

Discerning Generational Shifts in
Child and Adolescent Susceptibility to Sex Trafficking

by

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ABSTRACT

Human trafficking, specifically sex trafficking, is currently the fastest growing criminal industry for many reasons. Children and adolescents are most likely to become victims of this heinous crime because of the vulnerabilities inherent to this developmental stage. Adolescents are susceptible to sex trafficking for many reasons, such as their need to belong, anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem, and many others. Furthermore, changes that have occurred within this generation of children and adolescents not only make them uniquely different from previous generations but also exacerbate their susceptibility to sex trafficking.

This qualitative study explored professional school counselor experience with generational shifts in children and adolescents and how these changes have increased children's and adolescents' susceptibility to sex trafficking. Specifically, school counselors were interviewed about their knowledge of sex trafficking and the differences they have observed in this generation of children and adolescents that distinguish them from preceding generations. Although, society is learning more about sex trafficking with children and adolescents, little research has been conducted. Most information is derived from police reports and survivor accounts. Currently, no studies have discussed professional school counselor experience with children's and adolescents' susceptibility to sex trafficking.

Findings from this research study indicate changes in seven categories pertaining to child and adolescent susceptibility to sex trafficking. These categories include: personal achievement, parenting, technology, risk taking behavior, sexuality/gender identity, poverty, and mental illness. The research findings of this study can be utilized to

increase awareness of sex trafficking in professional school counselors, aide in implementing training programs and graduate school curriculum that make necessary adjustments to counselor interventions, and to promote advocacy for children and adolescents regarding their susceptibility to sex trafficking.

Keywords: adolescents, children, domestic, generational changes, licensed professional counselor, minor, professional school counselor, sex trafficking, susceptibility

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ASCA.....	American School Counselor Association
CSC.....	Certified School Counselor
LCDC.....	Licensed Chemical Dependency Counselor
LPC.....	Licensed Professional Counselor
LPC-S.....	Licensed Professional Counselor Supervisor
NCC.....	National Certified Counselor

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Professional school counselors (PSC) have great responsibility in schools. They serve their students, teachers, administrators, and parents across multiple domains. PSC's often take on the role of counselor; consultant, coordinator of services, leader, advocate, and team collaborator on their campus (American School Counseling Association, 2013). In addition, schools districts are beginning to hire licensed professional counselors (LPC) to serve students with their more serious mental health needs. Licensed professional counselors promote client well-being and advocate for their clients when needed (American Counseling Association, 2014).

Counselors serving in schools for extended amounts of time, may witness generational shifts in their students. Counselors are in the optimal position to observe cultural changes and vulnerabilities that may lead to sex trafficking. However, many school counselors are not aware of the signs of sex trafficking and lack general knowledge of the hideous subject.

Combatting sex trafficking in our communities is not an easy task. Awareness of vulnerabilities such as bullying, homelessness, and substance abuse in the home are key to prevention (Smith, 2014). School counselors are in a position to play an essential role in preventing children and adolescents from falling victim to this revolting crime (Smith, 2014). Learning from the direct observations of school counselors may provide an insight into the youth of today.

Statement of Problem

According to the United Nations, an estimated 27 million people are trafficked into forced labor or sexual exploitation (Rescue Her, 2015). Sex trafficking produces approximately 32 billion a year (Rescue Her, 2015). In the United States, 100,000 minors are exploited for commercial sex annually and many are from Texas (Rescue Her, 2015). Of those 100,000, 80% are female, and the average age is 12 years (Rescue Her, 2015). According to a study from the University of Texas (2017), there are currently 79,000 minors who are victims of sex trafficking in Texas. They found that the total amount of known victims, including adults and minors in the state of Texas, is 300,000. The University of Texas believes that this number only shows a small portion of actual victims in the state.

Adolescents in the United States are most likely to become victims of sex trafficking due to the issues related to this developmental stage (Polaris Project, 2015). Many teens struggle with the need to belong and seek the approval of others. Erikson (1968), believed that while adolescents are finding their independence, they are also looking to how their own identity fits in with relationships and careers. Traffickers are aware of the vulnerabilities inherent to adolescents and use opportune strategies to exploit their developmental needs, in order to groom victims (Greenbaum & Crawford-Jakubiak, 2014).

Significance of the Study

Cultural aspects related to adolescents in the United States, and around the world, have significantly changed from past generations. In this generation, more than in the past, information is shared quickly and on a global scale. Technologies such as

Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter have taken social pressures to a new level. Teens are susceptible to bullying, dating violence, depression, anxiety, suicide, and non-suicidal self-injury more than ever before (Humphreys, Risner, Hicks, & Moyer, 2016). The natural development of an adolescent involves forming an identity and being accepted by peers (Humphreys, et al., 2016). This leaves teens in a vulnerable state within our society. Sex traffickers' prey on adolescents because of their vulnerability. In reality, the adolescent is an ideal target for coercion and persuasion.

School counselors directly encounter changes in the adolescent culture and, consequently, can give key insight to trends with their students. Gathering information on their perception of what aspects make our adolescents vulnerable to trafficking can guide future professional development. Professional development can be used to train our school staff to become more aware of sex trafficking. Trainings would enable our school counselors to equip teachers, administration, parents, crossing guards, and bus drivers, and other staff to look for signs of trafficking victims. Insight from individuals who work with our youth is essential to creating proper prevention programs. Prevention is key in the fight against sex trafficking.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is: (1) to investigate school counselor knowledge of sex trafficking, (2) to discover the school counselor perception of generations shifts in children and adolescents, (3) to investigate school counselor perception of how trends makes them susceptible to sex trafficking.

School counselors are at the forefront of adolescent culture in the United States. They are able to see how aspects such as social media, bullying, mental illness, dating violence, and academic pressure may attribute to the rise in sex trafficking among our youth. School counselors are with youth every day and perceive how cultural changes are contributing to the issue of human trafficking. Our school counselors are in a position to aid in preventing our youth from falling victim to sexual exploitation.

Research Questions

1. What is the current knowledge that professional school counselors have pertaining to sex trafficking?
2. What are the observed generational shifts in children and adolescents??
3. How do school counselors perceive that these generational shifts make children and adolescents more susceptible to sex trafficking?

Theoretical Framework

This study used a qualitative, grounded theory method. Grounded theory is comprehensive and descriptive in nature, which allows for the exploration of circumstances with rich contextual factors (Slavin, 2007). Grounded theory differs from other qualitative research approaches, in that it emphasizes theory development (Kolb, 2012). Theory development is based on a constant comparative method of data analysis (Kolb, 2012).

According to Robert E. Slavin (2007), grounded theory builds abstractions over time as the researcher considers and categorizes observations made in a variety of settings. This allows for a wide variety of data collection and can describe many

perspectives from individual participants. Data are systematically analyzed to develop theory from the bottom up rather than top down, making it inductive in nature (Berg & Lune, 2012).

Grounded theory develops a theory from emerging data. It allows the researcher to find information that is interconnected, which may help put the experience of the participant together as a whole. The direction of the study becomes clear after data are collected and time is spent with participants (Slavin, 2007). This approach gives the researcher an opportunity to lead a study without assumptions (Slavin, 2007). It aids in the prevention of some minor threats that qualitative research holds.

According to Slavin (2007), a weakness that is apparent in qualitative studies is researcher bias. Grounded theory can help relieve some of those biases by employing a theory that does not make previous assumptions about the findings. Slavin (2007) also discusses how the abundance of data can be overwhelming to a researcher. As discussed previously, grounded theory offers a wide range of data collection and this may hinder the researcher. There are times when the researcher may not know what data to keep out of the study in order to focus on the goals at hand. The amount of data can be both a hindrance and an opportunity to have a breakthrough.

Assumptions

There are a few assumptions present in this research study. First, it was assumed that counselors in the school system have been able to observe generational changes among their students. Secondly, it was assumed that counselors in the school system have more contact with children and adolescents than those in private practice. Third, it was

assumed that through certain training, school counselors have some knowledge of sex trafficking. Finally, it was assumed that counselors work with their students on issues that make them vulnerable.

