group showed that Landon has a genuine love for God and thinks deeply about the implications of his faith. In his responses, Landon was especially quick to relate topics to the gospel message and the overarching narrative of the Bible. Landon also recognized the multiple perspectives and agendas that often influence public school content. He expressed a willingness to respectfully hear and understand other's opinions while still remaining grounded in the truthfulness of God's word. Landon acknowledged the Holy Spirit's work in his life to both reveal truth and guide his actions.

Travis

Travis is a senior at Downey Hill High School. While he is not involved in any school activities, Travis regularly attends church where his dad is a pastor. The document analysis and interview revealed Travis to be a sharp thinker who is firmly committed to the values of his Christian faith. Travis reasoned through presentations of content from his Christian perspective and showed an ability to simplify complex ideas in a practical way. He also exhibited a unique ability and willingness to empathize with the perspective of his classmates by discussing content from their point of view. Despite Travis's knowledge and biblical proficiency, he was quick to acknowledge his own limitations and reliance on God to work through him.

Blake

Blake is a senior at Downey Hill High School where he plays volleyball. Blake is actively involved at the church where his father pastors. He serves as the tech leader for his youth group and coordinated a large summer mission trip. The document analysis and interview showed that Blake is a deep, careful, and critical thinker who is firmly grounded in his Christian faith. More than any other participant, Blake was keenly aware of the ways that public school content was biased or framed. He was quick to point out the agenda-driven perspectives that are often present in curriculums and textbooks. In spite of these opposing perspectives, Blake expressed a desire to remain true to the Bible and the values espoused in his faith. He appreciated the ability to hear varying opinions in the classroom and hoped he could be a good Christian example to his peers.

Results

After data was collected from the 10 participants through document analysis, interviews, and a focus group, the data was analyzed using Moustakas's (1994) approach. Through epoché, I limited my personal biases and experiences from the data, examining participant statements in their own terms. Codes were given to significant statements that later contributed to the development of four major themes: Interpersonal relatability, parallel, truth, and presentation. From these themes, textual and structural statements were created, leading to a composite description for the essence of the phenomenon. The themes and composite description can be used to answer the research questions posed at the beginning of the study.

Theme Development

Themes were developed through the analysis process described by Moustakas (1994). After all data was transcribed, each transcription was read thoroughly multiple times to identify

significant statements pertaining to the participant's experience (Agar, 1980). This process was referred to by Moustakas (1994) as horizontalization, in which "horizons" (p. 97) remain after irrelevant data is discarded. Although not all statements deemed as significant pertained to a specific research question, if a statement did directly relate to one of the research questions, it was color-coded. All statements identified as significant were then copied and pasted from the transcript into another document. This new document contained the horizons. As part of the auditing process, I made comments on each statement in this document, recording my initial thoughts about the participants' similar concepts or thought processes.

As a first step in the development of broader themes, codes were created based on initial similarities between statements. These codes were recorded in a codebook and given definitions so that they could be referenced and applied consistently (Bernard & Ryan, 2009). Overall, 11 codes were created to describe the content of each statement as it pertained to the participant's lived experience. The code, *definition* was used for any participant statement that discussed the meaning of words and how they may change based on someone's perspective. Several participants questioned definitions given by textbooks, making statements such as, "This makes me wonder if this is how I would define forgiveness" or "I was surprised they even tried to define what love is."

The code, *factual*, was used when participants made a reference to an empirical fact or truth statement about history. Examples of this code include statements such as, "I think the earth is around 10,000 years old" and "I feel like it's very factual. Just the time period. I remember gender roles – it was mostly talking about what happened then." The code, *empathy*, was used for statements pertaining to the understanding of other perspectives. Participants made statements such as, "I think it's good to see other people's viewpoints at least" and "it gives me

an idea of how the world sees Christianity,” revealing a willingness to see content from other people’s viewpoint.

The code, *limits*, was used when participants expressed that some ideas and concepts are unexplainable or are hindered by certain viewpoints. Participants commented that “science doesn’t really know everything” and noted the confined perspective that people take on certain perspectives, claiming that “they hold fast to this idea of evolution as this is the answer, this is fact, without considering anything else.” The code, *lived behavior*, was used for statements that pertained to personal morals or actions. Participants related content to moral imperatives, such as, “love your neighbors as yourself” and “my automatic biblical answer to that question would be of course this character should forgive.”

The code, *position*, was used when participants referenced a specific position or view. Sometimes these positions were referenced more broadly, such as people looking at information through a “modern lens,” while other times more narrowly, like people taking a “secular stance” or describing a teacher as “anti-Christian.” The code, *portrayal*, was used when a participant commented on how something was portrayed, whether positively or negatively. Examples of this include statements like, “they talk a lot about the history of Christianity in a negative scope” and “I feel like this just kind of painted Christianity as bad.”

The code, *cohesive*, was used when statements suggested that two potentially conflicting ideas could actually work together. Sometimes participants stated this explicitly in statements like, “science and religion can work together,” and other times more implicitly, such as when one participant said, “We don’t know that God’s timeline is the same as ours.” The code, *narrative*, was used when statements described a story or used themes to explain a general concept. Sometimes short biblical references were made by participants, like, “Jesus said, ‘let the children

come to me' and come as they are" while at other times longer explanations were given, such as explanations of the gospel message.

The code, *connection*, was used when participants connected school content to prior knowledge or experiences. Often participants mentioned the current reality of American life, such as people in America today thinking disciplining kids is "kind of rude," or that "marriage is just starting to not necessarily be as prevalent of a thing." The code, *interjection*, was used when participants referenced the vocal expression of their faith in the classroom. Examples of this include statements like, "I think I wouldn't be taken very seriously," and "sometimes the relationship is a little bit more important than proving a point in class."

After codes were created and assigned to each statement, the statements were reviewed again to find similarities between codes. Through the process of "clustering" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 97), horizons were grouped together to create themes. Although some overlap existed among the codes in relation to themes, the codes narrative and connection fit broadly under the theme of parallel. The codes definition, factual, limits, lived behavior, and cohesive, fit broadly under the theme of truth. The codes position and portrayal fit broadly under the theme of presentation. Lastly, the codes empathy and interjection fit broadly under the theme of interpersonal relatability. All four themes and supporting quotes can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1

Themes and Supporting Quotes

Theme	Supporting Quote
Parallel	“That’s like a lot of teenagers today find interest in others through physical appearance and less about their moral standpoints.”
	“I see a lot of that matching up with stuff in the Bible.”
Truth	“I don’t have as much a problem with them because these were actually things that happened. History is much more fact-driven, so I wouldn’t expect it to start dumping on Christianity.”
	“I just don’t believe that humans came from monkeys.”
Presentation	“I don’t necessarily think bringing up the financial, social, or cultural reasons for marriage – or really just the financial or social reasons are necessary in a textbook.”
	“I feel like this just kind of painted Christianity as bad, and obviously the Christian people of this time were not doing something good by driving out the nonbelievers.”
Interpersonal Relatability	“Even from a Christian perspective, it’s good to look at opposing beliefs because then – it not only tells you how to necessarily address it, but even how it applies to or how it challenges your own faith.”
	“You would probably find some common ground where you can still find a solution that you think is honoring to God and also is still taking into account the opinions of other people.”

Parallel. The first theme that emerged in understanding how evangelical students in public high schools interpret content areas through their worldview was parallel. Although this theme was seen on its own less frequently than several others, it nevertheless demonstrates an important aspect of student interpretation. In the document analysis, interviews, and focus group, participants revealed that part of their lived experience as a Christian was the ability to draw parallels between content information and other sources related to their faith.

The first way the parallel theme was expressed was through parallels to contemporary circumstances or behaviors. In several instances, participants used content from public school

textbooks to make a broader point about the state of Christians and non-Christians in society. Andrea expressed her appreciation for the way the health textbook described sacrificial love in marriage, adding, “I think this is something a lot of teenagers don’t quite understand.” Tim similarly noted that the focus on sexual attraction in relationships “is just kind of the common pattern in modern society for what love looks like.” Reed said that “That’s like a lot of teenagers today find interest in others through physical appearance and less about their moral standpoints.” Kyle went even further in both the document analysis and interview, stating that “I think the homosexual community out there often mistakes this” and “I think in today’s society, especially in the LGBTQ community, that’s just one thing I think is very misunderstood.”

When reading a history textbook on the Crusades, Landon noted how the church focused on political power but quickly saw the connection to how modern Christians “just kind of go our lives” and only “go to God when you’re in need or want something.” As a result, he and others should not “judge them too hard.” Travis also made similar ties in his interview, commenting on the Crusaders’ thirst for political power that “some Christians still act that way. Some Christians act like they’re going to take up a pitchfork and go to war if you don’t believe in what they believe in.” Landon also saw the Christian-Muslim relationship in Medieval times as a warning against generalizations. “It seemed very relatable to stuff people are protesting about right now” he noted in the document analysis. In the same section, Megan concluded that “even if you’re not a king or something, I feel like a lot of people will call themselves Christians and not even really think about it and know what it actually means to be a Christian.” In a separate analysis on the same section, Chelsea expressed an identical sentiment, stating that it “makes me think of a lot of people that I know . . . I don’t want to call them fake Christians because that’s not fair, but they go to church or something whenever it’s convenient for them.”

When analyzing how the English textbook described the main character's desire for control, Megan expressed that "today people have this desire to control everything more than ever, which I think is where a lot of anxiety and depression comes from." Noting the emotionless act of forgiveness by a character described in the English book, Chelsea added, "as Christians, we really like to take the easy way out and forgive mentally rather than emotionally because that's too much work."

The second way the theme was expressed was through parallels to the Bible. In his document analysis of an English textbook, Tim related the main character's approach to forgiveness to Jesus's idea of forgiveness:

His forgiveness flips the entire concept of Prospero's forgiveness on its ears. Because now, Jesus doesn't expect anything before he dies on the cross. He doesn't expect to get anything from people. In fact, he expects the opposite. He expects to literally pour himself out for the people he's trying to save. I mean that's his forgiveness.

In essence, Tim connects textbook content to the gospel message of salvation. In less words, Megan made the same connection, noting that "Jesus' forgiveness is free, and we did absolutely nothing to deserve it." In a shorter connection to the same story, Megan paused after reading of Prospero's mercy to note that "Jesus gives us mercy every single day."

While some parallels were made to larger biblical narratives, other parallels were made to specific biblical people or stories. Tim wrote in his notes that although women in Medieval times had little influence in the church, biblical characters like Tabitha and Mary Magdalene showed that women did deserve influence. Despite lacking a specific reference, Chelsea made the same connection, stating that it "sounds a lot like stuff from the Bible, just like how the men would go out to work where the women would stay at home" and begrudgingly admitted that

“normally the men are considered the head of the household, and I know that’s in the Bible too, which I don’t necessarily agree with.”

Tim related the bitterness of Shakespeare’s character Prospero to the Apostle Paul before he was converted. Kyle mentioned the same bitterness in his document analysis but instead related it to Cain’s jealousy of Abel, whereas Reed claimed that “Prospero is alluding to Satan.” Megan wrote a note about Prospero’s anger softening and how this reminded her of Moses talking to God on Mount Sinai. In analyzing the health textbook’s excerpt on marriage, Chelsea stated that it reminded her “of what’s in the Bible and how God says – when Jesus says that marriage is very sacred and why people marry.” She also recalled that “God calls some people to marriage, but He also doesn’t call everybody to marriage.”

In interviews, participants explicitly affirmed that their Christian faith allows them to draw parallels to both contemporary issues and the Bible. Megan noted that it was “cool to see how things of faith and things that are mentioned in the Bible kind of relate to things or the actual world and what’s actually happening in our brains.” Eve mentioned in the focus group that she had a “better understanding” of some parts of history in her classes because “I know some of these stories and I know some of this ancient history just by being a Christian.” Chelsea expressed a similar view, recollecting a teacher who used to give their class “life lessons” and how she could “see a lot of that matching up with stuff in the Bible.” Reed echoed these sentiments:

When I learn stuff in school, I think of how, if there’s a problem or dilemma, I think of how Jesus would have handled that. Like in history, they went to war all the time, but then I just think, what would Jesus do in that situation if he were in charge?

For many participants, the compatibility of public school content to their Christian faith was correlated directly with the Christian parallels they could draw from it. In ranking textbook excerpts during her interview, Megan explained:

Yeah, that [history textbook] one also just talked about Christianity more. And that's kind of why I picked that one to be number two. Number three, I picked the English one because it talks about forgiveness and mercy, which are really important in Christianity.

Travis similarly concluded that history was very compatible:

Because I think religion, whether it's Christianity, you know, Islam, like that kind of stuff, Judaism – I think all of those are part of history and I don't do a good job of making this connection myself, but I think that if you're reading something about how people acted in the past, you can relate that to faith.

The parallel theme was an integral part of how the participants experienced the interpretation of public school content through their Christian worldview. In addition to the specific instances mentioned above, the theme overlapped with all three of the other themes. Participants made both explicit and implicit parallels to contemporary and biblical topics in truth, presentation, and interpersonal relatability, but in greater levels of depth.

Truth. By far, the largest recurring theme for all participants was truth. Their focus on truth was present in all three data collection methods and was expressed in several different ways. The first way truth was expressed was through factual alignment. Participants carefully weighed whether scientific or historical “facts” presented to them in public high school content contradicted the Bible. The truth of factual alignment was particularly emphasized in conversations about science, specifically evolution. Eve stated bluntly about evolution in her

document analysis that “I know that it’s unbiblical,” but later clarified that “others say that it can be understood with the Bible.” Andrea expressed concern about the same excerpt:

I think I figured out what was bugging me about all of this. And that is that this is all presented as fact. And as I have learned in many a biology class, it’s called the theory of evolution, not just the fact of evolution.

However, she too was quick to add that “science and religion can work together.”

Like Eve and Andrea, many of the participants wrestled through the ways that the facts of evolution could be reconciled with the facts of the Bible. In her interview, Eve stated this explicitly, saying, “when I’m in a science class and we’re going through those sort of factual things, I’m always going through my mind how it fits with my faith. More so than any other subject, really.” Megan affirmed this experience in her interview:

Even though I don’t completely know what my stance is on evolution, I don’t believe everything they teach. And so, in class it honestly kind of distracts me cause I’m constantly thinking, is this right? Or is this just what he has to teach?

Exemplifying an attempt at reconciliation, Andrea noted that “We don’t exactly know that God’s timeline is the same as ours. He did say six...seven days. A day could have been a million years. Who knows?” She expressed comfort in knowing that “sciences changes” and “we’re continually learning new things.” In the same way, Megan affirmed that “the Bible also says one day to God is like, I think He said a hundred thousand years or something like that.” Kyle remarked that the earth “could have been created millions and millions of years ago” but that he didn’t think it was “part of the seven-day creation when [God] actually started putting things on the earth.” Landon recollected a passage from the book of Genesis in an attempt to reconcile the discovery of human-like fossils by biologists with what is written in the Bible. He went on to

claim that there are “at least two or three references for people being giants – real extremely tall people, where we don’t share the same human structure.” Some participants, like Chelsea, elected to not sort through the details but instead simply claimed, “I believe in evolution, but I also believe in Christianity” and that “I think you can believe in both.” After reading a passage about the evolution of primate’s brains, Eve noted that “God made us that way. We are created in the image of God.”

Of all the topics, evolution brought out the clearest statements of factual dissent, with participants making claims like, “I think that is incorrect,” “I just don’t believe that humans came from monkeys,” “it’s so contrary to biblical history,” and that science class should be taken “with a grain of salt.” Reed said bluntly about the textbook’s mention of the earth’s age, “I obviously disagree with that and agree with the Bible. I said, I don’t know how scientists have evidence for the world being this old, but the Bible says otherwise.” Andrea added in her interview, “In the Bible we’ve read the creation. It’s in Genesis. It’s all right there, so it’s very quickly – easily disproven.” Travis attempted to poke holes in the evolutionary argument by rhetorically asking, “Who created the big bang? Where does all this space come from? What is any of this?” Tim acknowledged his own propensity towards skepticism with evolution in the document analysis:

I’m more inclined to say something like, “How do we know that?” as opposed to just being like, “Oh yea. Must be true because it’s written in this book.” I just find myself being skeptical about it, and I think for good reason.

Megan similarly expressed skepticism about public school content during her interview, saying, “even environmental science where we’re learning about the rocks and how old the earth is and stuff – that’s also kind of how old is the earth? No one truly knows.” Tim also noted in his

interview that much of the conflict between science and Christianity is “deeply engrained in society” because Christians have believed certain things in the bible for hundreds of years.

The second aspect of the truth theme was morality. While participants typically related content from science to factual truth, most related content from other subjects to moral truth. When analyzing the health textbook’s advice for marriage, Eve pointed out that “as Christians we need to at least marry someone who has the same faith as us.” Megan used biblical language to say that Christians are “supposed to be equally yoked.” Landon similarly noted:

You and your spouse should be both prioritizing God. And you know your spouse doesn’t take the place of God. They are not God, but yet they are very important. And that is true. That is something you should recognize.

Eve also changed the textbook’s statement that “When you love someone, his or her well-being becomes as important to you as your own” to “As a Christian, the other person’s well-being should mean even *more* [emphasis added] than your own.”

Participants saw history through a moral lens as well. Andrea commented on the Medieval Crusades:

The solution to this would be to love and let God do the work instead of taking it into the hands of the people and just driving them out, because they’re still people and they should have the chance to come to Christianity.

Landon remarked about the Crusades that “this is pretty messed up” and added about the gender roles of men and women during the Medieval ages that “the Bible clearly highlights how this is not how it’s supposed to be.” Andrea similarly critiqued the character of Prospero in the English textbook, noting, “I don’t think that is the way you should forgive people.”

As a whole, participants did not hesitate to make truth statements in which moral absolutes were expressed. Andrea wrote that “we know forgiveness is the right thing to do, or at least I’d hope they know that forgiveness is the right thing to do.” Megan highlighted the sorcery a character from the English textbook partook in, saying, “That’s wrong. That’s a sin.” Just as Travis gave an apologetic for factual truth in his discussion about science, Kyle gave an apologetic for moral truth in his discussion about English, stating that “the problem I see with that is if without God morality is subjective, it’s just subjective to our own opinions and beliefs as a society.” Both participants used these apologetic arguments to point to the existence of God. However, while most participants were confident in asserting moral absolutes, several softened their assertions by making subsequent statements warning against condemnation. Landon noted in his document analysis that “we’re all human. So just keeping that perspective. I shouldn’t judge him right off the bat” and “I’m not in that culture, so I can’t quite judge that.”

The third way that truth was experienced by the participants was through meaning. This aspect of truth went beyond the simple right and wrong of facts and morals but emphasized the right and wrong meaning or purpose of words, concepts, and ideas. Eve summarized well in her interview:

Because of my faith I understand those a little bit deeper. And even in science when we talk about the facts, I have a greater appreciation for our world because I believe that something greater made it. It has more meaning.

Tim similarly reflected, “if you use the Bible as a lens to look at the world, particularly the classroom, then you’re going to make those connections.”

Participants questioned textbook definitions of “forgiveness,” “mercy,” “noble,” and “love,” claiming that there might be “more to” these words than what the authors described. Tim

expressed his surprise that a health textbook would even attempt to define love because “it’s something that’s so hotly debated.” Andrea disagreed with the English textbook description of Shakespeare’s play, *The Tempest*, writing, “I think I understand it more as a repentance story than as a forgiveness story.”

Rather than relying on public school content for meaning, participants turned to their faith. In his document analysis, Landon noted that “love and forgiveness are the foundations of the gospel” and later went on to explain the gospel message in light of the health textbook’s definition of love, saying, “ultimately the one place that you can be sure of if you’re looking for the right definition of love is look to what God does for us. Look how God treats us.” Kyle similarly mentioned that “I don’t know if we can completely match God’s forgiveness because we didn’t do anything to deserve His forgiveness.” Travis noted that God forgives us and there’s no price for that besides Jesus. And that price is already paid.”

In her discussion about the roles of men and women in Medieval Europe, Megan pointed to God’s purpose in creation, stating, “that’s kind of what women were created for, to aid their husbands in whatever their duty was or whatever their purpose was.” Kyle also appealed to God’s purpose in creation, saying that marriage was intended “to make a covenant between a man and a woman to become one flesh and reproduce.” To Kyle, it wasn’t so much that public schools taught the wrong details of marriage, but rather that they missed its entire meaning. He concluded, “And I think when you take God out of it, it’s just kind of like – why have marriage at all?” Kyle took this concept even further when discussing his experience in psychology class. Although students were learning truth on a basic level, they were still missing the entire picture. He said in his interview:

[My psychology teacher] just wouldn't accept the idea of spiritual warfare, anything like that at all, because to him, what's happening in your brain – the processes in your brain – it's nothing more than that. And us as Christians, we think it's more than that because there is spiritual influence.

Eve applied the same concept to science, suggesting that the Christian faith is what gives meaning to science. Without faith, science is incomplete. She said in the focus group:

We believe God created everything and, especially in science class or different situations like that, where that's relevant, the idea that everything was designed for a reason. And that we're not just here out of chance and there's a reason for us to be alive, which not everyone has a reason to be alive.

Like other participants, Megan turned to the gospel message in her experience of interpreting content. She suggested that one reason Christianity may have spread so rapidly in Medieval Europe was because it's "the only religion that you don't have to work to get in. Your good deeds will never get you to heaven. It's only through Jesus. So, people probably found so much comfort in that." She expressed frustration with the way one of her own teachers taught about Christianity in the past, claiming that he taught people they had to earn their way to heaven rather than that "you just have to accept Jesus." Travis went beyond a moral critique of the Crusades and mentioned that the Crusaders missed the whole "point of Christianity – it's supposed to be to bring people in." Megan experienced meaning when reading about evil in the English textbook:

[God] cares so much and He can stop it. But if He were to stop every single evil thing, millions of people would go down too and He's giving us the chance to go to Him and surrender and accept Jesus.

She later added in her interview that “there’s a God who has a plan and who knows what he’s doing – and that our pain has a purpose.”

Participants agreed that the truth expressed in classroom content was a key factor in how they experienced its compatibility with their Christian faith. In affirming the compatibility of the history textbook, Eve stated, “I feel like it’s very factual. Just the time period. I remember gender roles – it was mostly talking about what happened then.” In other words, because what was written did not directly contradict the Bible, it was more aligned with Christianity. She confirmed this concept by stating that math is the most compatible subject with her Christian faith because “You can’t really change that. And we don’t really learn about morals in any way in math class. It’s just math.” Tim agreed, stating that math has “nothing to do with God. You’re not going to start talking about the merits of Christianity in the middle of calc class.” Landon also said that “math is pretty set in stone, maybe. I don’t think that math class could be bad.” Travis added, “I don’t see how math is connected to faith.” Tim further commented about historical events from the textbook, “I don’t have as much a problem with them because these were actually things that happened. History is much more fact-driven, so I wouldn’t expect it to start dumping on Christianity.” The health textbook was at the top of Andrea’s list for compatibility because it “hit the nail on the head” in its definition of love. “That’s love. And that is in fact the – It’s a very Christian ideal. That one is on top for that specific sentence. I really like that,” she stated. For many participants, English was the subject in school that was easiest to reconcile with Christianity because it was “fairly interpretive” and they could draw the truth of morality and meaning from their faith. Kyle stated that the Bible “has answers to those things that we in English class try to come up with for ourselves. I’m like, well, the Bible already explains this.” On the other end, Blake noted in his interview that “the least compatible

would probably be the evolution one. That pretty much goes directly against what we know from the Bible about creation.”

Overall, participants spoke passionately about the importance of truth in understanding their experience with content as Christians in public schools. Landon summarized well:

I feel like when you get God’s truth inside of you, you can again discern truths from part-truths or truths from lies. I think you can kind of – when the Holy Spirit fills you, he gives you discernment to see things for what they really are. And I think that’s very important in school, where there’s a ton of different mixed things – information and opinions coming at you from all angles.

Andrea said succinctly during her document analysis, “the Bible will always, in my mind, overrule what is said in the classroom.” Megan stated bluntly, “I personally know and believe that what the Bible says is right and wrong. The Bible is truth.” Blake added almost identically:

The Bible is the ultimate truth, you know? So, I think anything that is contradictory to the Bible, I have to label as false. And obviously it’s like it’s a framework for how we see right from wrong, which is pretty important, because as things change it’s good to have something that you know you can always go to get guidance and sometimes a pretty straightforward answer, sometimes not so much.

Travis claimed:

I think that the only role that my faith plays when it comes to being a student is how I process things and how I am like, “okay – I don’t believe in that.” I’m mentally like, “okay, that’s not aligned with what I believe in.”

Tim considered the possible advantages of a Christian school versus a public school, saying students at a Christian school “wouldn’t have to look over their shoulder every day and be like, is

there something in this textbook that's going to teach students something that isn't true?" In the focus group, Kyle also expressed the importance of his faith for revealing truth, saying, "we find purpose and meaning in Christ and that kind of changes everything. So, I'd say the lens – that your worldview is sort of describing the meaning of life in reality, I guess." He added:

I think people get mixed up with truth. So, someone's worldview might be 'their truth' when obviously there's only one truth, but people view the world through a different lens than someone else. And that might be truth to them. I think it just kind of gets mixed up with truth versus kind of how you perceive the world and the root of how you perceive those.

In all of the data collection methods, truth was the largest recurring theme for each of the participants. Although there was variation among students regarding their emphasis on certain kinds of truth, all participants agreed that truth was the most important way they experienced interpreting content through their worldview at public high school. Nevertheless, there was a third theme that emerged from the data that is integral to the understanding of the phenomenon, despite its infrequency relative to the others: Presentation.

Presentation. The last theme was seen the least among participants, although it was profound when emphasized. At times, participants moved beyond a focus on parallels and truth to an analysis of how the material itself was presented. There was some recognition that even if content was true and did not contradict the Bible, it could still be unnecessary, missing important information, or framed in a certain way.

As one aspect of presentation, some participants questioned why certain material was included or excluded from content in public schools. In her document analysis of a health textbook about marriage, Andrea noted, "For my viewpoint as a Christian, I don't necessarily

think bringing up the financial, social, or cultural reasons for marriage – or really just the financial or social reasons are necessary in a textbook.” She later reflected more generally, “I guess the whole feel of it is just kind of bugging me. Why is the school teaching this? I feel like your parents should be teaching you.” Before reading the same excerpt, Tim stated:

Well before I even start, I automatically – given that it’s a public high school textbook – so it’s not going to take the Christian line of what marriage should and shouldn’t be.

Which I mean is okay. Like I was saying before, it gives broader perspective. But I’m already preparing myself for it.

He admitted, similarly to Andrea, “I wasn’t expecting marriage to be covered in a health textbook.” Landon expressed similar concerns to others about the role of a textbook, this time an English one, saying, “I think it’s kind of interesting how an English textbook is pointing out all of these character flaws. I don’t know, I just haven’t seen that before.”

Like Tim, Kyle admitted that key aspects about the meaning of marriage would be missing from the textbook, stating, “Obviously they don’t talk about this ‘cause it isn’t a Christian excerpt.” He even hinted at an intentional misdirection from the meaning of marriage by the textbook author because “the central significance of marriage has a lot to do with being obedient to God.” Blake agreed during his document analysis:

I don’t think they would be able to put something like that in the textbook. So I wouldn’t say it bothers me, but it’s just, it could obviously mislead people who are not in a relationship with the Lord and they could think, “hey, if I just work at these things, like this is, it’s all going to fall into place,” but it could easily fall apart down the line.

Landon also admitted his hesitancy when reading about history and science in public school, stating, “especially history because I know a lot is left out sometimes and you’re just kind of getting bits and pieces of history.” Megan expressed:

[Christian students need to] learn more about [content] and just to see where God was taken out of the things I’m learning in those classes and are filling the gaps with where I know God truly fits in in those areas. And just trying not to let what I learn in those classes influence my faith in a negative way.

Several participants discussed how content is presented in a way that includes or excludes certain views. Eve stated, “I don’t think there’s a whole lot of diversity of thought within the classroom settings, whether that’s a political view or religious views. I don’t think a lot of those different perspectives are taught.” In her interview, Andrea reflected on her experience in 7th grade learning about religions:

I learned a lot about the Muslim – Islam faith – and all that stuff and less about Christianity. So I feel like [a Christian school] would kind of flip-flop that. I don’t even know if they would teach the other faiths, actually.

Chelsea agreed that a Christian education “might go over briefly other religions, but they wouldn’t go in depth and they probably wouldn’t explain it as much.” Reed similarly expressed how the substance of what is presented in a public school might be different than a Christian school, saying, “I think that everything that you would learn about is what Jesus would have wanted in the world, in history.” Travis noted that Christian schools might teach similar things but would also “make Christian commentary on it.” Megan recognized the limits of public school education, saying in her interview that “the teachers can’t share their beliefs and can’t go

against the core curriculum. So whereas in a private school, their textbooks can mention faith-based things and opinionated things.”

In addition to noting how content was integral to the presentation of information, participants also noted how viewpoint influenced presentation. Chelsea noted that “different teachers have different perspectives,” making some more or less open to dialogue about religion. In the focus group, Landon stated that “how you perceive things going on around you, based on what you’ve been like and what you’ve grown up with in your experiences – that kind of feeds into how you view the world.” Kyle added:

Someone has a worldview, whether they claim to just not know – you kind of have to. I can’t really fathom just not knowing and just accepting. I feel like deep inside, you come up with some reason for reality or life or something like that.

Landon followed, “You might not be aware of it. But I would say everyone has an upbringing. You know, they have values placed by their parents and their friends and things like that.”

Megan agreed, stating, “And I don’t think that anyone could ever have the same exact worldview as you.”

Reed recognized that as a whole, non-Christians are “not taking the information in the same way I am from the Christian view.” In the notes of his document analysis, Tim wrote about the textbook’s presentation of evolution, “Are we seeing things that we want to see?” Kyle expanded on this idea:

I think a lot of it is just what we assume about the world, and more specifically the scientific world tries to find the answers that I think are not like – the Bible says that the truth is found in Jesus. . . . I think a lot of worldly scientists, they don’t want to accept

what the Bible says is true. And I think they really hold fast to these theories of evolution and try to make it as true as possible when really there's not as much evidence.