Delimitations

Participants in the study are all from three parts of a Southwestern state that are separated by 300 miles. Research findings may not be transferrable to other regions of the United States because the study was conducted in one region, in Texas. Data collection methods may cause another delimitation. Semi-structure, in-depth interviews are the main form of data collection and rely on the participants' willingness to provide in-depth information.

In addition, counselors who focus on private practice as their main job were not interviewed. This was decided because counselors within the school system have more day to day contact with children and adolescents. Further, quantitative methods were not used because this study focuses on the experiences of school counselors.

Limitations

There are some limitations with this study. First, school counselors do not have the knowledge of sex trafficking that other professions, such as law enforcement, may have. Secondly, findings from data collected from a convenient sample of school counselors in one region of the country may not be generalizable to other areas of the United States. Third, current data indicate that this region is one of the most trafficked regions in the country. Therefore, information gathered may not represent other areas of

the country. Lastly, I utilized purposeful sampling. Strategic sampling limits the participants which I used for participation in this study.

Definition of Key Terms

The following definitions are offered to clarify terminology used in this dissertation:

Abuse: Abuse is a corrupt practice or custom that includes: improper or excessive use or treatment; language that condemns or vilifies usually unjustly, intemperately, and angrily; or physical maltreatment (Merriam-Webster, 2015).

Adolescent/adolescence: Adolescents is a developmental period in life that ranges from 10 to 21 years of age (Flannery, Torquati, & Lindemeier, 1994). Many variations in age encompass the adolescent period (Flanner, et al., 1994). For the purpose of this study, an adolescent will be defined as a youth 13-18 years of age.

Coercion: Coercion is defined as making someone do something by using force or threats (Merriam-Webster, 2015).

Culture: Culture is the beliefs, customs, arts, etc. of a particular group, society, place, or time (Merriam-Webster, 2015).

Grooming: Grooming is defined as building an emotional connection with a child or adolescent to gain their trust for the purposes of sexual abuse or exploitation (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, 2015).

Human trafficking: Human trafficking is form of modern day slavery that is defined by the recruitment, harboring, and transportation of humans with force or threats

for exploitation (Cecchet & Thorburn, 2014). Under United States law, human trafficking is divided into three specific populations (Polaris Project, 2015). These include: children under 18 years of age induced into commercial sex; adults age 18 years and over induced into commercial sex through force, fraud, or coercion; and children and adults induced to perform labor services through force, fraud, or coercion (Polaris Project, 2015).

Prostitution: Prostitution is defined as the act of having sex in exchange for money (Merriam-Webster, 2015).

School counselor: A school counselor is an individual that meets the minimum of a master's degree in school counseling and meets the state certification and licensure standards (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2007). They abide by the ethical and professional standards of the ASCA and all other applicable ethical standards. School counselors promote the development of a school counseling program based on the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2007).

Sex trafficking: The use of violence, threats, lies, debt bondage, and other forms of coercion to force adults and children into commercial sex acts against their will (Polaris Project, 2015).

Trafficker: A trafficker is an individual who recruit, transport, harbor, obtain, and exploit victims, using force, threats, lies, or psychological coercion (Polaris Project, 2015). They identify and leverage their victims according to personal vulnerabilities in order to create dependency and impose control (Polaris Project, 2015).

Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000: Title 18, § 1591 of the U.S. Code is the cardinal statute used to prosecute domestic child and commercial sex trafficking. If

a defendant is convicted of using force, fraud, or coercion or trafficking a minor under the age of 14 years, conduct covered by §159(b)(1), the defendant will receive a mandatory sentence of a minimum of 15 years in prison with no possibility of parole and could receive up to life in prison.

Willing victim: A willing victim is one who chooses to participate in prostitution, also known as voluntary slavery (Rand, 2009).

Organization of the Study

This research study consists of five sections: introduction, review of the literature, methods, results, and discussion. The review of the literature section includes the following: human trafficking, sex trafficking, recruitment, and domestic minor sex trafficking. The methodology section will include the background of the study, research questions, rationale of the study, context of the study, data sources, data collection methods, data analysis, data management, transferability, and trustworthiness. The results section includes participant information and analysis of the data. The discussion section includes implications for theory as well as a summary of the study.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Adolescent development encompasses many aspects of an individual. The stage of adolescence is essential in identity formation according to developmental theorist Eric Erikson (Erikson, 1968). Erikson was a pioneer in psychology and identified the psychosocial stages of development (Wiley & Berman, 2013).

Erik Erikson's stage of adolescent development was termed as the stage of crises of identity versus role confusion (Erikson, 1968). He believed that adolescence is a period filled with struggles pertaining to roles, goals, and values that give the adolescent purpose and direction (Erikson, 1968). There are also some other issues that Erikson did not mention in adolescent development. These include social, academic, family, and internal struggles that can become overwhelming at times. Recent changes in adolescent culture, such as social media, bullying, one parent families and risk-taking behavior, may have an effect on how vulnerable teens are to sex trafficking. Qualitative research is essential in order to explore what aspects of American adolescent culture makes them vulnerable to sexual exploitation and trafficking.

Human Trafficking

Human trafficking is a worldwide phenomenon that currently enslaves 20.9 million people (Crecchet & Thoburn, 2014). Human trafficking encompasses both individuals who are trapped into forced labor and sex for the profit of the trafficker (Polaris Project, 2015). The International Labour Organization (2017) estimates that

human trafficking is a \$150 billion global industry, making it one of the most profitable criminal industries.

Though this number may seem large, it is possible that numbers are largely underestimated (McClain & Garrity, 2010). The very nature of the human trafficking industry makes it difficult to accurately count the number of victims or calculate the profit (McClain & Garrity, 2010). Data have also been affected by the lack of coordination among law enforcement, the juvenile justice system, and child welfare in documenting and reporting (Rand, 2009). Therefore, inconsistency is prevalent throughout the literature. Victims of human trafficking are exploited in many different areas, but the largest subset is that of commercial sexual exploitation (McClain & Garrity, 2010). Sex trafficking is the recruitment, transportation, harboring, provision, or obtaining a human being for the purpose of exploiting him or her in commercial sex acts (Kotrla, 2010).

Sex Trafficking

Sex trafficking exploits individuals through forcing them into commercial sex. Commercial sex acts are acts that are performed by a person for profit (Kotrla, 2010). Profit can include any exchange that allows an individual to obtain money, food, shelter, or any other valued commodity (Kaplan & Kemp, 2015).

According to the U.S. government, anyone under the age of 18 years participating in a commercial sex act is considered a victim of sex trafficking (Polaris Project, 2015). Sex trafficking in minors is a phenomenon that pervades all communities and cultures (McClain & Garrity, 2010). According to the U.S. State Department *Trafficking in*

Persons report (2009), there were identified victims of sex trafficking in all 50 states. This report also showed an increase in the recruitment of minors for sex trafficking (U.S. Department of State, 2009). An investigation in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania targeted the sex trafficking industry by watching truck stops in the area (Hakes, 2011). During this investigation, over 150 victims were identified; the youngest was 12 years of age (Hakes, 2011). This investigation made good strides in the fight against trafficking. However, significant research needs to be done due to the lack of definitive data pertaining to the victimization of American youth.

Recruitment

Sex traffickers use various and multiple tactics in the recruitment process. Traffickers will utilize violence, threats, debt bondage, lies, and other forms of coercion to recruit adults and children to participate in commercial sexual acts against their will (Polaris Project, 2015). Victims have a wide range of experiences when it comes to recruitment into sex trafficking.

Some people are forced into commercial sex by their parents or other family members (Polaris Project, 2015). Victims are also lured by false promises pertaining to jobs such as modeling or dancing. Some victims are forced because threats are made toward their family members or loved ones (Polaris Project, 2015). There are many recruitment methods, but the one that is the most far-reaching and deceptive is that of “grooming” (Smith, 2014).

Grooming is the period of time in which the trafficker builds a relationship, much like courting, with the victim that the trafficker has determined to be in a vulnerable state

(Smith, 2014). Traffickers will spend long periods of time, including months or years, in order to groom their victim. During this time, they make extravagant demonstrations of kindness by buying gifts, making promises, providing for their prospective victim's needs such as attention and love (Parker & Skrmetti, 2013).