Some participants even named specific views, highlighting a textbook's "secular viewpoint of marriage," a "secular stance," the "scientific community," or the perspective of a "nihilist." Kyle gave an example of how a secular perspective might influence the presentation of information:

They think religion – they think of it less as truth and more as something that you choose to incorporate in your life to cope with how you live life, I guess. They don't really see it as an absolute truth.

Megan also saw how the perspective or viewpoint of a teacher could impact students:

For the longest time, everything my teacher said, I thought there's no way that they'd ever be lying. And it's not even that they're lying or anything, it's just their perspective, their worldview on different topics. And then that's how they teach it to us. And then that becomes our worldview.

A few participants reflected on their own viewpoint. Tim said in his interview that "my faith almost acts as a lens." Travis added similarly that his faith is like "glasses" that "kind of puts everything through a lens and it kind of makes more sense, less sense, kind of makes you question things." Blake said, "we have our Christian perspective on everything, which is certainly going to influence the way we think about the information we're taking in and the way we utilize it." Megan added that a Christian worldview is more than just claiming a certain religion but is truly dependent on a person's heart:

I have a lot of friends that call themselves Christians, but they never touched a Bible.

They go to church on Sundays with their family, but other than that, that's the extent of

their Christianity. And I feel like their worldview would just be the same as the majority of non-Christian worldviews.

Some participants noted that even among Christians, how a person views the Bible impacts the way they experience content. If someone views the Bible “literally,” they may understand public school information differently than if someone views the Bible “like a guide.”

The third way that participants discussed the theme of presentation was in the context of “framing.” The viewpoint of the presenter and the substance of the content might “frame” information a certain way, creating a positive or negative portrayal. In analyzing information from the history textbook about the gender roles in Medieval Europe, Blake said, “It seems that [Christians] often get framed as very oppressive towards women than people of other religions.” About the presentation of the Crusades, Andrea expressed, “I feel like this just kind of painted Christianity as bad, and obviously the Christian people of this time were not doing something good by driving out the nonbelievers.” Blake similarly stated:

I think all of that kind of frames it against the European Christians. Even though some of it might be true, it seems to – obviously none of us were alive back then, so we don’t quite know what it was like – but it seems to frame them poorly.

He added, “I don’t know if they continue to talk about the Muslim side of things and what the rest of the world was, but without talking about any of that yet, it does seem pretty one-sided.”

Tim noted that “it almost makes the church out to be like a corporation or its own kind of country. Which, I mean, at that point it almost kind of was.” Kyle said:

I think anytime a public textbook mentions Christianity, it’s always been kind of – it’s never been portrayed as a good thing. Like for example, like what we just read about the Catholic church – a lot of the things that you read about with the Catholic church in

history are very, just kind of crazy – that they shouldn't be doing that kind of thing. And I don't think that Christianity is like that. I think they put it in a very negative scope. Blake said in his interview that “a lot of history tries to frame early Christianity in obviously a very one-sided negative light. So, it kind of seems to be trying to guilt earlier Christians and kind of try to derive [detract] from the entire gospel.”

Like several participants, Landon noted that just because facts are presented, the content is not necessarily neutral:

That's a lot of what I keep in mind, where I read something where it's obviously led to one way. I mean, yes, they are – they're probably like – this is a neutral tone where they're just saying facts. But obviously facts make you think one thing and it's intended for that purpose.

In the textbook excerpt about evolution, he claimed to “see tons of pro-evolution bias in all of this and they're only promoting one thing, so I have to take that with a grain of salt. You know they're only pushing for that.” Kyle also commented on the framing of evolution, saying, “And they only talked about how it's getting more advanced instead of the things that they're still working on trying to discover.” Blake expressed thankfulness that his high school does not present evolution in a “matter-of-fact” way, “like how evolution was how we came to be.” According to him, evolution is only “speculation” and any public school information about evolution should mention that “this is widely contested by various religions.” Blake commented on the portrayal of the character Prospero in the English textbook:

What I get from this is whoever's writing this – they do not like Prospero too much because they seem to kind of – all of the good things he does – they always seem to emphasize whatever bad he also did along with it.

Landon saw potential framing in the presentation of marriage in the health textbook:

One thing I kind of at least notice so far is it's completely gender neutral, which is probably intentional because it's a textbook. And they're saying "partner." I don't know, it seems like they're not – it seems very gender neutral and what they're telling – it seems like they're kind of preaching it doesn't matter who, or stuff like that, which is personally not something I agree with. I believe that God created man and wife to be together.

Megan also commented on the health textbook's portrayal, saying, "the way they kind of explain [love] in here, it kind of sounds like it's like this desire or passion for another person. But love is a choice that people have to make every day." Blake wondered why the health textbook "doesn't mention the divorce percentage," hinting that they don't want to focus on the negative aspects of a secular approach to marriage.

A number of participants traced public school information back to the agenda behind the curriculum. Landon said in his document analysis that "There's a lot of swing in what the education board wants to tell us. Even the news." He noted in his interview that "education may not be telling whole truths" and "we're kind of taught the agenda of whatever political party is in power there." He continued later that "health would probably be a touchy subject sometimes because the government pushes certain things to be told and certain things are okay and certain things aren't okay that we as Believers have different opinions on." At the end of his interview, Landon concluded, "generally in school we're taught one perspective from a lot of different things and not always given the other side."

Kyle claimed that in public schools, "they almost seem to teach you a secular version of Christianity versus a biblical version of Christianity." He added later in the focus group:

When public schools start teaching that there's – that Christianity is just another worldview along with all these other worldviews, there's no uniqueness to Christianity anymore. And I think because Satan has a big influence in the secular world, and I think any opportunity he can get, whether schools are talking about different worldviews or not, I think he's going to find a way to twist it, to bring God and true Christianity out of it.

Blake also commented on the overall agenda of the curriculum:

It can feel like a certain viewpoint is kind of being forced upon you through whatever curriculum you're using or whatever textbook you're reading from. And I feel like that was kind of apparent in some of the ones we read. There were clear opinions that you could see in some of them that probably – even though it might not be shared by a lot of people – that those are the people who are leading the education – the world of education.

In the focus group, Eve noted the implications of this for non-Christian students, saying, “in school [students] just get fed more of what they believe, if that makes sense. And they will never hear our side because in school it's just kind of taught like this is fact.”

Andrea mentioned how she once discussed classroom content with her Christian friend after school and her friend commented that it was “bogus” and “not something that's right,” suggesting that it was framed in an anti-Christian way. Kyle claimed to have an “anti-Christian teacher” who was “very adamant about teaching evolution and as a fact that is against biblical history.” Blake said in his interview that “faith in the classroom has been kind of discouraged over the years. I think more and more you see and hear about different areas that they just try and clamp down on religious activity in school.” Participants in the focus group agreed with Landon that “being told partial truths in school is kind of hard to navigate. You know, not

everything I'm taught in school is true." He also claimed that unless teachers were Christian and understood scripture, it was unlikely that Christianity "would be able to be represented exactly."

The presentation theme reveals that an important aspect of participant's experience in interpreting public school content from their Christian worldview was understanding the substance, viewpoint, and framing of the information. Although this theme was more present in some participant's responses than others, it shows a frame of thinking that factors significantly into the final theme: Interpersonal relatability.

Interpersonal Relatability. The final theme that emerged from the horizons was interpersonal relatability. Interpersonal relatability is different in nature from the themes of parallel, truth, and presentation because it does not emphasize cognitive interpretation of content. Nevertheless, this theme is essential because it both informs and applies the cognitive processes at work in the other themes. Interpersonal relatability focuses on the contextual and relational side of the participant's lived experience. It brings understanding to why students interpret and express content the way that they do and how their mindset informs application. It became apparent from the data collection that the relational aspect of participants' faith could not be separated from the intellectual aspect of their faith.

Many of the participants recognized that public school content, informed by their Christian faith, helps them understand their peers. Blake summarized the beliefs of many of the participants when he said:

[Most classes at public school can] make you think about "how can this help me connect to other people so that I can possibly try to understand their culture a little bit better and the way they see the world?" I think that can be really helpful when you're trying to share the gospel.

Eve also emphasized evangelism, saying that her presence in public school as a Christian would allow her to “share [my Christian perspective] with those friends.” Eve expressed in her document analysis that she can “see both perspectives” regarding the controversy over evolution, later adding in her interview:

It’s important that a lot of Christians are in a setting at some point in their lives when they’re not – where they are the only Christian or one of the few Christians, just to see and understand how the world views different topics like evolution or like forgiveness in the English textbook.

Chelsea said that it was her Christian faith that causes her to see both sides of situations because “Jesus would do that.”

Tim noted that “Even from a Christian perspective, it’s good to look at opposing beliefs because then – it not only tells you how to necessarily address it, but even how it applies to or how it challenges your own faith.” In the focus group, Landon said learning content in a public school “helps you to be able to understand more about what people that aren’t like you think and believe.” He noted:

If there’s a type of content you don’t particularly believe about to be true, but you still have to learn it for school – you can still apply that. Maybe you can fact-check it against what God says and you know, you still believe what God says, but at least you’re able to understand what other people might be thinking.

Chelsea agreed, saying that learning outside perspectives “allows you to better make your own opinions that way.” She continued, “You’re not just handed somebody else’s opinion and said, ‘okay, believe this.’” Travis even proposed that understanding could be gained from learning about historical people. He said about the Crusades, “it doesn’t align with what I believe in, but

it's also good to see how people acted back then – believing the same things that we do, but not really acting as if they believe in those.”

Landon commented on the perspective of his teachers and classmates:

If they're living in the world and taught by the world then they're going to think like the world. But I think it's good to see other people's viewpoints at least. Even if I stick with my own – rooted in God's word. I feel like it's still helpful to see where people are coming from – to understand why they might think a certain thing based on experiences they have had, or other experiences other people have had that have influenced them.

Kyle went further:

[Hearing other perspectives would] even cause me to grow in my faith because it gives me an idea of how the world sees Christianity and how the world views it and how the world will try to take away my faith. So, it requires me to be in prayer and to be in the Word to allow God to work in me to strengthen my faith if it is being challenged in things that I learned.

Tim believed that teachers should encourage students to share their beliefs in the classroom because they would be “culturing new ideas, which is the whole purpose of going to school anyway.” He shared one of the reasons that he was hesitant to share his faith in the science classroom:

For the most part they're not really asking you your opinion. It's just did this happen or did it not? It's one of those where I feel like there have been a couple of times where I'm like, this isn't correct, but I'm just going to give you the answer you're looking for anyway.

Chelsea confirmed that she has “a lot of friends and classmates who aren’t religious, but they also want to hear everybody’s opinion just because they’re a good person.” She added in the focus group that it might be helpful if teachers make it “very clear that ‘this isn’t a dictatorship where you have to have the opinion that I say, but here’s what we’re teaching you.’” Andrea declared that although she is hesitant to share something biblical in the classroom, she would be “more likely to quote something biblical because everybody’s opinion is taken into account in situations like that.” Kyle expressed something similar in his interview:

Last year in English class I had a really good teacher and I felt more comfortable too, because he’d invite everyone to put their personal opinion out there – without being shunned or anything – you would accept people’s opinions. This is how it was. So if I’m more open to share my opinion influenced by the Bible in the class – so I guess it really depends on the teacher in the class.

Reed said:

Obviously, I want people to know this perspective on the Bible and how that plays into their life, but why should I be allowed to share my perspective when others aren’t, just because I think mine is right and others think theirs is right? So, I feel like we all have to be able to share a perspective this same way.

He added later in his interview that he believes some non-Christians in his classes know Christianity “might be true, but they don’t want others to think they know it’s true.”

Most participants believed that despite the sharing of views, most students in their classes would not change their minds after hearing a Christian perspective. Kyle noted that non-Christian students are “just going to accept that you believe what you want to believe and they’re not going to challenge you on that, but they’re not going to accept it as a truth.” Megan claimed,

“They may just kind of blow it over if I’m being completely honest, like not really think about it any deeper than whatever I answered,” adding later, “most kids would probably just not even think twice about it. Like, ‘okay, she gave an answer. That’s all it is.’” Blake asserted a similar view, saying, “I think for a lot of classes it probably doesn’t change too much,” but later expressed hope that “you would probably find some common ground where you can still find a solution that you think is honoring to God and also is still taking into account the opinions of other people.” Travis took an even more hopeful perspective when he stated, “it’s still not my job to change their belief. God, working in people and working through their minds helps them change what they believe in.”

Participants suggested that one reason their teachers and peers may not fully internalize faith-related opinions is because they are seen as irrelevant. Tim said that some students would find these opinions “a bit tone-deaf,” even though “there’s not a whole lot that are going to do anything about it.” Eve stated, “If I back up my answer to a question with the Bible, I think I wouldn’t be taken very seriously, so I tend not to.” Andrea confirmed, “it’s a peer pressure thing where no one wants to listen to that girl preach – literally preach in the classroom. No one wants to hear that. That’s not what we’re here for.” She later asked rhetorically, “What’s the point if they’re just going to laugh and not pay attention?” In her interview, she concluded, “I’m not going to try to start a biblical debate in the classroom because I feel like that’s not the right place for it.”

The second way that participants revealed the interpersonal relatability theme was through a focus on conflict. Although most agreed that their Christian faith informed their belief that hearing other opinions in the classroom was important, they also showed great hesitancy in expressing their own faith in the classroom. A number of the participants believed that sharing

their faith in the classroom would actually hinder their relationships with teachers and peers.

Eve said in her interview that she tries “not to just make a huge deal – not that I’m ashamed of my faith, but just to make it less difficult sometimes.” She added:

In my opinion, sometimes the relationship is a little bit more important than proving a point in class. I’ve had better conversation and explaining my faith when I’m in the lunch room or just kind of talking with my friends and asking questions and being open to that.

Travis similarly stated, “I don’t really [share my faith in the classroom] because I know not everyone believes in that kind of stuff and I don’t want to kind of turn people away.” He later noted that “it would kind of feel like I’m trying to push my faith onto them.” Tim also showed concern for how his faith-based opinion might come across in the classroom. He said in his interview:

Part of it is what you actually say and the other part of it is just how you carry yourself, which is one of the biggest parts of witnessing to somebody. It’s not so much what you say – it’s how you act. It’s not saying Christ’s love to someone – it’s showing Christ’s love.

He admitted to getting “fired up inside” sometimes over controversial topics in the classroom and needed to remind himself that “that’s God’s child. It’s another human that’s been made in His image.” Megan agreed that her faith impacts the demeanor of her responses in the classroom as much as the substance, saying, “you can kind of see a difference in the way I’ll answer questions – the tone of voice.” In her interview, Megan also shared an example of how faith conversations could take place in the classroom without causing a disruption. She recalled an instance when she did not agree with her teacher’s portrayal of Christianity. According to

Megan, “after class, I went up to him and kind of explained [Christianity] to him, but I still don’t think that he understood it.”

Some participants went even further in the way they described conflict as part of interpersonal relatability. Tim said that sharing faith in the classroom sometimes “puts fear in you because you’re like, ‘what are people going to think?’ They’re going to think I’m weird. I’m just going to say it and I’m just going to give the canned answer that everyone wants me to give.” Landon gave an almost identical response:

I think in the classroom, living your faith out loud can be difficult when everyone else is telling you to act one way or people are just trying to get what they want done.

Internally, I’d say I answer the question how I believe it should be, but usually I just give them the response that they’re looking for.

Kyle admitted to sometimes not having “the boldness to speak up against what they’re saying and what I believe.” Blake felt that if someone shared a Bible quote in one of his classrooms, most of the students “would just probably just mock you ruthlessly.”

Interestingly, Megan shared that some teachers might also avoid faith-based discussion in the classroom out of fear. She said:

I think that a lot of teachers are so scared to answer or talk anything about religion, just because if – people are really set in their ways. So, if some student overhears someone talking about religion and they go home and tell their parents, they could sue the teacher.

Blake reflected:

Faith in the classroom has been kind of discouraged over the years, you know. I think more and more, you see and hear about different areas that they just try and like – they clamp down on religious activity in school.

Kyle stated that while teachers may not “shun” a student who shares their faith in class, they would likely “accept what you’re saying” and “move on very quickly to something else.” Travis commented similarly, “I don’t think they would get upset at you for doing that. But I also don’t think that they would take that and run with it. I think they would probably try to stop it at what you said.” Tim concluded succinctly that overall, teachers and students simply try “to avoid the conflict.”

All four themes revealed in the data analysis convey deep and profound ways that the participants experienced interpreting content through their worldview at a public high school. Parallel highlighted the ways that participants created parallels and connections between classroom content and contemporary and biblical situations, people, and events. Truth was a broad theme that included participants’ focus on content’s factual alignment with the Bible, morality, and meaning. As part of the presentation theme, students went beyond the surface-level content to an examination of how it was presented, considering the content’s substance, viewpoint, and framing. Lastly, participants revealed the interpersonal relatability theme by not only discussing the cognitive interpretation of content, but highlighting the relational factors involved in their interpretation, such as understanding, relevancy, and conflict. All four themes combined to answer different aspects of each research sub-question posed in the study.

Research Sub-Question Responses

A combination of themes was used to answer each of the research sub-questions. However, some themes were seen more prevalently than others, suggesting that each question rightly highlighted a different aspect of the participants’ overall lived experience. Each sub-question is discussed separately using the 4 themes from the analysis. Together, the themes from the sub-questions were synthesized to create textual and structural statements. Finally, these

statements were combined to develop a composite description, which explains the essence of the phenomenon and answers the overall research question.

Sub-Question 1. What philosophical assumptions about content information are informed by the lived experiences of evangelical students in public high schools? According to Naugle (2002) and Sire (2009), all worldviews operate on underlying philosophical assumptions and presuppositions. The data from this study revealed that many of the participants not only expressed these assumptions but also understood them. The main theme revealed for Sub-Question 1 was presentation. In this theme, the participants highlighted distinct viewpoints and demonstrated how these viewpoints not only differed from each other, but also how they impacted the way content was presented. Participants saw that certain agenda's such as those by "science," "the education board," "secularism," "the government," or "political parties," would all impact the way content was framed due to underlying beliefs and ideas. Perhaps the most explicit example of this was how several participants noted the naturalistic presuppositions of public school presentations of "science." Participants expressed the limits of science, such as when Eve stated, "science doesn't really know everything." Although expressed in simpler terms, Eve and others seemed to recognize that science, as a discipline, is confined by its empiricism. Science cannot explain more than what can be seen or observed, despite the scientific community's attempts to "extrapolate off of" evidence by creating theories. Kyle specifically said that "a lot of it is just what we assume."

The truth theme was often imbedded into the presentation theme regarding student statements about the limits of a naturalistic presentation. The participants inserted their own presuppositions where they believed other views and presentations fell short. Several participants expressed their belief in a "supernatural being" or "spiritual influence" that could not

be mentioned in public school content. Landon claimed that his own assumptions about life excluded the possibility of a “computer generated world.” Travis revealed the theme of truth when he attempted to poke holes in naturalism’s presuppositions by highlighting that it cannot explain life’s first cause. “Who created the big bang?” he asked. Megan drew from the truth theme when she stated that an evolutionary perspective could not claim that “pain has purpose.”

Participants also revealed the presentation theme when they expressed surprise that public school textbooks would attempt to explain themes such as “love” or “forgiveness.” Most participants initially recognized that these presentations would be given from a particular perspective and would inevitably leave out important information from a Christian view. As Kyle noted, “the problem with taking any kind of secular stance on marriage is that the core meaning of marriage is left out.” In this statement, Kyle combined themes of presentation and truth to reveal that secular presuppositions preclude transcendent, objective meaning. He said in the focus group that atheism will “give you a different meaning of life and everything that you’re seeing based on the fact that there is no God.” Landon similarly added that nihilists would “see everything as kind of negative.”

The truth theme was also seen to a lesser degree through participants’ focus on morality and meaning. Each of the participants clearly assumed that humanity has a moral conscience, even while recognizing that some worldviews do not allow for a legitimate accounting of that morality. Eve stated that she has “morals to back up what I believe.” For Kyle, a public school presentation of religion operated under the assumption that religion is something you “choose to incorporate in your life to cope with how you live” rather than a claim on “absolute truth.” In essence, participants clearly demonstrated that they drew upon their own assumptions about the Bible and reality to validate what they believed was true. A few participants even expressed that

their Christian view of topics could differ from other Christians depending on what they presupposed about the Bible. Using the theme of truth, some participants recognized that their position against evolution or LGBTQ issues was due to a literal reading of the Bible while others believed in theistic evolution and LGBTQ rights due to a more metaphorical understanding of the Bible. Chelsea described the Bible as a “guide” and noted how this made her opinions different than many of her Christian peers. She also noted how someone’s views about public school content may depend on what they believe about “the separation of church and state.”

Sub-Question 2. How do the lived experiences of evangelical students impact the way they relate the Bible to topics presented in public high school classrooms? The two main themes that the participants used to relate the Bible to topics were parallel and truth. In the theme of parallel, students made connections between the events, people, and concepts described in public school curriculum to the events, people, and concepts described in the Bible. An indicative example of this is Tim’s parallel between the gender roles of women in Medieval Europe and the “biblical women of influence, like Tabitha and Mary Magdalene.” The English character Prospero reminded Tim of the “Apostle Paul” while Megan alluded to “Moses,” Reed alluded to “Satan,” and Kyle drew a parallel to “Abel.” When reading about evolution, both Landon and Kyle recollected the Bible’s description of “giants” in the book of Genesis. Many participants related the content they learned in public school about religion and history to the information they learned in the Bible, such as when “the Israelites lived in Egypt.”

As Fowler (1981) and Naugle (2002) noted, narrative is a major component of worldview understanding and was seen through many of the participants’ responses. In a combination of the parallel and truth themes, participants connected public school content to the meaning or narrative expressed in the Bible. Tim claimed to use the Bible as a “lens” that allowed him to

make connections between school concepts and the biblical narrative. He exemplified this idea when he stated:

[Jesus'] forgiveness flips the entire concept of Prospero's forgiveness on its ears.

Because now Jesus doesn't expect anything before he dies on the cross. He doesn't expect to get anything from people. In fact, he expects the opposite. He expects to literally pour himself out for the people he's trying to save. I mean, that's his forgiveness. And that's the complete opposite of what Prospero tries to do.

As with Tim, several of the participants used public school content on a number of topics to make connections to the gospel story of God's love, forgiveness, salvation, and redemption.

Megan summarized the gospel message by stating, "Christianity is also the only religion that you don't have to work to get in. Your good deeds will never get you to heaven. It's only through Jesus."

The truth theme was seen explicitly through numerous statements made by the participants that the Bible is the ultimate source of truth. Kyle expressed concern that the "world really tries to go stray from the truth in the Bible." Andrea said, "the Bible is going to be more true than what these teachers are going to be telling me." Megan stated in her interview, "I personally believe that what the Bible says is right and wrong. The Bible is truth." Blake similarly concluded that "I think anything that is contradictory to the Bible, I have to label as false. And obviously it's like a framework for how we see right from wrong." However, while most participants viewed the Bible as true and clearly used it as a reference for understanding and interpreting public school content, the interpersonal relatability theme indicated that they were hesitant to express these biblical connections in class. The participants were concerned that biblical parallels or truth would be perceived as "irrelevant," cause conflict, or diminish their

“witness” with classmates. As Travis claimed, it would “feel like I’m trying to push my faith onto them.” Instead, most participants preferred to share their faith privately with peers outside of the classroom. As Eve noted, “sometimes the relationship is a little bit more important than proving a point in class. I’ve had better conversation and explaining my faith when I’m in the lunch room or just kind of talking with my friends and them asking questions and being open to that.”

Sub-Question 3. How do evangelical students’ lived experiences influence the way they comprehend the multiple worldview perspectives involved in content presentation at a public high school? The themes of truth, presentation, and interpersonal relatability all influenced the way participants comprehended multiple worldview perspectives. As seen previously, participants mostly remained committed to the Bible, as “the ultimate truth.” As a result, the truth theme, as part of their lived experience, made it easy for them to label other opinions and perspectives as false. Landon understood that other people are “going to think like the world,” and that he “might not agree and generally keep my mind set on what I think the one answer is.” Reed stated that “When I say that I know I’m a hundred percent right, that sounds arrogant, but it’s in the Bible and it’s what I believe.” However, many of the participants also noted that they would still consider other opinions as “valid,” even if they were untrue. To them, the validity of an answer meant that it was well-reasoned and contributed something beneficial to the discussion. After all, as Megan claimed, “when other students answer these questions, they all have valid responses because that’s how they grew up. That’s what they know.” Kyle summarized many of the participants’ ideas by saying, “I think people get it mixed up with truth. So someone’s worldview might be ‘their truth’ when obviously there’s only one truth,” later

adding, “I think it just kind of gets mixed up with truth versus kind of how you perceive the world and the root of how you perceive it.”

Like Megan and Kyle, most participants recognized that student responses are due, in part, to their background and personal experiences. This recognition revealed the presentation theme because it focused on how worldview perspectives influence the presentation of information. Participants in the focus group agreed with Kyle that “someone has a worldview, whether they claim to just not know, you kind of have to,” with Megan adding that “I don’t think that anyone could ever have the same exact worldview as you.” Even still, participants claimed that there were clear commonalities for a general Christian worldview, including belief in the “supernatural,” a God who “created everything,” and a meaning and purpose for life.

While most participants were quick to highlight the worldviews involved in the presentation of information from students and teachers, they were less likely to include the presentation theme when discussing some textbooks. Participants easily noted the incompatibility of textbooks that presented truth “contrary to the Bible,” such as evolution, understanding that they presented a particular worldview. However, only a few participants noted the potential worldview bias of textbooks that may “frame” facts, even if the facts themselves did not contradict the Bible. Blake was one participant who noted how an accurate textbook could be “one-sided,” such as the history book excerpt framing the Crusades “against the European Christians” or the English book emphasizing “whatever bad” Prospero did in the narrative. For Blake and a few others, identifying non-Christian perspectives in the classroom went beyond a simple biblical fact-check.

In recognizing the wide range of perspectives and opinions of classmates and teachers, the participants all highlighted the value of understanding other views. In the interpersonal

relatability theme, participants stressed the importance of hearing various perspectives in the classroom. Landon stated that hearing other views “helps you to be able to understand more about what people that aren’t like you think and believe,” with Chelsea adding that it “allows you to better make your own opinions.” However, as mentioned earlier, a key aspect of the interpersonal relatability theme was a hesitancy on behalf of the participants themselves to express their Christian perspective in the classroom. Ironically, it was their awareness and empathy towards the opinions and viewpoints of others in the room that made them hesitant. As a whole, the participants believed that many of their peers would not see the relevancy of a Christian viewpoint in the classroom, that it might cause conflict in the classroom, or that it might “turn off” their peers from the message of Christianity. As Andrea stated, “no one wants to listen to that girl preach – literally preach – in a classroom.” Non-expression, for the participants, was the natural result of understanding that “worldly” and “Christian” viewpoints were often (but not always) diametrically opposed. It was not that the participants were afraid to share their faith, but rather that doing so in the classroom was seen as an ineffective, and even detrimental, approach.

Critical Question Response

A comprehensive examination of the themes, and how they related to each sub-question, led to an informed understanding of the phenomenon as a whole. A textual statement was first created from the themes and then, through imaginative variation, a structural statement was created. (Moustakas, 1994). Both statements together then informed the composite description, which is an explanation of the essence of the phenomenon and answers the critical question: How do evangelical students in public high schools interpret content areas through their worldview?

Textual Statement. According to Moustakas (1994), the textual statement highlights the experience of participants as it relates to the phenomenon: How did evangelical students in public high schools experience interpreting content areas through their worldviews? Participants interpreted content through the general themes of parallel, truth, and presentation, each revealing loose placement in a stage of faith, according to Fowler (1981). They often related classroom content to contemporary issues or biblical people and events. They also spoke strongly about whether content was true, separating topics based on factual alignment, morality, and meaning. Some participants also went further and analyzed how material was presented to them, pointing out “bias” or framing, and suggesting that important aspects of a Christian view were missing.

Structural Statement. Through the process of imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994), a structural statement was created. The structural statement highlights the context in which the participants experienced the phenomenon: In what context did evangelical students in public high schools experience interpretation of content areas through their worldview? Participants generally recognized that many teachers and peers hold to different perspectives than themselves. The theme of interpersonal relatability revealed that participants believed that while some teachers and students may be hostile to Christianity, the majority would remain apathetic to Christianity being expressed in the classroom due to either a disbelief in its relevance or a desire to avoid conflict.

Composite Description. The composite description is a synthesis of both the textual and structural statements and answers the question: What is the essence of the experience? Participants interpreted content through their worldview by the themes of parallel, truth, presentation, and interpersonal relatability. The first three themes corresponded loosely to Fowler’s (1981) stages of faith. Some participants saw faith in a more wholistic way than others.

While these interpretations of content were largely thoughtful and deep, participants remained reluctant to express these understandings in the public school classroom. Participants were aware of contradictory perspectives presented by teachers, peers, and classroom textbooks, but mostly chose to avoid conflict and keep faith references to themselves. Participants' ability to interpret content through their worldview did encourage them to seek understanding with other views and opinions that were expressed in the classroom even though there was hesitancy to express their own. Participants hoped that understanding in the classroom, however, could lead to conversation outside of the classroom.

Summary

Data was collected from 10 evangelical students at public high schools through document analysis, interviews, and a focus group. Through epoché, I removed my own biases and viewed the phenomenon as it was experienced by the participants. During horizontalization, significant statements were taken from transcriptions of the data and inserted into another document. Eleven codes were then developed that corresponded to general ideas and concepts presented in the statements. The codes were used to arrive at four broader themes that described the lived experience of participants as it pertained to their interpretation of content in public high schools. The first theme was parallel, in which participants made connections between school content and contemporary and biblical people, events, and situations. The second and most recurring theme was truth, where participants emphasized the factual alignment, morality, and meaning of content based on their Christian perspective. In the theme of presentation, participants expressed that the substance of content, viewpoint of the person or author, and framing of the content, all impacted the way the information would be received. The interpersonal relatability theme highlighted participants' concerns with the way their own perspective interacted with other

perspectives in the classroom. In this theme, participants expressed a willingness to understand other viewpoints as well as a concern with causing conflict or expressing their worldview in a way that was not relevant to others. Each of the themes combined to provide answers to the sub-questions posed in the study. Together, the nature of the themes and how they specifically related to the sub-questions, answered the study's critical question. Textual and structural statements were created and then combined to arrive at a composite description that explained the essence of the phenomenon.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe how 10 evangelical students in public high schools interpret content areas through their worldview. A summary of the findings is succinctly described, highlighting the themes of *parallel*, *truth*, *presentation*, and *interpersonal relatability* as they relate to the study's sub-questions. The results of the study provided confirmation with much of the existent theoretical and empirical literature while uniquely contributing new information. Implications of the study in multiple areas are discussed with a particular focus on the practical recommendations for public schools, churches, and parents. Delimitations and limitations are outlined, clarifying the scope and setbacks of the study. Further research is suggested that focuses on repetitions of the study with various demographics.