Once a victim trusts the trafficker and lowers his or her defenses, the trafficker begins to slowly isolate the victim before forcing the victim into the sex industry (Parker & Skrmetti, 2013). For example, Sophie Hayes, a trafficking survivor, was groomed by a trafficker for 4 years before she was forced into commercial sex acts (Hayes, 2013). Her trafficker was perceived by Sophie to be her best friend for 4 years prior to taking her on an international trip where he forced her into prostitution (Hays, 2013).

After the grooming period has ended, the trafficker slowly introduces his or her victim into prostitution (Smith, 2014). This is followed by a period in which the trafficker breaks down the victim into a state of submission (Smith, 2014). Tactics used may involve raping, beating, starving, drugging, and other forms of degradation (Smith, 2014). Some traffickers will father children with their victims in order to create a family bond (Smith, 2014). Overall, they will use the most vulnerable aspects of an individual in order to force them into sexual slavery. Adolescents happen to be in their most vulnerable period in life (Erikson, 1968). This alone may make them susceptible to sex trafficking.

Cybergrooming is a form of grooming in which an individual befriends another online, to facilitate sexual contact or meet the person with the goal of sexual abuse (Wachs, Jiskrova, Vazsonyi, Wolf, & Junger, 2016). Adolescent use of the Internet and

social media makes cybergrooming an effective tool for traffickers. They are able to recruit via online ads, social media sites, chat rooms, gaming, and other forms of engaging media. Cybergroomers prey on vulnerable individuals on the Internet. Those who have already been affected by cyberbullying can be easier targets for the trafficker (Wachs et al., 2016).

There are five main stages of cybergrooming. First, the groomer will gather information on their target, such as age, sex, and grade level, in order to begin the relationship-building process (Wachs et al., 2016). Secondly, relationship formation is used in order to gain trust. The groomer will begin to discuss more intimate topics such as friends, school, and challenges they face daily (Wachs et al., 2016). Third, the groomer will gather information in order to avoid the chance of being caught. This includes the location of the individual and the work schedule of the parents (Wachs et al., 2016). Fourth, the trafficker will encourage the victim to keep their relationship a secret from others (Wachs et al., 2016). Finally, the victim is convinced to have sexual conversations, share sexual images, or take part in sexual video chats prior to the physical meeting of the two individuals (Wachs et al., 2016).

Trafficker Demographics

Traffickers come from many different racial and cultural backgrounds. Researchers in Chicago, IL, found that one-quarter of traffickers are female, 64% are African American, 20% Caucasian, 4% Hispanic, and 8% biracial (Parker & Skrmetti, 2013). Most of the female traffickers have been in the sex industry for some time. An overwhelming number have begun their own sex-trafficking business as a result of being victims themselves (Parker & Skrmetti, 2013).

The overlap between victim and perpetrator in the trafficking industry is evident. Studies have found that sex traffickers had been exposed to domestic abuse and had witnessed prostitution practices either at home or in their community (Hayes & Unwin, 2016). The main difference that separates prostitution from sex trafficking, is that the term prostitution describes an adult that engages in sex for money on a voluntary basis (Kotrla, 2010).

In the United States, girls with experience in prostitution are used as “bottom girls” (Hayes & Unwin, 2016). *Bottom girls* are prostitutes who receive status by recruiting, managing, and disciplining young females that have been trafficked (Hayes & Unwin, 2016). Transitioning from victim to perpetrator takes time, which is the reason that intervention must take place during early stages of victimization.

International Sex Trafficking

Domestic minor sex trafficking is the focus of this research. However, it is important to understand that this is a global epidemic. Internationally, 79% of trafficking involves sexual exploitation (United Nations, 2017). Of that, 20% of sex trafficking victims are minors. According to the United Nations (2017), many believe that human trafficking implies that people are transported across countries. However, the UN data shows that domestic trafficking accounts for most of the victimization that occurs.

Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking

Domestic minor sex trafficking, trafficking of children under the age of 18 years, is broken into two categories: domestic minor sex trafficking and international minor sex trafficking. First, international sex trafficking spans recruitment countries, destination

countries, and bidirectional countries (Williamson & Prior, 2009). *Recruitment countries* are countries from which victims are recruited to be sold in another country. Countries to which the victims are taken and work in sex trades are *destination countries*. Further, *bidirectional countries* are countries in which victims are recruited, sold, and work in sex trades (Farr, 2005; Williamson & Prior, 2009).

In the United States, domestic minor sex trafficking is on the rise. The functionality of each city in the trafficking industry mimics that of the international breakdown. For example, smaller cities in the Midwest have been identified as being destinations for the recruitment of victims. Destination and bidirectional cities tend to be larger metropolitan areas such as Chicago and Las Vegas (Williamson & Prior, 2009).

Adolescents who are 14 to 17 years of age make up the largest percentage of minors involved in prostitution, making them victims of trafficking (McClain & Garrity, 2011). However, 11% of those victims are reported to be under the age of 14 years (McClain & Garrity, 2011). Many individuals who see a minor soliciting for sex will label them as a prostitute (McClain & Garrity, 2011). Some will be described as a *willing victim*, which has the illusion of choice. The choice to participate in prostitution is often a result of overwhelming coercion (Rand, 2009). In addition, the lack of psychosocial maturity of minors lends doubt to their ability to make such choices (Reid & Jones, 2011).

Labeling a minor as a prostitute or willing victim is not accurate according to the U.S. government (McClain & Garrity, 2011). Legally, any minor participating in commercial sex acts meets the criteria of a sex trafficking victim (McClain & Garrity,

2011). The Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 is the statute used to prosecute those who have committed this criminal offense (Parker & Skrmetti, 2013). The implementation of this law shows that social change is occurring in the United States. However, the reporting of sexual exploitation and trafficking remains low across the country (Hayes & Unwin, 2016).

Reporting Victims

Despite all 50 states having laws on reporting child abuse, many sex trafficking victims go unreported. Trafficking victims are difficult to identify and are commonly misidentified (Countryman-Rosworn & Bolin, 2014). Victims are often placed in police custody for unrelated charges, and they tend to distrust the system, which creates a problem with identification (Countryman-Rosworn & Bolin, 2014). Pediatric physicians and nurses have also reported being inadequately prepared to identify domestic minor sex trafficking (Barron, Moore, Baird, & Goldberg, 2016). Victims will often seek medical attention at clinics or emergency rooms. However, patients do not disclose involvement and do not consistently present providers with evidence of trafficking (Barron et al., 2016).

Another barrier to identification is that professionals working with minors have mixed feelings about reporting trafficking victims. In their research, Hartinger-Saunders, Trouteaud, and Johnson (2016) found that many individuals who work with minors have mixed feelings on reporting those who are prostituting themselves. Most (98%) of these participants would report traditional methods of sexual abuse of a child. Of these, 57% of these individuals, believing that adolescent females chose to prostitute themselves, may not report it (Hartinger-Saunders et al., 2016). These same individuals agreed that a

17-year-old engaging in prostitution is a crime (Hartinger-Saunders et al., 2016).

Individuals working with minors need more education to combat the failure to report victims of trafficking and better understand the vulnerabilities of trafficking.

Adolescents are vulnerable for many reasons that include physical, psychological, and social changes. Literature on teens in the United States is scarce. Teens from any socioeconomic background, ethnic, or racial group is susceptible to sex trafficking (McClain & Garrity, 2011). Traffickers will always look for those who are most vulnerable (McClain & Garrity, 2011). They target those in poverty, isolation, or foster care, and have a history of abuse, drug addiction, family problems, or bullying, among others (McClain & Garrity, 2011). Along with a need to belong, these aspects can only add to the vulnerability that an adolescent already has during this period of development.

American teens who have been previously sexually abused are at a high risk of being coerced into the sex industry (Rand, 2009). There may be times when early abuse of a child defines the value the child places on his or her own body and puts her or him at later risk for trafficking (Rand, 2009). Children receive messages about their bodies from adults, television, and peers (Green, 1999). American television and advertisement have been sexualizing our youth for many years. As a result of these messages, body image has been an ongoing issue with girls in the United States.

Role of the Mental Health Professional

School teachers, administrators, counselors, medical providers, and clinicians are all central to the prevention of sex trafficking (Kaplan & Kemp, 2015). They play a critical role in observing warning signs that an adolescent may be a victim of grooming

or is already a victim of domestic minor sex trafficking (Kaplan & Kemp, 2015).

Therefore, these individuals are the key to understanding how American adolescent culture makes them vulnerable to sex trafficking.

Additionally, counselors play a role in the restoration of trafficking victims.

Mental health professionals must gain further understanding of the impact that this crime has on our youth (Hardy, Comptom, & McPhatter, 2013). Sex trafficking survivors have vast similarities to those victimized by domestic violence or rape (Hardy et al., 2016).

The ongoing captivity, though, and isolation from society as a whole creates a unique set of needs for these victims (Hardy et al., 2016). Often, victims present with dissociative disorders, substance abuse, conduct disorders, attention deficit hyperactive disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder, which places them in a “fight or flight” mode (Jordan, Patel, & Rapp, 2013).

In addition to the mental health needs of survivors, counselors must also be aware of their need to be integrated back into normal life. These needs may include trauma treatment, learning to be with family/friends, spiritual needs, physical health, shelter, clothing, food, and career concerns. Counselors must be aware of resources in their community for trafficking victims. Many anti-trafficking organizations, which are mostly faith-based, provide food, shelter, and other supportive needs for victims (Perdue, Prior, Williamson, & Sherman, 2012). Counselors in both school and community settings are critical to both the prevention and restoration of trafficking victims.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Background of the Study

This study was designed to examine how the American adolescent culture makes teens susceptible to sex trafficking. This chapter will discuss the research methodology for this study. An explanation of the research design and procedures for analysis will be explained. The rationale for the study, the context of the study, data sources, data collection methods, data management, transferability, and trustworthiness will be explained in this section.

Structure of Study

There were 11 counselors interviewed for this study. Counselors participated in surveys, individual interviews and/or focus groups. All counselors participated in survey completion and individual interviews. After random selection, two focus groups were formed. The first focus group comprised three counselors from the Texas Panhandle. The second focus group comprised 4 counselors from North Texas. Counselors were asked questions related to their knowledge of sex trafficking and their experience of the generational shifts in child and adolescent culture. Counselors who participated in a focus group were asked questions related to how they perceive child and adolescent culture is changing and what key trends they believed make them vulnerable to sex trafficking.

Research Questions

This study will seek to answer the following questions:

1. What is the current knowledge that professional school counselors have pertaining to sex trafficking?

2. What are the observed generational shifts in children and adolescents??
3. How do school counselors perceive these generational shifts to make children and adolescents more susceptible to sex trafficking?

Rationale of the Study

Qualitative methods were used to analyze the effect that adolescent culture has on the vulnerability teens have toward sex trafficking. To fully understand how an individual is affected by the environment to which s/he is exposed, one must experience the individual's thoughts and emotions. Berg (2012) offers a definition of qualitative research in his book *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*. His definition says that qualitative research refers to things such as the what, how, when, where, and why of things. Qualitative methods grant the researcher an opportunity to gather data that are beyond face value. For example, the grounded theory approach allows a theory to emerge from the qualitative data rather than preconceived notions (Kolb, 2012).

There are many qualitative methods that allow the full exploration of a particular phenomenon. These methods are used by the researcher to investigate the meanings behind information that is collected and grasp the context of how an individual is affected by his or her environment (Hays & Wood, 2011). Qualitative research strives to explain a phenomenon by analyzing the processes, conditions, sequences, and actions of that phenomenon (Hays & Wood, 2011). Therefore, the qualitative paradigm is the best method for exploring how American adolescent culture makes our youth susceptible to becoming victims of sex trafficking.

Context of the Study

Participants in this study were recruited within three areas of a Southwestern state. This area was selected because it is one of the most common areas for individuals to fall victim to human trafficking. One Northern area, in particular, is a prime area for trafficking because it is where several connecting highways in the country intersect. These areas were also selected because of the wide variety of socioeconomic status within the school population. This gave the researcher the opportunity to gather information from school counselors from a diverse group of schools. I conducted the interviews with the school counselors at the schools in which they were employed, so they would be most comfortable in answering my questions and discussing this sensitive topic.

The findings should be representative of other areas that may replicate the environment associated with this particular Southwestern state. However, the findings may not transfer to other areas in the country such as the Northeastern United States. Other areas of the United States may be home to peoples of different cultural, socioeconomic, and religious backgrounds.

Data Sources

Data sources included a survey that features open-ended questions, interviews, focus groups, and information from previous research. The survey served as a prompt for later interviews and was related to demographics of the participants and their schools. Survey data answered several questions pertaining to demographics and knowledge of sex trafficking.

Interviews were conducted based on the questions that were previously answered in the survey. Discussion in the interview was related to trends that had been noted in their work with adolescents and their knowledge of sex trafficking. Interviewees were asked to discuss how current trends in adolescent culture make teens vulnerable to sex trafficking.

Focus groups were conducted after all interviews had been completed. There were two focus groups. One represented North Texas and the other the Panhandle of west Texas. Participants of each focus group were randomly selected from those individuals who had been interviewed. Focus group prompts were used to expand on knowledge gained from individual interviews.

Participants were a convenience sample. There were 11 participants ranging in age and sex. Each participant was a school counselor or a Licensed Professional Counselor that is attached to a school. Participants were fully licensed and qualified to work within the school system. Participants will have some knowledge of sex trafficking from experience or training.

These participants were similar in that they were all located in a Southwestern state. However, the schools from which they came differed in backgrounds and study populations. This state is one that reports some of the most sex trafficking among teens. Therefore, findings may not be transferrable to areas that have low levels of sex trafficking.

Sampling

This study's sample included 11 school counselors or licensed professional counselors (LPCs) who were employed by schools in a Southwestern state. A sampling was derived from a strategic sample. School counselors selected for this study varied in years of experience. School counselors were selected based on experience or training in human trafficking. I went to one elementary school, three middle school and seven high school campuses for recruitment. I explained the purpose of the study, the expectations of the participants, and asked which counselors would be willing to participate. After clearly explaining the details of participation, willing participants were asked to provide written consent. I collected the informed consent forms.

Schools from which participants were recruited were selected based on their cultural composition, in order to provide a variety of cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. Schools varied on socioeconomic status to gain insight into aspects that may differ between socioeconomic statuses. Many counselors in this study work in several school campuses that vary in socioeconomic and cultural background. School counselors in this study are representative of the counselors in the Southwestern state that was studied. Participants in this study were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time.

Data Collection Methods

Several data collection methods were used to ensure triangulation. Triangulation is a term that describes multiple sources of data collection used to measure a single concept (Berg & Lune, 2012). Each data collection method intersects to create a line of sight toward an end result.

Data were collected using three separate methods that fall into the qualitative methods paradigm. The first form of data collection was a survey that consisted of open-ended questions (Berg & Lune, 2012). The open-ended response is consistent with the ideas and philosophies of qualitative research. The survey was comprised of nine open-ended questions that related to demographics, experiences, and knowledge of sex trafficking. Participants received the survey on an individual basis and were able to complete it in their personal time. Participants were asked to complete the survey and return it within one week. Most of the participants completed the survey in a week. However, three did not return the survey until the day before their scheduled interview.

The researcher used the survey as a stepping stone to further investigation. After areas of investigation were determined, the researchers conducted individual interviews with each participant. These included further investigation into counselor knowledge, vulnerabilities of their student population, generational shifts, and how these are related to sex trafficking. Each participant was interviewed in his or her own personal time. The interviews were conducted in at each participants' school campus. This provided convenience for each participant.

Interviews were semi-structured. This approach allowed me to ask particular questions, while allowing the interviewee to explore ideas and perceptions related to the questions (Berg, 2012). I prompted each participant to provide necessary information but facilitated an open discussion that mimicked typical conversation. Focus group questioning was derived from the same investigative interview process as the individual interviews.