Summary of Findings

The research revealed that the participants used the themes of parallel, truth, presentation, and interpersonal relatability to interpret public school content areas through their worldview. In the parallel theme, participants showed the parallels between public school content and contemporary issues related to faith as well as biblical people, themes, or concepts. The truth theme indicated that participants focused on whether or not public school content aligned with the facts, morality, and meaning espoused in the Bible. The substance, viewpoint, and framing of public school content was highlighted in the presentation theme by participants. In this theme, the participants believed that even if information was true, it may skew the way content was presented. In the interpersonal relatability theme, the participants revealed how the interpretation of content impacted them in the classroom. They focused on relationships with their peers and

showed a willingness to understand other viewpoints but remained hesitant to share their own view due to the relevancy of the information or the potential of conflict.

Each of the themes discovered in the analysis helped to reveal important answers to the research sub-questions. The presentation and truth themes explained Sub-Question 1 by showing that the participants expressed and identified philosophical assumptions about content information in public high schools. Travis revealed the theme of truth when he attempted to poke holes in naturalism's presuppositions by highlighting that it cannot explain life's first cause. "Who created the big bang?" he asked. Many participants recognized the specific worldview perspectives that were influencing the presentation of the content, such as "secularism" and "atheism." Kyle noted that his public school presented religion as something that people "choose to incorporate in your life to cope with how you live" rather than a claim on "absolute truth." Participants knew that worldviews like secularism and atheism operated under the assumption that nature is all that exists, thus excluding the possibility of a creator God. They also revealed their own assumptions through the truth theme by affirming the reality of the "spiritual" realm and asserting the truthfulness and ultimate authority of the Bible.

The parallel and truth themes explained Sub-Question 2 by showing how participants' lived experiences impacted the way they related the Bible to topics presented in public high school classrooms. The parallel theme indicated that participants drew connections between content and the Bible. They showed similarities between characters, themes, and concepts in curriculum material and characters, themes, and concepts in the Bible. Tim exemplified this concept when he drew a parallel between the gender roles of women in Medieval Europe and the "biblical women of influence, like Tabitha and Mary Magdalene." The truth theme showed that participants rejected or accepted public school content based on its compatibility with the facts,

morality, and meaning of the Bible. Andrea simply claimed, “the Bible is going to be more true than what these teachers are going to be telling me.” Many participants interpreted content by discussing the overarching biblical narrative of perfection, sinfulness, forgiveness, and redemption.

The truth, presentation, and interpersonal relatability themes explained Sub-Question 3 by showing how participants’ lived experiences influenced the way they comprehended multiple worldview perspectives in content presentation at their public high school. Participants judged other worldviews and opinions expressed in the classroom as either true or false using the truth theme. Reed bluntly stated that “When I say that I know I’m a hundred percent right, that sounds arrogant, but it’s in the Bible and it’s what I believe.” Participants recognized that other perspectives did not always hold to biblical presentations of facts, morality, and meaning. In the presentation theme, participants showed their belief that the worldview perspectives of teachers and textbook authors created a bias in the content, sometimes portraying Christianity in a negative light. The interpersonal relatability theme indicated that participants appreciated hearing other worldview perspectives in the classroom because it allowed them to better understand their peers and the world as a whole. Landon said that hearing other views “helps you to be able to understand more about what people that aren’t like you think and believe.” However, participant responses also showed that they did not want to cause conflict or “turn off” their peers from the Christian faith by expressing their Christian faith too outwardly in the classroom setting.

The four themes and their answers to the sub-questions contributed to the creation of a composite description which explains the essence of the phenomenon. Participants interpreted content through their worldview by the themes of parallel, truth, presentation, and interpersonal

relatability. The first three themes corresponded loosely to Fowler's (1981) stages of faith. Some participants saw faith in a more wholistic way than others. While these interpretations of content were largely thoughtful and deep, participants remained reluctant to express these understandings in the public school classroom. Participants were aware of contradictory perspectives presented by teachers, peers, and classroom textbooks, but mostly chose to avoid conflict and keep faith references to themselves. Participants' ability to interpret content through their worldview did encourage them to seek understanding with other views and opinions that were expressed in the classroom even though there was hesitancy to express their own. Participants hoped that understanding in the classroom, however, could lead to conversation outside of the classroom.

Discussion

The results of this study show both continuity and divergence from the empirical and theoretical literature on the topic. The study confirms empirical literature by showing that Christian teenagers think deeply about their faith but are often impacted by the culture surrounding them. It diverges from empirical literature by focusing on the interpretation of public school content rather than the overall social experience of Christians in public schools. The study also confirms the theoretical literature by revealing various levels of depth, or stages, to student understandings of the world. The study diverges from the literature in that it categorizes experiences of interpretation that may fall within Fowler's (1981) stages.

Relationship to Empirical Literature

The information gained from this study revealed a great deal of continuity with other literature on the topic. Although the idea of "worldview" is difficult to define, the participants in the study showed that they thought about their Christian worldview not only in terms of

propositional beliefs, but also expressed it through narrative and a heart-felt desire to positively impact others (Naugle, 2002; Sire, 2009). The participants' perspective as a Christian also clearly impacted the way that they understood the world and viewed content in class, confirming that worldview influences psychology and behavior (Kearney, 1984; Kennedy & Humphreys, 1994; Koltko-Rivera, 2004; Olthius, 1989). This concept was exemplified when Tim said, "I try to use my faith and the Bible as a lens to look at everything around me." For Tim and other participants, their Christian faith had far-reaching and important implications.

The research confirmed much of the literature about Christian teenagers. The participants in the study showed that their views about school, curriculum content, and the Bible were complex (Loubser, 2012; Van der Walt, 2017). They thought in defined moral categories and believed that the Bible was the ultimate source of truth, even if they were sometimes unsure about specific quotes or interpretations. The participants also confirmed much of the literature about teenager's focus on identity and perception (Moreno-Knittel, 2012; Tenger & Seifert, 2017; Van der Walt, 2017). A key aspect of the participants' lived experience for interpreting public school content was their concern with voicing their interpretation in the classroom. Participants were concerned that teachers and peers may think their perspective was irrelevant and would potentially laugh or make fun of them. They were also concerned that discussions about religion would cause unnecessary conflict in the classroom and would ruin their ability to share their faith in a less formal setting. However, the participants differed from much of the literature written about the shallowness of many Christian teenagers' faith and their participation in moralistic therapeutic deism (Barna, 2001; Carpenter, 2015; Dean, 2010; Lindemann, 2018; Noebel & Edwards, 2002). While this shallow version of faith may be true for many Christian teenagers, it was not true of the participants. By the nature of the study, participants were

selected who exhibited a commitment to their faith. The participants as a whole showed a strong knowledge of God's word and an in-depth understanding of how their Christian perspective differed from many other perspectives. Interestingly, the participants did affirm that many of their peers who identify as Christians "might say they believe it and not act out one-hundred percent because they probably don't really have faith in the gospel."

The study also confirmed much of the literature about the role of religion in public high schools. Several of the participants acknowledged the historical conflict between secular education and religious expression (Noebel, Baldwin, & Bywater, 2007). Blake noted that "faith in the classroom has been kind of discouraged over the years." Many of the participants believed that sharing about religion in the classroom was discouraged by teachers in order to avoid potential conflict (Hillier, 2014; Nelson, 2010; Waggoner, 2013). A few participants, like those in Moreno-Knittel's study (2012), expressed that they faced outward opposition to Christianity in the classroom. Kyle noted that he once had an "anti-Christian teacher" who was "very adamant about teaching evolution as a fact." The research also aligned with studies that suggested religious discussions in the classroom often focus on preference and experience rather than truth (Noebel et al., 2007; Werther & Linville, 2012). Kyle stated that public high schools think of religion "less as truth and more as something that you choose to incorporate in your life to cope with how you live life."

The largest area of divergence between the study and literature on the topic is where the literature remains silent. Almost no studies currently exist that discuss the worldview of Christian students in public high schools. The closest study is Moreno-Knittel's (2012) in which she examined how Christian students respond to a secular environment. Where there is overlap, much of the research confirms Moreno-Knittel's (2012) findings. As mentioned, the main point

of confirmation was how students experienced hesitancy to express their own worldview in the classroom and the hostility they felt against their worldview by some teachers and peers. However, the current study is unique because it focuses on participants' interpretation of classroom content, rather than the social influences, like Moreno-Knittel's (2012). The current study shows how the participants lived experience is reflected in the processing of content, rather than simply their response to content. The results of the research showed that participants interpreted content through the themes of parallel, truth, presentation, and interpersonal relatability. Not only are these specific findings unique among the literature, but the category of content interpretation is itself unique among the empirical literature.

Relationship to Theoretical Literature

The findings of the study corroborate much of the theoretical literature on the topic, especially Fowler's (1981) stages of faith. Although there is little research that provides a sufficient theory for worldview development, there are several studies that highlight the psychological development of teenagers (Dockery, Thornbury, & Colson, 2002; Gibson, 2004; Percy, 2004; Phillips, Brown, & Stonestreet, 2008). The most reliable study related to the developmental stages of worldview is Fowler's (1981). Fowler's (1981) stages of faith provide a lens through which to view the results of the current study. According to Fowler (1981), people progress through different stages of faith throughout their lifetime, often overlapping between stages or drawing from previous stages. While the stages typically correspond to age, some people remain in early stages of faith for most of their life.

The themes of parallel, truth, and presentation each loosely correspond to a different stage of faith. The parallel theme shows participant thinking in the second stage of faith, called *mythic-literal faith* (Fowler, 1981, p. 135). In this stage of faith, people take religious symbols

literally, focus on stories, and emphasize reciprocal fairness. They are not yet able to “step back from the flow of stories to formulate reflective, conceptual meanings” (Fowler, 1981, p. 149). The parallel theme fits well in this stage because participants exhibiting this theme made one-to-one connections between textbook content and the Bible. Reed exemplified how the parallel theme fits in the mythic-literal faith stage by saying, “Prospero is alluding to Satan. So, this play, *The Tempest*, it was centered around forgiveness and Prospero is perceived as one who is forgiving. But when you look deeper, he acts to the contrary and, like in our world today, things that seem good – although all our worldly things like drugs, alcohol, sex – people that have desires or that seem good are actually like stars – from Satan and not godly.” Like participants who made similar statements, Reed focused on the story of the textbook and related it to the story of the Bible, speaking of Satan in a literal way. Although Reed exhibited some aspects of stage 3 in his statement, the main emphasis of his Christian perspective was on the story itself rather than on the textbook’s definition of forgiveness or the author’s viewpoint. None of the participants in the study interpreted content solely in the mythic-literal stage, but many showed elements of it in some of their responses through the use of biblical parallels.

The truth theme shows participant thinking in both the third and fourth stages of faith. In the third stage, *synthetic-conventional faith* (p. 151), Fowler (1981) noted that a person “is aware of having values and normative images. He or she articulates them, defends them and feels deep emotional investments in them, but typically has not made the value system, *as a system*, the object of reflection” (p. 162). Participants’ focus on morality indicated their placement in the synthetic-conventional stage. Most participants were adamant about the Bible’s authority and how it gave meaning to their sense of morality. However, some participants struggled to articulate why they believed the Bible was true and what exactly contributed to their Christian

perspective. Chelsea affirmed that the Bible shows her “right from wrong” but then questioned whether or not she should “follow every single thing” that it says, such as wearing head coverings or not getting tattoos.

The truth theme was also shown in the fourth stage of faith, *individuative-reflective faith* (Fowler, 1981, p. 174). In this stage, people see truth from the lens of a worldview and think critically about how their beliefs interact with those of others. Participants took a worldview approach to truth when they focused on meaning, noting how public school content could not fully convey the meaning of concepts like love and forgiveness. Most participants noted that biology textbooks about evolution were “wrong” because their facts about the origins of life did not align with the Bible’s, thus revealing a worldview perspective. However, Fowler (1981) claimed that “For a genuine move to stage 4 to occur there must be an interruption of reliance on external sources of authority” (p. 179). This interruption corresponds to a recognition of the pervasiveness and extent of worldview perspectives, especially how they influence social systems and institutions (Fowler, 1981). Several of the participants showed a firm placement in this stage through the theme of presentation. For example, Blake and Kyle discussed the framing and bias of almost all textbook excerpts that they analyzed, even when the facts and morality of the excerpts seemed to align with the Bible. Both participants claimed that the information, even if true, could be manipulated in a way that highlights a certain perspective or worldview. While many participants were quick to point this truth out in the biology textbook, very few saw the pervasiveness of worldview influence on more “neutral” subjects like history or English. Blake’s “interruption of reliance on external sources of authority” (Fowler, 1981, p. 179) was made clear in his statement that “a certain viewpoint is kind of being forced upon you through whatever curriculum you’re using or whatever textbook you’re reading from.”

Overall, the research confirmed Fowler's (1981) analysis that most adolescents would show placement in the third and fourth stages of faith. All the participants, in exhibiting the parallel, truth, and presentation themes, showed that they interpreted content through various stages, sometimes resorting to stage 2 thinking and other times stretching to stage 4 thinking. Most of the participants, with their focus on truth, revealed placement in a transition between stages 3 and 4. Several participants showed that they were firmly in the stage 4 category due to their emphasis on presentation. While these results corroborate Fowler's theoretical framework, the current study gives added detail by highlighting specific themes of content interpretation that may take place within various stages. Fowler's broad framework for stages of faith is specified by the themes in this study related to content interpretation, something that does not exist in other theoretical literature on the topic.

Implications

There are a number of theoretical, empirical, and practical implications resulting from the study. Theoretical implications include a potential way to understand how different themes of content interpretation relate to psychological developmental stages, while empirical implications include understanding the differences in applications of viewpoints to subject matter. Practical implications include ways that schools can encourage worldview expression and churches can enhance Christian worldview development.

Theoretical Implications

The results of the study show strong corroboration with Fowler's (1981) stages of faith. The themes of parallel, truth, and presentation imply that perhaps there are specific ways of interpreting academic content from a perspective of faith that help to reveal placement in certain stages. As mentioned, the parallel theme generally corresponded to Fowler's (1981) stage 2,

while truth corresponded to stages 3 and 4, and presentation corresponded to stage 4. The prevalence of these themes in students' answers to questions may provide an efficient way to understand what stage of faith development a student is in. For example, if most statements are related to the parallel theme, the student is likely in stage 2 of faith. The themes from the study also could help to specify Fowler's (1981) much broader framework. While his framework is useful because it applies to all worldviews and faiths, breaking the framework down into themes of content interpretation might provide further accuracy. It would be worth researching whether the themes presented by the ten participants in the current study appear for students in other contexts and with other faiths.