Role of the Researcher

A central element of qualitative research is the role of the researcher (Berg & Lune, 2012). This concept rests on the definition of the environment in which the investigation takes place and how the researcher establishes himself or herself within that structure (Berg & Lune, 2012). For example, researchers must use what they know about the environment to build rapport with participants. Rapport with an individual cannot be established until personal beliefs and judgements are set aside. Glesne (1999) suggests that one knows that personal judgements have been set aside when a growing desire to investigate the issues begins to develop.

Several aspects about my background, professional experiences, and counseling philosophy have affected me as a researcher. First, I am a licensed professional counselor. Further, my background is diverse. I am a bi-racial, female, who grew up in West Texas. Culturally, my background is both Hispanic and Caucasian. My grandparents on the Hispanic side of the family are immigrants from Mexico and spoke little English. In addition, my mother learned English from her school, beginning in second grade. I am the first college graduate on my Hispanic side.

In contrast, the other side of my family experiences are from a Caucasian, middle-class, educated family. My father and both of his siblings are college educated. My grandfather served in the United States Navy and my grandmother attended some college. Both families are of Christian faith.

The differences between each family has given me a drive to understand individuals from diverse backgrounds, including diversity among socioeconomic status.

Further, my upbringing of faith has influenced how I view life and its purpose. Standing up for those who are persecuted and those who cannot stand up for themselves is based on my religious upbringing. This serves as much of the basis for my research on human trafficking.

Work experiences have also influenced my research interests. During my time as a teacher, I began to realize that the students who were considered disruptive were the ones who needed the most love and attention. The connections that I made with students gave me a desire to help them more than I was able to as a teacher. What I witnessed from some parents made me interested in how family dynamics is connected to child and adolescent success and vulnerability.

In addition, my counseling experience has been related to the child and adolescent population. I have spent time in schools and working with youth in a partial hospitalization facility. My recent work in a partial-hospitalization facility for children and adolescents gave me experience with some of the trends found in this study. In my opinion, counselors have the capability to foster growth and change with the clients they serve. Each of the factors mentioned, have influenced my views on research. My personal belief is that there are times when we must investigate the experiences of others in order to fully understand our changing world.

Data Analysis

Several data analysis techniques are available to qualitative researchers. However, the form of analysis that grounded theory employs is inductive in nature (Berg & Lune, 2012). After the completion of data collection, I immersed myself in the

information gathered. Data analysis, in this study, involved the identification of themes that are meaningful to theory development (Berg & Lune, 2012).

The first step in my analysis included the reading and listening of materials from beginning to end (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Listening without transcription is done first in order to fully feel what participants are experiencing (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The audio files in this study were reviewed one time through without transcription. The next step utilized in the data analysis is transcription.

After transcription, coding of the data began with analyzing the text for themes. Textual themes strive to cluster units of meaning of the person's experience (Hays & Wood, 2011). This allowed me, as the researcher, to focus on themes or overlapping processes in the data. I was able to use this to see key aspects that are central to a specific phenomenon. The process used to develop themes and categories from data is open coding. Open coding was used to open inquiry widely (Berg & Lune, 2012). Strauss (1987, p. 30) suggests four basic steps for open coding: (1) ask the data a specific and consistent set of questions, (2) analyze the data minutely, (3) frequently interrupt coding to take notes, (4) never assume relevance of any variable, such as age, sex, ethnicity, etc., until the data show that it is relevant.

Axial coding was used after concepts and categories were identified from open coding (Strauss, 1987). The categories and concepts derived from open coding were tentative until answers emerged (Berg & Lune, 2012). Axial coding is the intense coding around each, individual category derived from the open-coding process (Berg & Lune, 2012). Laying out the information that has been gathered allowed me to present the

information in an organized manner. Organization is central in identifying specific criteria that data must meet in order to fit into a specific theme or category. This also gave me the tools that allowed me to stay true to the experiences of the participants.

An advantage to using this form of data analysis is that it gave me the ability to use information from multiple sources. Although useful to analyze interview data, axial coding can be used to analyze archives, movies, and newspapers, among others (Berg & Lune, 2012). Additionally, this form of analysis is cost-effective because materials needed are easily accessible (Babbie, 2007). Further, analysis of the data provided the means necessary to reflect on trends in society that occur over time (Berg & Lune, 2012).

Though there were many advantages to this specific style of analysis, there are some disadvantages that it presented. First, the analysis was limited to messages given from other individuals (Berg & Lune, 2012). For example, data from each interview was limited to what each participant decided was beneficial. Additionally, this type of data analysis cannot test for a causal relationship between variables (Berg & Lune, 2012). Therefore, this data can say what is present by way of themes and patterns, but not why. Other means must be used to test the association between variables.

Data Management

Data were collected, managed, analyzed, and presented within a 16-week period. The written analysis was completed by week 12 of the study. Researchers argue that data management and data analysis are interrelated (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). In fact, both consist of three necessary actions: data reduction, data display, and conclusions and verification (Huberman & Miles, 1994, p. 10–12).

Secondly, qualitative studies manage large amounts of data that need to be reduced and transformed into coded information (Berg & Lune, 2012). In this study, I administered a questionnaire that sought open-ended responses. I also gathered data by administering interviews to each participant and focus groups. These three methods of data collection produced a large amount of data that were organized and placed into categories. According to Berg and Lune (2012), data reduction occurs when interviews are transcribed and the data are later placed into summaries that show themes in the information. This process also aligns with Moustakas's (1994), idea that data should be organized and placed into categories that do not repeat and contain information that does not have repetitive themes.

Another problem in data analysis is how to present your data in an organized and constructive manner. Readers of the data will need to have information that has been organized in order to understand the context of what they are reading. Using tables, tally sheets, summaries, and providing definitions of key terms can aid in data that is organized and easily read (Berg & Lune, 2012).

Lastly, data management involves verifying the researcher's conclusions of the study (Berg & Lune, 2012). Grounded theory research lends itself to the idea that you do not have a hypothesis prior to the investigation of a phenomenon. Many times, the researcher does have personal experience with the topic being evaluated. However, grounded theory attempts to portray the personal experience of the participants. This allows the researcher to verify his or her conclusions through other means. Identifying themes in data collection and using material in existing research can aid in the verification of conclusions (Berg & Lune, 2012). Using a specific strategy in data

analysis and the self-reflection process of the researcher can keep problems associated with conclusions from arising in the study (Berg & Lune, 2012).

Trustworthiness and Transferability

Several methods to ensure trustworthiness in qualitative research are available. The postpositivist method of research seems to be the most rigorous in ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative studies. Postpositivists set standards of inquiry that are most closely related to conventional standards (Morrow, 2005). Although the terms are not the same as conventional terms, they are related to ones such as: internal validity, reliability, and objectivity (Morrow, 2005). Guba (1981), most notably set forth the terms that are parallel to the criteria in traditional quantitative research. In this criteria set forth, key terms have been associated with other research terms. Therefore, internal validity is now called credibility in qualitative measures, external validity is referred to as transferability in qualitative research, dependability is known as reliability, and objectivity is seen as confirmability (Morrow, 2005).

The current research used methods to ensure credibility, transferability, reliability, and confirmability as set forth by Guba (1981). Several tactics are used in qualitative research to ensure credibility. To ensure credibility, I have become familiar with the cultural context of the participants and triangulated the data (Morrow, 2005).

Another important factor in ensuring the trustworthiness of a study is transferability. Transferability is the extent to which your findings will transfer to another setting (Morrow, 2005). Transferability can be difficult for qualitative research and many researchers disagree on how well this type of research can be transferred. In

order to convey transferability, the researcher must allow the reader to fully understand the context and characteristics of the participants and environment in which the study took place (Morrow, 2005). This allows others to determine the extent to which their setting is similar to the one in this study. Therefore, others can determine the extent to which these findings describe the same phenomenon in their own setting.

Dependability may also be addressed by describing the research design and how it was implemented (Morrow, 2005). Other techniques for insuring dependability include the operational aspects of data gathering and appraisal of the research (Morrow, 2005).

Confirmability is the final matter that must be addressed. The key to confirmability is how well the researcher explains and admits to his or her own biases. It is essential the researchers are aware and address predispositions in research in order to aid confirmability (Morrow, 2005).

Summary

A qualitative study based on grounded theory was conducted, utilizing an open-ended survey, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions. Participants were selected from a wide variety of demographics within a Southwestern region of the United States. Each participant was a fully certified school counselor or an LPC who worked in a school setting. This study sought to discover counselor knowledge of sex trafficking, find the trends that school counselors observe among adolescents, and their susceptibility to sex trafficking. Findings from this study will provide insight into how trends in adolescent culture make them vulnerable to sex trafficking.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Organization

In this chapter, results from this study are reported. The results of this study will be presented in the following sections: a restatement of the problem, description of participants, descriptions of the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data analysis, and a summary of the results.

Restatement of Problem

According to the United Nations, an estimated 27 million people are trafficked into forced labor or sexual exploitation (Rescue her, 2015). Sex trafficking brings in approximately \$32 billion per year (Rescue her, 2015). In the United States, 100,000 minors are exploited for commercial sex annually, and many are from Texas (Rescue her, 2015). Of those 100,000, 80% are female, and the average age is 12 years (Rescue her, 2015).

Adolescents in the United States are most likely to become victims of sex trafficking because of the issues related to this developmental stage (Polaris project, 2015). Many teens struggle with the need to belong and seek the approval of others. Traffickers are aware of the vulnerabilities of adolescences and use methods that target those vulnerabilities, in order to groom their victims (Greenbaum & Crawford-Jakubiak, 2014). The goal of this study was to discover observable generational shifts in youth that make them susceptible to sex trafficking.

Description of Participants

The following is a list of demographic information provided by all 11 participants. Participants in the focus groups were selected from the same 11 interviews. In order to maintain participant anonymity and confidentiality, participants will be listed in the order in which they were interviewed. Basic demographic information of participants and their campuses are reported in Table 1.

Participant 1 was a Caucasian male. He was 35-40 years of age and held a Master of Education degree at the time of writing. He was a Licensed Professional Counselor, with 11 years of high school counseling experience. He served a rural/suburban school that was of predominantly middle to lower socioeconomic status. He had a moderate level of knowledge of sex trafficking, which was derived from news outlets.

Participant 2 was a Caucasian female. She was 40-45 years of age and held a Master of Arts degree. She was a Licensed Chemical Dependency Counselor, a Licensed Professional Counselors Supervisor, and a Nationally Certified Counselor. She had 15 years of experience in private and non-profit schools, and at the time of writing was serving in a school. She was working in several schools (elementary-high school) within one area, serving students whose socioeconomic statuses ranged from low to high. She possessed moderate knowledge of sex trafficking passed on to her by a Licensed Professional Counselor Intern who was working for an anti-trafficking organization.

Participant 3 was a Caucasian female. She was 40-45 years of age, held a Master of Education degree, and was a doctoral student. She was a Licensed Professional

Counselor Supervisor and a Certified School Counselor. She had 4 years of experience at a psychiatric hospital adolescent unit and had worked as a high school counselor for 10 years. Her school had a population of students whose socioeconomic status ranged from low to middle. She had a moderate level of sex trafficking knowledge and had received training from an anti-trafficking organization.

Participant 4 was a Caucasian female. She was 50-55 years in age. She has a Master of Education and was a Certified School Counselor. She has served as a high school counselor for 18 years. Her school's socioeconomic status is lower-middle class. Her level of sex trafficking knowledge is moderate and she has attended an anti-trafficking presentation.

Participant 5 was a Caucasian female. She was 40-45 years in age and Masters of Arts degree. She was a Licensed Professional Counselor Supervisor and a National Certified Counselor. She has 5 years of clinical experience, 5 years of private practice, and has worked in a school for 17 years. Her high school falls mostly in the middle to upper portion of socioeconomic status. She has moderate knowledge of sex trafficking that derives from personal research and events.

Participant 6 was a Caucasian female. She was 40-45 years in age and holds a Master of Education. She is a Licensed Professional Counselor and works in 3 schools, ranging from elementary to high school. The socioeconomic status of each school ranges from predominately low to very high. She has a moderate level of sex trafficking knowledge that comes from personal research.

Participant 7 was a Caucasian female. She was 30-35 years in age and has a Master of Education. She was a Certified School Counselor and has been working as a high school counselor for two years. Her school is predominately middle class. She has a moderate level of sex trafficking knowledge from attending a presentation from an anti-trafficking organization.

Participant 8 was a Caucasian female. She was 45-50 years in age and has a Master of Education. She is a Licensed Professional Counselor Supervisor, a National Certified Counselor, a Certified School Counselor, K-12 ESL Certificate, and a Certified K-8 Teacher. She has 3 years of experience in private practice, 3 years of clinical, and has served as an elementary school counselor for 7 years. Her level of sex trafficking knowledge is moderate and was received from a presentation at a Counseling Conference.

Participant 9 was a Caucasian female. She was 45-50 years of age and has a Master of Education. She was a Licensed Professional Counselor Supervisor and a Certified School Counselor. She has 15 years of experience as a school counselor. All three school campuses are next to one another. Therefore, the population of students she serves range from elementary to high school. Most students fall into the poverty level of socioeconomic status. She has moderate knowledge of trafficking which comes from her Licensed Professional Counselor Intern that is specializing with this population.

Participant 10 was a Caucasian female. She had a Master of Science degree and was 45-50 years of age. She was a Licensed Professional Counselor and has 18 years of experience working in schools. She serves several school in one area, ranging in age.

Her students are most represented by the middle/working class. She had a moderate level of trafficking knowledge and was received from an anti-trafficking presentation.

Participant 11 was a Caucasian female. She was 45-50 years of age and had a Master of Education. She is a Licensed Professional Counselor Supervisor and a National Certified Counselor. She has 20 years of experience in a hospital, private practice, and currently serves in a school. She has served several schools in her area, ranging from elementary to high school. Her schools range in socioeconomic status. One school was considered Title I and had an immigrant program. Others have been in the upper class portion of socioeconomic status. She had a moderate level of sex trafficking knowledge that was obtained from news outlets and involvement in social justice agencies.

Table 1: Participant Demographic Information

Participant	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Highest License	Years of Experience	Grade Levels
Participant 1	35-40	Male	Caucasian	LPC	11 years	9-12
Participant 2	40-45	Female	Caucasian	LPC-S	15 years	K5-12
Participant 3	40-45	Female	Caucasian	LPC-S	10 years	9-12
Participant 4	50-55	Female	Caucasian	CSC	18 years	9-12
Participant 5	40-45	Female	Caucasian	LPC-S	17 years	10-12
Participant 6	40-45	Female	Caucasian	LPC	3 years	K5-12
Participant 7	30-35	Female	Caucasian	CSC	2 years	9-12
Participant 8	45-50	Female	Caucasian	LPC-S	7 years	K5-5
Participant 9	45-50	Female	Caucasian	LPC-S	15 years	K5-12
Participant 10	45-50	Female	Caucasian	LPC	18 years	K5-12
Participant 11	45-50	Female	Caucasian	LPC-S	20 years	K5-12

Analysis of Data

Several themes and sub-themes emerged during the data analysis of this study.

This section provides information about the following eight themes: (a) changes in attitudes toward personal achievement/progression, (b) changes in parenting, (c) technology, (c) changes in risk taking behavior, (d) changes in sexuality and gender identity, (e) mental health, and (f) poverty. These themes and the sub-themes within each are discussed in the following sections. In addition, participants provided information pertaining to counselor knowledge and related each theme to how children and adolescents are vulnerable to sex trafficking. Each theme and sub-theme overlapped during discussion of the mentality and behavior of this generation of students.

Changes in Attitude Toward Personal Achievement/Progression

During the interview process, this theme emerged as a main concern that counselors have pertaining to this generation of students. Minimal information in the literature was found, as their ideas are specific to recent changes in the attitudes children and adolescents have on personal achievement and progression. Within this theme are several sub-themes: entitlement, lack of motivation, authority issues, truancy, and study skills. It is worth noting that each sub-theme was referred to within the same portion of the interview and they appear to be interconnected with one another. Further discussion of the subject was conducted during each focus group. Focus groups discussed how each issue puts their students in a vulnerable place to be trafficked because children and adolescents have a false sense of security. Adolescents' entitlement and lack of motivation, the counselors believe, directly affect the youths' ability to be cautious in everyday situations.