Empirical Implications

The results of the study show that the participants experienced the interpretation of content from their worldview through the themes of parallel, truth, presentation, and interpersonal relatability. While these themes were prevalent for each student, all students exhibited an emphasis in one or more areas. Overall, the results showed that most participants tended to focus on truth as part of their interpretation. However, the focus on truth meant that some of them overlooked the bias or framing of a topic or concept simply because it did not appear to contradict the Bible. This implies that there is a tendency for some evangelical students to potentially embrace secular presentations of content, simply because they are not viewed as contradictory. For example, almost all participants questioned the biology textbook's claims about evolution, even though facts were used, but did not question the history textbook's factual claims about the Crusades. The reason for this was because the facts about evolution, for many participants, were directly opposed to the Bible's story of creation, whereas the Bible had no content to contradict the facts about the Crusades. Some participants did not articulate that it

was possible for the biology textbook and history textbook to both be equally skewed by an alternative worldview. Perhaps this complexity in content interpretation reveals a historic imbalance in Christian circles regarding the message of scripture. For Christian parents, pastors, and teachers who are concerned about the possible invasion of secular thinking, it would be important to emphasize the potential framing of all content rather than focusing on a specific subject or topic.

Practical Implications

The results of the study reveal several practical implications, each pertaining to different societal spheres. In the realm of public education, administrators and teachers should highly consider emphasizing worldview expression in classrooms. In the interpersonal relatability theme, the participants acknowledged the benefits of hearing other perspectives. Not only did it help them better relate to their peers, but it also strengthened their faith. However, the participants also noted that they generally felt uncomfortable sharing their worldview perspective in the classroom because they believed the teacher would move on quickly or that their peers would not be receptive. Several of the participants noted that when a few of their teachers encouraged students to share their opinion in the classroom, they felt more comfortable and willing. Rather than religion being confined to curriculum, perhaps classes would benefit if teachers allowed students to express their worldview about any topic in class. This might not only increase understanding and empathy but could also increase an awareness of worldviews as thought systems and affirm students in their own positions rather than isolating them.

The results of the study also have implications for churches. As mentioned, some participants did not articulate the presentation theme to its fullest extent. Youth pastors and other church teachers should make students aware that information, even if factually and morally

correct, could be presented with a secular bias. If churches included worldview teaching along with sound biblical exegesis, students and other parishioners would likely be developed further into stage 4 (Fowler, 1981) while still remaining secure in their faith. The participants did demonstrate that as a whole, local churches can be encouraged by the depth and vibrancy of many students' faith. While faith development is possible, the students who participated in the study showed that the future for evangelicalism is bright.

There are similar implications from the study for parents and households. Parents should be aware of what students are learning in their classrooms and emphasize the wholistic nature of a Christian worldview. Many of the participants expressed hesitancy in sharing their worldview in the classroom, and it may be helpful for parents to help their teenagers navigate these difficult scenarios. Parents may also model for their students a stage 4 faith, where the presentation of content is considered as much as parallels and truth. After all, if studies are correct, the vibrancy and depth of students' faith is most dependent on their parents (Strom, 2009).

Delimitations and Limitations

Several delimitations were included in the study. A transcendental phenomenological study was chosen due to the nature of the question that I sought to research. Because I desired to understand the experience of interpretation for students, I needed to arrive at the essence of the phenomenon, which is the purpose of a phenomenological study. A transcendental approach was taken because I did not want my own biases to interfere with the results. Participants needed to be under 18 because that would ensure that they were still in high school at the time of the research. I specifically chose public high school students because literature on the Christian worldview of public school students was extremely limited, revealing a need for new studies on that topic. Evangelical students were chosen because evangelicals as a whole emphasize

worldview analysis in the academic community, creating multiple levels of audience for the results of the research. The public schools of the participants were confined to central Pennsylvania for convenience. Since I reside in that location, it was much easier for me to implement the data collection.

There were a few limitations to the study. One limitation was the lack of a strong theoretical framework for understanding worldview interpretation. Although Fowler's (1981) stages were sufficient, the analysis could have perhaps been stronger if the framework was more specific to the experience of worldview interpretation of content rather than a broad framework about the psychology of faith development. One of the largest limitations of the study was the state restrictions implemented due to the COVID-19 pandemic. During the gathering of the data, in-person gatherings at public locations were forbidden. As a result, the document analyses, interviews, and focus group occurred for all participants through the online format of Zoom. Although this was a sufficient virtual face-to-face form for collecting data, perhaps participant responses would have been lengthier or more detailed if the format was in-person. The last noteworthy limitation of the study is its lack of transferability. Since the study focused on participants from a small geographic location, all of whom were white and middle class, the findings of the study cannot be applied more broadly with any degree of certainty. Although this does not nullify the implications of the study, it does necessitate the replication of the study with participants from other demographics in order to apply the findings more generally.

Recommendations for Future Research

The results of the current study reveal multiple pathways for further research. To begin, the methods of the study should be replicated with different demographics. It would be beneficial to know if and how students from inner cities or very rural locations think about

content differently from their worldview. Perhaps students in various locations are exposed to varying degrees of secularism in their public schools and therefore maintain a different approach to interpreting content from their Christian perspective. It would also be beneficial for the same methodology to be conducted on students from private Christian high schools. Do students from Christian high schools show the same themes of content interpretation as Christians from public high schools? To further highlight these similarities and differences, future studies could conduct mixed-methods studies where participant analyses of textbooks are quantified and analyzed across various demographics. Due to the lack of literature on the Christian worldview of public high school students, the approach and focus of future studies is wide open. My hope is that the findings of this study provide a starting point from which researchers can continue to build the literature on this topic.

Summary

Ten evangelical students from public high schools participated in a study to examine how they interpret content areas through their worldview. The results of this transcendental phenomenological study showed that the participants experienced content interpretation through the themes of parallel, truth, presentation, and interpersonal relatability. While these interpretations of content were largely thoughtful and deep, students remained reluctant to express these understandings in the public school classroom. Fowler's (1981) stages of faith framework was used to reveal the theoretical implications of the study, which showed that the participants remained mostly in the synthetic-conventional and individuative-reflective stages. The study suggested that students may benefit from more worldview conversations in the classroom and that churches and parents should emphasize the presentation of content, in addition to the truth of content, as an important aspect of worldview interpretation. Further

research using different demographics would be beneficial as a way to highlight potential transferability of results.

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APPENDIX A

Permission Request Form

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the Department of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The title of my research project is Students' Evangelical Worldview in Public High School Content Areas: A Phenomenological Analysis and the purpose of my research is to describe how 10 evangelical students in public high schools interpret content areas through their worldview.

I am writing to request your permission to contact members of your church to invite them to participate in my research study.

Participants will be asked to contact me to schedule an interview. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please respond by email to rjallen1@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

Russ Allen
Ed.D (ABD)
717-798-4149; rjallen1@liberty.edu

Recruitment Email

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to describe how 10 evangelical students in public high schools interpret content areas through their worldview, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must identify as evangelical Christians, be ages 14-17, and attend a public high school. Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in a document analysis where they will analyze excerpts from popular high school textbooks (60 minutes), participate individually in a semi-structured interview (60 minutes), participate with 4 other students in a focus group (60 minutes), and engage in member checks to review the accuracy of the study's findings (30 minutes). Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

In order to participate, please contact me at 717-798-4149 and sign and return the attached parental consent document.

A consent document is attached to this email. The consent document contains additional information about my research. Please sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the document analysis meeting.

Sincerely,

Russ Allen
Ed.D (ABD)
717-798-4149; rjallen1@liberty.edu

Recruitment Follow-Up Email

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the Department of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. Last a letter was sent to you inviting you to participate in a research study. This follow-up letter is being sent to remind you to respond if you would like to participate and have not already done so. The deadline for participation is [Date].

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to participate in a document analysis where they will analyze excerpts from popular high school textbooks (60 minutes), participate individually in a semi-structured interview (60 minutes), participate with 4 other students in a focus group (60 minutes), and engage in member checks to review the accuracy of the study's findings (30 minutes). Your name and/or other identifying information will be requested as part of your participation, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please contact me at 717-798-4149 and sign and return the attached parental consent document.

A consent document is attached to this Email. The consent document contains additional information about my research. Please sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the document analysis meeting.

Sincerely,

Russ Allen
Ed.D (ABD)
717-798-4149; rjallen1@liberty.edu

Consent/Assent Form

Title of the Project: Students' Evangelical Worldview in Public High School Content Areas: A Phenomenological Analysis

Principal Investigator: Russell Allen, Ed.D. (ABD), Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

Your child is invited to participate in a research study. Participants must identify as evangelical Christians, be ages 14-17, and attend a public high school. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to allow your child to take part in this research project.

What is the study about and why are we doing it?

The purpose of the study is to describe how 10 evangelical students in public high schools interpret content areas through their worldview.

What will participants be asked to do in this study?

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

1. Participate individually in a document analysis with me at a local public library. The student will respond to textbook excerpts from popular high school textbooks. The session will take approximately 60 minutes and will be audio recorded.
2. Participate individually in a semi-structured interview with me at a local public library. The student will respond to 12 questions. The session will take approximately 60 minutes and will be audio recorded.
3. Potentially participate with 4 other students in a focus group with me at a local public library. The 5 students who participate in the focus group will be chosen at random from the 10 interview participants. The student will discuss his or her answers to 5 questions with the other students. The session will take approximately 60 minutes and will be video audio recorded.
4. Participate in a member check where the student can review the accuracy of the study's findings.

How could participants or others benefit from this study?

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

Potential benefits to society include informing churches and schools how they can better meet the worldview needs of young people.

What risks might participants experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks your child would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject.

Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation. The document analyses, interviews, and focus group will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for five years and then erased. The researcher and transcriber will only have access to these recordings throughout the process. Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Data collected as part of this study may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from the participants is shared, any information that could identify them, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared. Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After five years, all electronic records will be deleted.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to allow your child to participate will not affect your or his or her current or future relations with Liberty University or the school and church he or she attends. If you decide to allow your child to participate, she or he is free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should be done if a participant wishes to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw your child from the study or your child chooses to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw her or him or your child chooses to withdraw, data collected from your child, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your child's contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw him or her or your child chooses to withdraw.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Russ Allen. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at rjallen1@liberty.edu or 717-798-4149. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Larry Crites, at lrcrites@liberty.edu.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about rights as a research participant?

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. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to allow your child to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

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.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio and video record my child as part of his/her participation in this study.

Printed Child's/Student's Name

Parent's Signature

Date

Minor's Signature

Date

APPENDIX B

Document Analysis Protocol

Biology Textbook Excerpt

READING TOOL

Applying Prior Knowledge

The climates in Central and South America vary greatly from the climate and habitats of Africa.

✓ Why does it make sense that monkeys in the former areas evolved long tails, while those in the latter areas did not?

BUILD Vocabulary

hominoids group of anthropoids that includes gibbons, orangutans, gorillas, chimpanzees, and humans

opposable thumb thumb that enables grasping objects and using tools

Using Prior Knowledge Very few species on our planet have opposable thumbs. ✓ What advantages do opposable thumbs give to animals?

Well-Developed Cerebrum In primates, the cerebrum (or "thinking" part of the brain) is large and intricate, enabling complex behaviors. Many primate species create elaborate social systems that include extended families, adoption of orphans, and even warfare between rival troops.

Evolution of Primates

🔍 **KEY QUESTION** What are the major groups of primates?

Humans and other primates share a common ancestor that lived over 65 million years ago, though the two groups split early. Primates in one group, which contains lemurs and lorises, don't look much like typical monkeys. The other group includes tarsiers and the anthropoids, or humanlike primates.

Lemurs and Lorises Most lemurs and lorises are small and nocturnal, have large eyes that see in the dark, and have long snouts.

Tarsiers and Anthropoids Primates more closely related to humans than lemurs belong to a different group having broader faces and widely separated nostrils. The group includes Asian tarsiers and anthropoids, the latter of which split into two groups about 45 million years ago.

New World Monkeys One anthropoid branch, the New World monkeys, is found in Central and South America. They mainly live in trees, have long flexible arms, and have long prehensile tails.

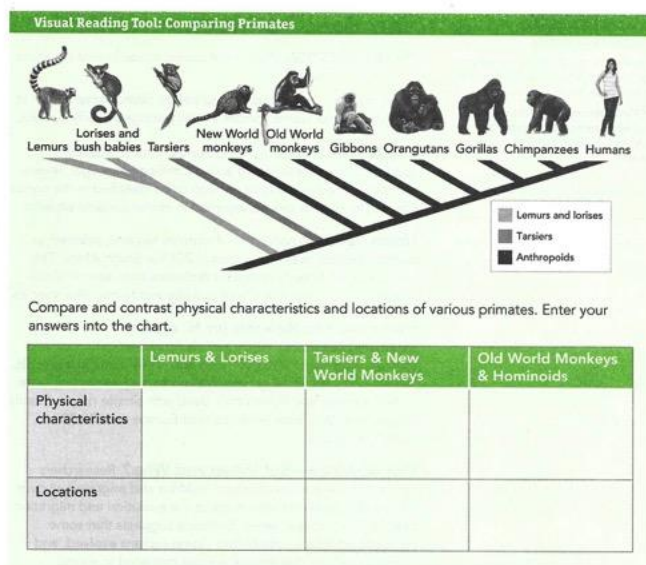
Old World Monkeys and Great Apes The other anthropoid branch includes the Old World monkeys and great apes and evolved from Africa and Asia. Old World monkeys spend time in trees, but lack prehensile tails. Great apes, or **hominoids**, include gibbons, orangutans, chimpanzees, and humans.

Hominin Evolution

🔍 **KEY QUESTION** What adaptations enable later hominin species to walk upright?

Between 6 and 7 million years ago, hominins, the lineage that includes modern humans and closely related species, split from the lineage that led to chimpanzees. Hominins evolved **opposable thumbs** and large brains. The skull, neck, spinal column, hip bones, and leg bones of early hominin species changed shape in ways that enabled later species to walk upright. Hominins' brains are much larger than those of chimpanzees with the biggest difference being the size of the cerebrum.

Hominin Relationships The hominin fossil record includes seven species and a few subspecies. All of these are relatives of modern humans, but not all are human ancestors.



New Findings and New Questions The study of human ancestors, which includes studying fossils and DNA, is constantly changing. Since the 1990s, fossil discoveries have more than doubled the number of known hominin species. The oldest known hominin is the *Sahelanthropus*, which is about 7 million years old, though scientists are still debating whether the creature was a true hominin, as well as how it relates to other fossil hominins and to humans.

Australopithecus The genus *Australopithecus* lived from about 4 million to about 1.5 million years ago. They walked on two feet, or were **bipedal**. Their skeletons suggest they spent time in trees, while their tooth structure suggests they ate a lot of fruit. The best-known species is *Australopithecus afarensis*, of which the best-known specimen, called "Lucy," was discovered in 1974. In 2006, "the Dikka Baby" fossil, another *A. afarensis* specimen, was found in Africa. Leg bones confirmed that it was bipedal, and arm and shoulder bones suggest that it was a stronger climber than modern humans.

BUILD Vocabulary

bipedal having two-foot locomotion

Related Words Humans are the only purely bipedal animals on our planet. Most other animals are quadrupedal. ☒ Based upon what you know about the word **bipedal**, and what you know about numerical prefixes, how many legs does a quadruped walk on?

English Textbook Excerpt

UNIT 5 INTRODUCTION

LAUNCH TEXT | ARGUMENT MODEL

This selection is an example of an **argument**, a type of writing in which the author states and defends a position on a topic. This is the type of writing you will develop in the Performance-Based Assessment at the end of the unit.

As you read, think about how the writer builds a case. Mark the text to help you answer this question: What is the writer's position, and what evidence supports it?



**Neither Justice nor Forgetting:
Defining Forgiveness**

NOTES

1 The concept of forgiveness is central to William Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*. Some readers maintain that its main character, Prospero, represents this noble virtue. However, a careful reading shows evidence to the contrary as Prospero's forgiveness always has a price.

2 From the beginning, Prospero seizes every opportunity fate brings him to get revenge. The storm from which the play takes its title puts his brother, Antonio, within Prospero's grasp. Twelve years earlier, Antonio took Prospero's land and power and exiled him to a distant island. Prospero's anger still burns.

3 Prospero's revenge is made possible by his own cunning. During his exile, he studied sorcery. The storm that batters Antonio's party is one that Prospero uses magic to create. He is sincere when he asks Ariel, his magical servant, "But are they, Ariel, safe?" However, he does not flinch at the miseries the sailors endure.

4 In this same exchange, Prospero taunts Ariel when the sprite requests his freedom. At length, Prospero reminds Ariel that he once rescued him from a magical prison. He browbeats Ariel until the sprite grovels. Then, before Prospero offers Ariel freedom, he makes him meek with a threat:

If thou more murmur'st, I will rend an oak
And peg thee in his knotty entrails till
Thou hast howled away twelve winters.

5 At other times, Prospero savors victory, demonstrating his power and control before offering a change of heart. In this speech, he teases Antonio before accepting his brother's apology:

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SCAN FOR MULTIMEDIA

ESSENTIAL QUESTION: What motivates us to forgive?

For you, most wicked sir, whom to call brother
Would even infect my mouth, I do forgive
Thy rankest fault—all of them; and require
My dukedom of thee, which perforce, I know,
Thou must restore.

If to forgive is to let go of anger and resentment, then Prospero cannot be called forgiving.

- 6 Caliban, Prospero's prisoner and servant, presents another example of forgiveness mixed with punishment. For all practical purposes, Prospero has enslaved Caliban because the creature once menaced his daughter Miranda. Later, in an effort to be free, Caliban plots to kill Prospero. Yet Prospero neither respects Caliban nor finds him threatening. Instead, he describes him as a "Dull thing . . . that Caliban / Whom now I keep in service."
- 7 Prospero ultimately shows Caliban mercy, which could be seen as forgiveness. But he first punishes Caliban thoroughly and continues to hold him in contempt. His forgiveness is less an emotional change than a simple dismissal of Caliban's importance.
- 8 As some critics interpret *The Tempest*, Prospero is moved to mercy by Ariel's sadness for the shipwreck victims. His anger softened, Prospero learns to forgive. But again, for Prospero, bygones cannot be bygones until he has received an apology:
... The rarer action is
In virtue than in vengeance. They being penitent,
The sole drift of my purpose doth extend
Not a frown further. . . .
- 9 Shakespeare is the foremost dramatist in the English language with good reason. In Prospero, he creates a complex portrait in which anger, the desire for control, the need for vengeance, and the will to forgive battle it out. In the end, Prospero does let go and forgive, but not before bringing his enemies to their knees. ■

NOTES

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WORD NETWORK FOR VIRTUE AND VENGEANCE

Vocabulary A Word Network is a collection of words related to a topic. As you read the selections in this unit, identify interesting words related to forgiveness, and add them to your Word Network. For example, you might begin by adding words from the Launch Text such as *victory*, *resentment*, and *revenge*. Continue to add words as you complete this unit.

Tool Kit
Word Network Model



Health Textbook Excerpt

Marriage

More than 70 percent of all Americans marry at some time during their lives. Therefore, it is likely that you will marry someday. If you do choose to marry, it will probably be one of the most important decisions you will make. It will affect you, your spouse, your family, your friends, and future generations.

Why People Marry People marry for a variety of reasons. Some people marry because they desire another person's love and companionship. Others marry for financial, social, or cultural reasons. Some couples marry in order to start a family of their own.

You need to know yourself fairly well before you select a marriage partner. You need to know what your goals are and how you are going to achieve them. You need to know what is important to you. When it comes time to marry, people usually select marriage partners who have similar interests, values, level of education, and social background to themselves. People who are quite different from each other can also have successful marriages, but they may have to work harder to overcome their differences.

Successful Marriages You probably feel, as most people do, that successful marriages are based on love. But what is love? Often young people mistake sexual attraction or short-lived crushes for love. Real love is part of a long-lasting relationship in which people really know, like, and accept each other as they are. People who are truly in love appreciate the things they like about each other and accept the things they dislike. When you love someone, his or her well-being becomes as important to you as your own.

Although love is a basic element in a successful marriage, it is not the only one. **Love, compatibility, and commitment are key factors in a successful marriage.** Compatibility is the ability to live together in harmony. Couples who share many qualities tend to be more compatible. Commitment is the strong determination by the couple to make their marriage a fulfilling lifelong relationship, despite the challenges. Other important factors to consider when thinking about marriage are listed in Figure 12.

What Qualities Make a Marriage Successful?

- Love
- Friendship
- Commitment
- Compatibility
- Communication
- Mutual respect
- Physical attraction
- Ability to compromise

Connect to
Your Life

What do you think is most important in a successful marriage?

FIGURE 12 There are many elements of a successful marriage besides love.

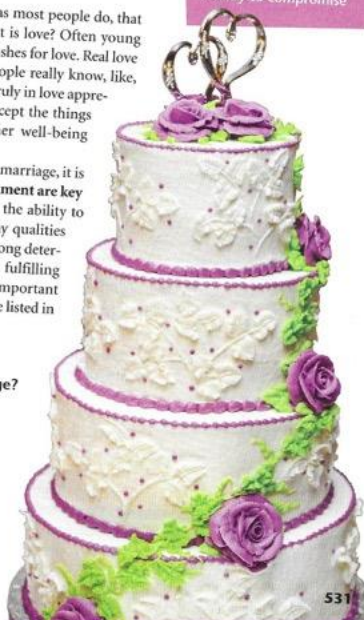


FIGURE 13 Many married couples share responsibilities both inside and outside the home.



Stresses in Marriage Throughout marriage, a couple must be willing to make adjustments to meet each other's needs. The changes in attitudes and expectations that these adjustments require can produce stress.

One difficult adjustment in marriage can be determining the responsibilities that each spouse will have. Some couples decide early in their marriage how each person will contribute financially and who will do certain household tasks. Who will do the cooking? Who will pay the bills?

By compromising and accepting tasks that fit their abilities and schedules, a couple usually can develop a comfortable give-and-take relationship. When changes occur, such as the birth of a child or a new job, the couple may need to redefine their responsibilities.

Marriages can become strained when unexpected problems arise. One spouse may lose his or her job. A spouse or child may become seriously ill. There may be an unplanned pregnancy. Effective communication can be an important tool in helping a couple get through a crisis. Sometimes a couple may need to seek help from community agencies that provide financial or counseling services. Turning to family or friends for emotional support is another way to get through hard times.

Parenthood For some people, young adulthood is not only a time for marriage but also a time to become parents. The relationship between parent and child is critical to the child's healthy development. As you read in Chapter 19, parents need to be able to commit a lifetime of love, guidance, and attention to their children.

At least one part of making the decision to become parents is purely practical. A couple should review their budget to find out whether or not they can afford to provide food, clothing, and medical care for a child. They need to discuss who will care for the child if both spouses continue to work. They need to find out if their employers grant maternity or paternity leave, so that at least one of them can stay home with the baby for a few months and still return to the same job. They may also need to investigate the costs and availability of child care.

History Textbook Excerpt

European Societies 15

the enslavement of "heathens" (non-Christians), and some Europeans' freedom was restricted by such conditions as serfdom, which tied them to the land if not to specific owners. In short, Europe's kingdoms resembled those of Africa or Mesoamerica but differed greatly from the more egalitarian societies found in America north of Mexico (see Map 1.3).

Most Europeans, like most Africans and Americans, lived in small villages. Only a few cities dotted the landscape, most of them sea-

Gender, Work, Politics, and Religion

ports or political capitals. European farmers, called peasants, owned or leased separate plots of land, but they worked the fields communally. Men did most of the fieldwork; women helped out chiefly at planting and harvest. In some regions men concentrated on herding livestock while women cared for children, prepared and preserved food, milked cows, and kept poultry. A woman married to a city artisan or storekeeper might assist her husband in business. Because Europeans kept domesticated animals (pigs, goats, sheep, and cattle) for meat, hunting had little economic importance in their cultures. Instead, hunting was primarily a sport for male aristocrats.

Unlike in Africa or the Americas, where women often played prominent roles in politics and religion, men dominated all areas of life in Europe. A few women—notably Queen Elizabeth I of England—achieved status or power by right of birth, but the vast majority were excluded from positions of authority. European women also generally held inferior social, religious, and economic positions, yet they wielded power in their own households over children and servants. In contrast to the freedom children enjoyed in Native American families, European children were tightly controlled and subjected to harsh discipline.

Christianity was the dominant European religion. In the West, authority rested in the Catholic Church, based in Rome and led by the pope, who then as now directed a wholly male clergy. Although Europeans were nominally Catholic, many adhered to local belief systems that the church deemed heretical but failed to extinguish. Kings allied themselves with the church when it suited them, but often acted independently. Yet even so, the Christian nations of Europe from the twelfth century on publicly united in a goal of driving nonbelievers (especially Muslims) not only from the European continent but also from the holy city of Jerusalem, which caused the series of wars known as the Crusades. Nevertheless, in the fifteenth century, Muslims dominated the commerce and geography of the Mediterranean world, especially after they conquered Constantinople (capital of the Christian Byzantine empire) in 1453. Few would have predicted that Christian Europeans would ever challenge that dominance.

When the fifteenth century began, European nations were slowly recovering from the devastating epidemic

Effects of Plague and Warfare

known as the Black Death, which first struck in 1346. This plague seems to have arrived in Europe from China, traveling with long-distance traders along the Silk Road. The disease then recurred with particular severity in the 1360s and 1370s. Although no precise figures are available and the impact of the Black Death varied from region to region, the best estimate is that fully one-third of Europe's people died during those terrible years. A precipitous economic decline followed—in some regions more than half of the workers had died—as did severe social, political, and religious disruption because of the deaths of clergymen and other leading figures.

As plague ravaged the population, England and France waged the Hundred Years' War (1337–1453), which began after English monarchs claimed the French throne. The war interrupted overland trade routes



▲ Daily life in early sixteenth-century Portugal, as illustrated in a manuscript prayer book. At top a prosperous family shares a meal being served by an African slave. Other scenes show male laborers clearing land and hunting birds (left) and chopping wood (right), while at bottom a woman plants seeds in a prepared bed and in the top background female servants work in the kitchen.

Interview Protocol

1. What role does your faith play for you as a student?
2. How does your faith impact the way you understand content in class?
3. Rank each of the texts (from the document analysis) in order from most to least compatible with your faith. You may also deem some to be equal. Why did you choose this order?
4. How similar do you think textbooks at a public school are to textbooks at a Christian school? Explain.
5. What subject area or topic in school is hardest to reconcile with your faith? Why?
6. What subject area or topic in school is easiest to reconcile with your faith? Why?
7. Explain how the Bible influences your view of reality.
8. How do you think the Bible relates to what you learn in the classroom?
9. How big of an impact does the Bible have on how you respond to teacher's questions?
10. What is the role of perspective in your classes?
11. How valid do you think other students' answers are to controversial questions, such as evolution?
12. If you quoted the Bible in one of your classes, what do you think the reaction would be by the teacher and students? Why?

Focus Group Protocol

1. What is the best and worst thing about being a Christian in a public school classroom?
2. Have you ever heard the term, “worldview?” What do you think it means?
3. How would you describe to a non-Christian teacher your Christian worldview?
4. How would you describe the worldview of most Christian students in public schools?
5. What are the positives and negatives of learning content at a public school?

APPENDIX C

Sample Document Analysis Notes

Men - "did most of field work"
"herding livestock"

women - "planting and harvest"
"cared for children, prepared and
preserved food, milked cows, kept
poultry"
"assist her husband"

Christianity was dominant European religion
"Authority rested in the Catholic Church"

- Clash between Christians + Muslims
 - ↳ Crusades - I remember learning about the crusades in school

Sample Document Analysis Transcript Excerpt (Kyle)

Kyle: [Reading]

Me: Cool. All right. So what were some of the things that you wrote down and why'd you write this down?

Kyle: The first thing I noted that when he was exiled, the first thing he did was study sorcery. And I think that's because, well, sorcery is obviously like I think witchcraft like a very demonic kind of thing. And I think Satan in a way, got ahold of him in the midst of his, his anger and just, he was, he was in a very vulnerable, his heart was in a vulnerable place, I think, like Satan kind of took advantage that when he was studying sorcery, he kind of like brought that to him. I also thought that - It said if to forgive is to let go of anger and resentment and then Prospero cannot be called forgiving. I think that's actually very true. Because like, I mean, you can say you forgive someone, but like if deep in your heart, like you still have that like if you're holding a grudge and you still have that anger in your heart towards them, I mean, the Bible says, well, Jesus himself actually said like anyone who hates his brother has like murdered him and his heart. So I think you can't truly forgive someone unless you've actually like, let go of that anger. Then yeah, I also said that - It talks about like forgiveness mixed with punishment. Like when Caliban - he did something took Prospero's daughter or something, and then like Prospero, imprisoned him and I guess ultimately did forgive him, but like, in a way, like, I don't know if we can completely like match God's forgiveness because like, we didn't do anything to deserve his forgiveness. And like, he didn't like punish us or anything like that. Like we were sinners here from the start and he just forgave us and that was the end. Like he didn't like, Oh, you're gonna go through this in that punishment until I can forgive you. There was no punishment mixed with it. And I think maybe like, that's the ultimate ultimate example of love through that forgiveness of Jesus dying on the cross. I think true forgiveness can't have the punishment mixed in with it.

Me: Yeah, absolutely.

Kyle: And then also wrote that at the end, it said, like he needed an apology to accept forgiveness. And I've been thinking about this, like to truly be forgiven as a Christian. You kinda, you have to like repent and like, know that like kind of like you have to repent and like acknowledge your sins like it's hard to, like, you can't really be forgiven and still willfully living in your sins without feeling that like resentment towards your sins. But at the same time, like it's kind of both because like we're called to like, forgive, like you just will let go of any like if, if we sin against him he doesn't necessarily need an apology to like forgive us. But like, if we're not asking for an apology, then does it, it shows that we don't really like, truly love God. And why would we want to live with God in heaven for eternity if we don't really love him? You know? So I think it's, it's kind of both ways, I guess. But definitely like, cause I know repenting is a huge part of being forgiven. He was like, if you don't want forgiveness for your sins, then why would like, I don't know. Yeah. That's my thought process.