Entitlement. Entitlement is a word typically used to describe “millennials.” Often, it refers to a sense of privilege and an effort to demand respect, rather than earn it (Alexander & Sysko, 2013). Millennials were raised by what was considered “helicopter parents,” which are those that have hovered over their children in an attempt to ensure their success (Alexander & Sysko, 2013). Researchers believe that this has effected the millennials’ ability to take responsibility for their failures in life (Alexander & Sysko, 2013). As we begin interacting and supporting the next generation of students, known as Generation Z, counselors are beginning to see an increase in the idea of entitlement. Participants in this study reported a heightened sense of entitlement among members of Generation Z as compared to millennials. All 11 participants reported entitlement as one of the main mindsets influencing these students.

Participant 8, who was working in an elementary school, described the entitlement of her students and how it had affected their day-to-day functioning. She explained:

I heard students described as “snowflakes” this morning. They aren’t held accountable for anything and everyone wants to get what they think they deserve, whether they deserve it or not. Even the new teachers are not about “How can I earn my spot?” It’s about “I’m here, and I got my degree so what are you going to do for me?” I am seeing entitled parents raising extremely entitled children. They can’t do things that are very everyday. I’m seeing kicking and hitting, and what sets them off is when you challenge them to do something or you say “No.”

Participant 5, who has 17 years of counseling experience in schools, mentioned adolescents feeling entitled in dating relationships. She said, “These kids don’t accept stuff. They want it so they should have it. Even in dating, they don’t accept ‘No’ for an answer, like with breakups.”

Participant 11, who has 20 years experience working with children and adolescents, believes that these kids are far different from any generation we have previously seen. She explained:

Entitlement is a huge barrier for these kids, especially in the higher socioeconomic areas. The values are the self and not family. It’s about my wants, my feels. They don’t hold jobs because their expectations are too high. They don’t have any responsibility because they don’t have to work for anything. They have never worked for anything in their life. They don’t even look beyond high school. They don’t even envision themselves supporting themselves.

Focus Group 1, which was composed of counselors from the Texas Panhandle, discussed the entitlement of their kids. Participants in the focus group were clearly frustrated about the entitlement of their students. One group participant stated:

These kids have a totally different mindset than even 10 or 15 years ago. They think, “I don’t have to work for it, I deserve it. Give it to me and now.” And especially in school. They expect they will get into college or get the best job. They don’t think they have to work their way up to anything. There’s no work ethic. None.

Lack of motivation. Lack of motivation was reported by all 11 counselors. This distinguishes these individuals from the previous generation, in that students of the previous generation were motivated by things such as loyalty, teamwork, and the belief that they were capable of accomplishing anything (Alexander & Sysco, 2013). The millennials had an almost false sense of capability, believing they should be given a reward for effort rather than performance (Alexander & Sysco, 2013). In contrast, participants reported that the entitled youth of today, lack motivation to put forth effort toward anything. Participants felt as though the lack of effort was due to the notion that they deserved the best and it could come regardless of effort. Participants discussed the sense of entitlement and lack of motivation as interlocked pieces in the mindset of this generation.

Participant 11 reported entitlement and motivation as being one conjoined issue. She stated:

The lack of motivation to be responsible for anything in their lives is huge. They expect it will happen, their entitled, and they don't have to work for it, so they don't. They do not want to work; they expect they will get a job on their terms.

Participant 1, from North Texas, discussed motivation issues as related to education. He reported:

Motivation issues is one of the main things I deal with. I probably deal with a motivation issue two or three times a day. Whether it's kids not wanting to come to school or they want to graduate early because they can't seem to do their work. They want to be on their own and do stuff, but they don't want the effort. So,

they just try to get things done faster. There are a lot more frequent schedule changes because they have disagreements with teachers about the work they have to put in. Kids are cutting stuff to just be finished, and they look for ways to be less involved. They are giving up activities that they have done for a few years in an effort to make it easier on themselves. They are trying things more manageable for themselves.

Focus group 1 discussed the motivation issues of their students and talked about their truancy. Participant IX was concerned about students' lack of motivation to attend the more affluent school at which she worked. She explained:

In the affluent school I work at, they tend to not come to school. They are chronic absentees and don't feel the need to do well in school. It doesn't matter to them and no one gives them any consequences. The school doesn't even do anything about it.

Focus Group 1 expressed their concerns that motivation and entitlement were, in fact, making their students vulnerable to sex trafficking.

They're not motivated to do anything, even follow rules. Kids just want people off their back. Maybe they give up, leave, and rebel. They don't want to follow rules so they leave. These kids can't survive out there on their own. That's when predators are there. I had a kid just run away from home. He told me he was going to go live with his girlfriend. He wasn't happy with rules and school. He never came back to school, he was a senior. He was already 18, so I couldn't do anything about it. I never knew what happened to him.

Study skills. Study skills was a topic of discussion among several participants. Some seemed perplexed by the issue because many schools offer study sessions. Participants seemed to think it was related to the issues of entitlement and motivation.

Participant 3 discussed concerns about students' ability to study. Her school offered a program for skills but said that the lower socioeconomic students did not have means to attend these sessions. She explained, "They don't know how to study anymore and can't manage their time. I guess they may not have support to study or maybe not motivated to study. There are more kids struggling academically."

Participant 5 talked about how the school district she worked for in North Texas allows all students to reassess when needed. She stated:

Kids don't have to study anymore or work for anything. We allow it. Even the schools allow it. My school district allows all students to reassess. We had 13 valedictorians last year because we had so many duplicate GPA's. So, if a student gets a 50 or even a 98 on an exam, they can request a reassessment. They can retake anything for a better grade. At first, years ago, if you failed, you could retake it, but only get a 70. Now, you can retake anything. We even have a Facebook page for parents. They discuss how their children need to retake stuff when they made a 95. That's crazy. We need to accept that some kids are average. So I had a student that went to college come visit me recently. He said that he is failing in college. He said he didn't realize you couldn't redo stuff in college. So, he didn't study for some exams and went to ask for a reassessment. He said the professor looked at him like he was crazy. He was shocked that he

couldn't retake anything. We are doing a disservice to these kids. They don't study because they don't have to. They don't have to work. Then they go out into the real world and fail. All these kids look good on paper. They all have AP classes, sports, but they aren't really able to do the work. Anyone can look good on paper. It's sad.

Authority issues. Authority issues were discussed among participants as a contributing factor in the changes we are seeing in the students of this generation. Participants seemed concerned over the lack of respect for authority among students from the middle to upper socioeconomic schools. A few participants who worked in both low and high socioeconomic schools reported that students from the lower socioeconomic schools were more respectful. One such participant, who was working in a school with an immigration program, said that the authority issues she had witnessed: did not often come from that group of students. Some participants attributed it to cultural differences within minority populations, believing that minority cultures promote respect within the family unit.

Participant 3 was asked about cultural shifts within the students at her school. The first thing that came to her mind was related to authority. She explained:

Students of this generation are more disrespectful than any students in the past. They don't listen and don't follow rules and they don't care. They're oppositional and defiant. Girls and boys are both more defiant these days, but boys are more aggressive with the defiant behavior. They speak up about their dislikes more.

Participant 1 discussed how motivation and lack of respect for authority were all linked. He stated, “There are so many teacher disagreements now. They disagree and they quit. They change what they’re doing everytime they disagree with someone.”

Participant 10 talked about how the teachers and parents are having a hard time dealing with the students’ reluctance to comply with rules or do work in the classroom. She stated:

Some of them just don’t know what to do with these kids. They are always breaking down or get confrontational with authority. I think these kids talk to adults or parents as equals, not as “you’re my teacher.” A lot of students these days have problems with authority. Authority can’t be confrontational in any kind of way or they will fight back. You have to tip toe around. This generation has a really big problem with authority.