Me: Yeah. That's good. That's good. Anything else? Or is that all you got?

Sample Interview Transcript Excerpt (Tim)

Tim: Even from a non-Christian perspective. Perspective, ha. If you're studying something, you're probably going to look at it with your modern lens. You're going to study it as a teenager living in America in the 21st century, so all of your personal experiences go into that perspective. So I think it's very important because that's what determines the effect that information your studying has on you. Is whatever lens you're looking at it through. If you're studying history and you feel totally disengaged because you're learning about the dark ages and it really doesn't apply to you, you're not going to learn anything from that. You're not going to put that into practice. But if you're learning about some Medieval hero who lived a certain way with someone then – and you identify with that – then perhaps you're going to become more engaged in that story and you're going to come and put more work into that class and start taking things out of that learning and being able to use that in your actual life. So I mean it's the same thing when you're studying the Bible. If you are looking at, I don't know, Leviticus or something, and it's talking about all of these different Jewish customs and rules and you're not Jewish I, like, it's not going to mean a whole lot to you. You're like, okay so the temple had this many lamp stands made out of gold. What does that do for my life? But then if you read something like James, which is targeted at Believers, and it's like yes this is what you should do to bring others to Christ and you're like, oh, this suddenly makes sense to my life's situation. Yeah, I find that's really one of the big goals of perception.

Me: Yeah. Good. Cool, alright well we're actually almost done here. We've got 2 more questions, okay?

Tim: Okay.

Me: The next one is how valid do you think other students' answers are to controversial questions, such as evolution?

Tim: I feel like the easy – this is kind of – it's a weird question because evolution is a controversial question but I don't think it has to be. The problem is that everyone is looking at it with a different perspective, to bring the last question into this question. But if I look at it – if someone – I mean it's the same thing with anyone who has an opposing idea to you. It kind of depends on how you carry yourself. You can just be like you're wrong and it's because of this, this, this, and this. If you're having a discussion with someone, forget it. Now this is going to be a heated debate and no one's going to learn anything. It's just going to be two people talking past each other. But if you actually go into it and say okay, why do you say this? That's how you culture learning there. So I think that's something that has to be kept in mind when someone says something that you believe to be wrong, which is definitely something I personally would have to work on because I can be one of those people who is like you know what, you're wrong. And I get super fired up inside myself because you're wrong. And I have to watch that because A.) it turns people off but B.) it's just like that's God's child. It's another human that's been made in his image. It's not just – the person is not just some symbol. It's not a punching bag that you can just fuel all of your anger at. That's a person whom God created, so you have to respect the humanity there and recognize that you're not right about everything. You have your own things that you've probably said where they're like no you're wrong. Yeah.

Focus Group Transcript Excerpt

Kyle: Like for example, one of my classes that's most contradictory to Christian views is psychology because that sort of teaches like it's all coming from your mind and there's no spiritual aspect to anything. So I think a lot of the content I learned in that class makes me challenge my faith. So then whenever I look in to how that could relate to the Bible, maybe be explained by the Bible, it doesn't, I don't only find how the Bible is correct, but the things I'm learning that did seem contradictory at first, actually prove what the Bible says in a way I find out a lot of times and it sort of strengthens my faith in that way, because I'm seeing like the secular content that is like taught without God. And then when you actually looked into how God created everything, it's sort of like, well this actually proves what God did, why God did it, I guess.

Landon: It gives a sense of wonder almost. It's like, wow, I've got this really cool. Like, like I don't even understand how that would fit in, but you still made that happen. It's really cool.

Chelsea: I was just gonna say for like, for like evolution, for example, I once had a really long conversation with it was like one of my leaders who's like in the medical profession and she was like, telling me, she's like, what I believe is like, the Bible says it was created in, I mean, the world was created in like seven days, but like how, like, who are we to say, like what seven days was back then? She's like, and I kind of just like trust that both can happen. Like, I can believe that God made the earth, but like that maybe the earth being 2000 years old isn't necessarily like the same times that like matched up. So it's just like different, different people have like so many different opinions and like, it is cool to see how everything interconnects, like what you guys were saying.

Landon: Yeah. Isn't there something in the scripture somewhere that says like, Oh, a day to God, like just, I'm sure someone pointed that out, but like the thousand days is a minute something yeah.

Me: Yeah, a day is a thousand years. Yeah.

Landon: Yeah. Yup.

Eve: Yeah. I think there's definitely plenty things we learned in school that are contradictory to our beliefs. And I'm sure we'll get into that more with the negative sides of what we learned in school. But I do think there's also a lot of times when you learn things that can coexist with our beliefs or help that a lot of like when we talk about ancient civilizations and history and stuff like that, I remember just having a better understanding when we talk about Egypt or I don't know, like the Mesopotamians, I don't know. And like just having a perspective, cause I know some of these stories and I know some of this ancient history just by being a Christian. So I feel like I can kind of help like teachers and students there too. And we have those discussions because it like mirrors what I'm learning in church.

APPENDIX D

Audit Trail

May 18, 2020 – Contacted youth pastors

May 18, 2020 – Response from [youth pastor]

May 18, 2020 – Participant contact list from [youth pastor]

May 27, 2020 – Follow-up email to youth pastors

May 27, 2020 – Emails sent to contacts recommended by [youth pastor]

May 27, 2020 – Eve text agreeing to participate in study

May 27, 2020 – Tim emails with question about study

May 28, 2020 – Andrea calls to confirm participation

May 28, 2020 – Tim emails to confirm participation

June 1, 2020 – Scheduled Document Analysis session with Tim for 6/5/20

June 1, 2020 – Scheduled Document Analysis session with Eve for 6/8/20

June 5, 2020 – Completed Session #1 with Tim

June 5, 2020 – Received text message from Landon's mom that Landon can participate

June 8, 2020 – Completed Session #1 with Eve

June 8, 2020 – Emailed Andrea to set up time for Session #1

June 8, 2020 – Emailed Landon to set up time for Session #1

June 17, 2020 – Completed Session #1 with Andrea

June 18, 2020 – Sent follow-up emails to youth pastors about recommending more participants

June 22, 2020 – Contacted Landon about scheduling Session #1

June 24, 2020 – Landon confirms time for Session #1

June 25, 2020 – Completed Session #1 with Landon

June 26, 2020 – Contacted Tim to schedule Session #2

July 8, 2020 – Contacted Eve to schedule Session #2

July 17, 2020 – Contacted [youth pastors] requesting permission to contact students

July 17, 2020 – Completed Session #2 with Tim

July 22, 2020 – Completed Session #2 with Andrea

July 24, 2020 – Completed Session #2 with Landon

July 27, 2020 – Completed Session #2 with Eve

July 27, 2020 – Received participant recommendations from [youth pastors]

July 27, 2020 – Emails sent to contacts recommended by [youth pastors]

October 28, 2020 – Emails sent to contacts recommended by [youth pastors]

November 4, 2020 – Completed Sessions #1 & #2 with Megan

November 12, 2020 – Completed Sessions #1 & 2 with Kyle

November 19, 2020 – Completed Session #1 with Chelsea

November 22, 2020 – Completed Session #2 with Chelsea

December 3, 2020 – Completed Session #1 with Reed Jones

December 7, 2020 – Tim, Andrea, Chelsea, Eve, and Kyle randomly selected for Focus Group and emailed

December 10, 2020 – Completed Session #2 with Reed


December 16, 2020 – Completed Focus Group session

January 13, 2021 – Completed Sessions #1 & 2 with Travis

January 22, 2021 – Completed Sessions #1 & 2 with Blake

March 2, 2021 – Completed member check

Horizontalization Sample Excerpt

<p>you can't really be forgiven and still willfully living in your sins without feeling that like resentment towards your sins. But at the same time, like it's kind of both because like we're called to like, forgive, like you just will let go of any like if, if we sin against him he doesn't necessarily need an apology to like forgive us. But like, if we're not asking for an apology, then does it, it shows that we don't really like, truly love God. And why would we want to live with God in heaven for eternity if we don't really love him?</p>	<p>Allen, Russell J February 06, 2021 </p> <p>Wrestles with understanding of repentance and forgiveness in the bible.</p> <p>Narrative -- MORALITY</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • And it said in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. I think that like that like outer space, like the cosmos and earth, there's the bearing ball of earth that it was could have been created millions and millions of years ago. I don't think I was part of like the seven day creation when he actually started putting things on the earth. 	<p>Allen, Russell J</p> <p>Uses bible verse to show reasonable doubt of textbook topic.</p> <p>Factual -- FACTUAL ALIGNMENT</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I saw thinking the Bible talks about, like fallen angels have come down. And it said they like reproduced and treated like a species called like Nephalims or something like that. Which I guess became the Neanderthals and so on and so forth. So I think part of the history of like, with our, our species, as you knew coming from primates, maybe that was misunderstood as we came from like Nephalims and they kind of looked like that kind of animal maybe, or, but I think in the beginning, God treated humans as like, as humans. 	<p>Allen, Russell J</p> <p>Uses obscure bible reference to explain biological concept.</p> <p>Factual -- FACTUAL ALIGNMENT</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'd also like to add, like, this is coming from like a textbook that they would, obviously like teach them in school and stuff. And I think obviously like evolution, there's like a lot of flaws because like it doesn't line up with the Bible. I think a lot of it is just what we assume and the world, and more specifically like the scientific world tries to find the answers that I think are not like the Bible says that like the truth is found in Jesus. And if you, if you don't have, if you don't have Jesus, you're on the truth and you're in darkness in this world, often lives in darkness. I think a lot of worldly scientists and just, it, it, they don't want to accept what the Bible says is true. And I think that they've really they really hold fast to these theories of evolution and try to make it as true as possible when really there's not as much evidence as, I mean, like they're just teaching this in schools as if it's just like a straight up fact. Like I don't, I think they're just the world really tries to go stray from the truth in the Bible. I think it's very anti-Bible, I think. 	<p>Allen, Russell J</p> <p>Clearly states that scientists and educators are making assumptions that go against the Bible.</p> <p>Limits/Portrayal/Position -- VIEW</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All right. I said there's a lot of like theory involved and like, not once did they mention the word "theory," even though evolution is a theory. I just think it's like the Bible and the history of the Bible, especially like in the Old Testament is just like there's. So there's a whole other spectrum of like what history could be. And obviously, like, we believe this to be true because like, we don't find like laws in biblical history from the beginning of the world. Like it's still debated to this day. Like I just, I like how they're so against like, not against, but like, they hold fast to this idea of evolution as this is the answer, this is fact, without considering anything else. 	<p>Allen, Russell J</p> <p>Assumes the narrowing of possibilities based on assumptions</p> <p>Limits -- VIEW</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • And like, oh, maybe they're going to say that, that this might be a theory that we don't know for certain, but they just added so many little phrases, like like they found new discoveries from studying fossils and DNA. Like they add these little phrases that make it sound like we have, like, we are right on this. Like there's no, there's no question. And they only talked about how it's getting more advanced instead of like the things that they're still working on trying to discover. And I just think it's really having an impact on 	<p>Allen, Russell J</p> <p>Suggests an explicit attempt to influence anti-Christian ideas</p> <p>Position/Portrayal -- FRAMING</p>

Memoing and Coding

Critical Question: How do evangelical students in public high schools interpret content areas through their worldview?

Sub-Question 1: What **philosophical assumptions** about content information are informed by the lived experiences of evangelical students in public high schools?

- As worldview scholars show, all worldviews are comprised of underlying philosophical assumptions and presuppositions (Naugle, 2002; Sire, 2009). Other studies reveal that these philosophical assumptions affect the way that people understand content areas such as science, English, and history

Sub-Question 2: How do the lived experiences of evangelical students impact the way they **relate the Bible to topics** presented in public high school classrooms?

- Fowler (1981) and Naugle (2002) both included narrative as a major component of worldview understanding. Those who have strong worldviews are able to describe events, circumstances, and ideas in light of biblical language and stories.

Sub-Question 3: How do evangelical students' lived experiences influence the way they comprehend the **multiple worldview perspectives** involved in content presentation at a public high school?

- According to Fowler (1981), people who are in the Individuative-Reflective Stage become cognizant of their own outlook on life in comparison to others. They recognize the presence of multiple perspectives regarding an event, circumstance, or idea.

1. Highlight significant quotes from transcript based on each sub-question.
2. Copy and paste highlighted quote into Horizontalization document
3. Take notes/make comments on each quote
4. Code each of the quotes
5. Create themes based on the quotes/codes
6. Create textual and structural statements
7. Create composite description

Codes:

- Definition – meaning of words may change depending on perspective
- Factual – truth statement about history
- Empathy – understanding other perspectives
- Limits – some things are unexplainable by certain viewpoints
- Lived Behavior – dealing with how one should behave
- Position – mention of a specific position or view
- Portrayal – notes how something is portrayed, either positively or negatively
- Cohesive – two ideas can work together

- Narrative – story or explanation of general concept
- Connection – connecting school content with other content
- Interjection – inserting a view into conversation

Themes (often overlapping):

1. Parallel – Stage 2
 - a. Contemporary
 - b. Historical
 - c. Biblical
2. Truth – Stages 3-4
 - a. Factual Alignment
 - b. Morality
 - c. Meaning
3. Presentation – Stage 4?
 - a. Substance
 - b. View
 - c. Framing
4. Interpersonal Relatability (not answered in research questions)
 - a. Understanding
 - b. Relevancy
 - c. Conflict

Textual Statement: How did evangelical students in public high schools experience interpreting content areas through their worldviews? Students interpreted content through the general categories of parallel, truth, and presentation, each revealing placement in a stage of faith, according to Fowler (1981). They often related classroom content to contemporary issues or biblical people and events. They also spoke strongly about whether content was true, separating topics based on factual alignment, morality, and meaning. Some students also went further and analyzed how material was presented to them, pointing out “bias” or framing, and suggesting that important aspects of a Christian view were missing.

IMAGINATIVE VARIATION



Structural Statement: In what context did evangelical students in public high schools experience interpreting content areas through their worldview? Students generally recognized that many teachers and peers hold to different perspectives than themselves. The theme of interpersonal relatability revealed that participants believed that while some teachers and students may be hostile to Christianity, the majority would remain apathetic to Christianity being expressed in the classroom due to either a disbelief in its relevance or a desire to avoid conflict. Overall, students were optimistic about their situation as Christians in public school classrooms, asserting the benefits of understanding different perspectives, despite their own hesitancy to express their views.

Composite Description: What is the essence of the experience? Students interpret content through their worldview in a variety of ways that correspond to Fowler’s (1981) stages of faith.

Some students see faith in a more wholistic way than others. While these interpretations of content are largely thoughtful and deep, students remain reluctant to express these understandings in the public school classroom. Students are aware of contradictory perspectives presented by teachers, peers, and classroom textbooks, but mostly choose to avoid conflict and keep faith references to themselves. Students' ability to interpret content through their worldview does encourage them to seek understanding with other views and opinions that are expressed in the classroom even though there is hesitancy to express their own. Understanding in the classroom, however, may lead to conversation outside of the classroom.