Participant 11 discussed the differences between her higher and lower socioeconomic schools. She explained:

At higher socioeconomic schools there is a lot more outbursts toward authority or teachers rather than peers. It’s the opposite in lower SES [socioeconomic status] schools. They have outbursts or fight with peers. A lot of the low SES Hispanic kids are very respectful toward authority. They listen.

Changes in Parenting

Parenting was at the forefront of much of the discussions within each interview. Findings in parenting are linked to research in some aspects. Research shows that parent involvement and attitude have a direct effect on student achievement and motivation

(Froiland, 2015). Participants were clearly frustrated with parents and seemed to believe that many of the issues facing students were a result, on some level, to parenting.

Entitled parents raising entitled children. Parents of school-aged children are predominately from Generation X and the millennials. The original generation of entitlement is now in the workforce and raising children. The effects of parenting from this generation are largely unknown in research, but these participants offered some insight into what is happening as a result of entitled parents.

Participant 2 was asked about the entitlement of her students, but began to show frustration when discussing their entitled parents. She believed that the parenting was fostering the sense of entitlement in her students. She explained:

I have seen huge changes in something. That there is definitely more of a sense of entitlement from this generation. Parents bail them out of trouble, no matter what. Parents are so entitled, too. Parents have a sense of you should be doing all these things for their kids when it is necessary or it's stuff that parents should be doing. It also falls on socioeconomic lines. I mean, the ones in poverty will take whatever they can get. Half of them don't speak English. Then you move into the more affluent schools, and that's where you have the entitled parents and kids.

Participant 7 whose age places her in the millennial generation, had clear ideas about parenting issues. She stated:

White, middle, upper class, there is a lot of entitlement, they think everyone should do everything for their kids. They don't think that it's acceptable for their

kids to appear to be doing wrong, so they don't accept it when you tell them otherwise.

Participant 7, an elementary counselor, shared her experience with both upper and lower socioeconomic students and their parents. She explained:

My low SES kids often have grandparents that are co-parenting or just parenting because the parents aren't around. These grandparents have a hard time putting rules in place. They make excuses for kids. They don't hold them accountable for anything. But the grandparents seem to be more open to allow counseling. Now, my other parents are kind of the same, but aren't really open to counseling. These parents that are in their late 20s and early 30s are so entitled. I'm seeing entitled parents raising really entitled children. When you look at how that affects their brain development, they can't do things that are so everyday.

Participant 8, from West Texas, described the same idea of parent entitlement as did the participants from the other two areas of Texas. She explained:

I've been here 20 years, and the same things cycle through. One of the things that has changed is that parents expect more for their kids. More from us. They feel more entitled than they used to and expect schools to cave in to their kids. Everyone is supposed to get a ribbon and they think that everyone will be successful. They are starting to find out that their kids are going to college and failing. Parents have done so much for their kids that they don't know how to stand on their own or speak up for themselves.

Participant 9, was clearly angry over the way parents are paving the way for kids. Her frustration was evident from the tone in her voice and rapid speech.

Within the affluent population there is an apparent feeling that kids should be protected from everything. Everyone is entitled to be protected. From mistakes they make to mistakes others make. I even see parents and staff at the school promoting this. Natural consequences should be enforced but parents have excuses on consequences won't work for their kids. They baby them. Students who aren't turning in work don't get failing grades. They are allowed to turn it in until the very last day of school and receive a 70. Or students skip class all the time, and the parents make up a reason that doesn't even make sense. The school accepts it. These messages are coming from everywhere. Parents are doing that. You don't have to deal with consequences ever. And parents think their kids deserve to be that way.

Focus Group 2 also felt as though entitlement made kids vulnerable to sex trafficking. After being asked the question, "Do you think this makes them vulnerable to sex trafficking? If so, tell me about that." They responded:

Absolutely it makes them vulnerable. Their parents don't allow them to do wrong; they never suffer consequences. These kids think they can always be bailed out. Always. Parents don't accept when you tell them their children are doing something that might put them in a bad place. It's always our responsibility, and they will push until we do something for their child. These kids think their invulnerable.

From helicopter parent to lawnmower parent. Millennials were raised by helicopter parents. These parents are considered to have a controlling form of parent involvement (Froiland, 2015). According to Froiland (2015), this parenting style comes at a price because it hinders the child's development of autonomy and inhibits emotional health. Recently, a new term has risen and was often discussed in conjunction with entitled parents. According to these participants, parents have shifted from helicopter parenting to lawnmower parenting.

Participant 8, discussed how the lawnmower parent is now the term used for their parents who don't let children suffer consequences. She states:

We call parents lawnmower parents. Their [students'] way is paved so when issues come up they can't cope. There is such a polarity in parenting now. We have opposite ends of the spectrum with parenting and no middle ground anymore. We have those that aren't involved at all. We have those lawnmower parents that do everything for them and don't let them be late with anything, not even assignments. There are no consequences. The kids forget an assignment and parents will call and call to try and rush it up here. The kids don't learn how to fend for themselves.

Participant 11, talks about changes she has seen in parenting over the last 20 years. She describes:

When I first started it was the helicopter parents. I thought those were bad, but no. Now we have the lawnmower parent in the higher SES kids. That has become the norm. It's enabling these kids. They have never had to fail in their

life. The parents don't like failure and strive for perfect children, so they just do it for them. They don't think it's okay for the kids to make a mistake, so they make the way for them, and they don't have to do any of the work. It's not okay for these kids to make mistakes.

Participant 6, discussed the lawnmower parent and how they is effecting her students.

Parents are taking on all the problems of the students. We have lawnmower parents now. They just pave the way for the students. Students already have their problems solved for them, all the time, and they don't have to deal with it. Even everyday stuff. It's solved. Parents just do it for them.

Focus Group 1 seemed really excited to talk about lawnmower parents. They began discussing how parents of older generations never did that stuff, that students used to be responsible to take care of things at school. They discussed:

All their problems are dealt with by their parents now. They don't have to do anything. Those are lawnmower parents. They aren't helicopter anymore, they are lawnmower. They always intervene and solve every issue. I see the lawnmower, then the parents that aren't involved at all. It's totally opposite.

There are two extremes. Rather than telling kids how to fix conflicts, they just do it. They do everything for them. When I went to school my parents never came up here. Parents are up here all the time, wanting you to do this and that. I handled my own problems at school. My parents didn't hold my hand in everything.

Focus Group 2 talked about the parenting and how it makes students vulnerable. They described:

Parents make excuses for everything these kids do. You know, the lawnmower. They're almost permissive of stuff. They don't have to deal with consequences so they don't see the danger in anything they do. This makes them a target. They will do anything because they can get away with it.

Parent pressure for achievement/perfection. Another major shift in parenting, as observed by these counselors is the idea that parents desire perfection from their children. In addition to paving their pathway for success, they also overwhelm their children with activities and academics that are not sustainable for many. Parents in the middle and upper socioeconomic classes have a greater desire for their children to be successful than do the parents in the lower socioeconomic class and push them toward excessive achievement.

Participant 2 discussed the desire for success and how she felt it is often unrealistic. She discussed:

I think in the affluent schools, there is a lot more pressure to perform than there used to be, academically, athletically, musically. They find it difficult to keep all these balls in the air, and then to top it off, the parents don't allow any mistakes or failure. They're [students are] bailed out when something goes wrong. The pressure for perfection is there. They see that their parents want them to be perfect. That's tough.

Participant 3 seemed concerned over her kids and the pressure coming from home. She stated:

I have some kids that are not sleeping or eating. They are on the verge of a mental breakdown because of the pressure they get to be good at everything. A lot of them don't know how to deal with that. Our middle class kids struggle with academics. They have a hard time keeping up with all the AP classes, extra-curricular, volunteer work, and they are struggling to do it all in one day. The parents expect it. The kids expect it of themselves. They do homework all night and don't sleep.

Participants also seemed to think the increase in anxiety and mental illness was related to the amount of pressure put on students. It is interesting to note that the word *pressure* was used a minimum of two times in every interview conducted. Participant 3 explained:

These kids have so much pressure on them, and a lot of times they feel like they aren't meeting expectations. They feel like it's not going good so they start doing this risk-taking behavior. A lot of them wouldn't have done that before feeling this way.

Participant 11 discussed how this generation has parents that put more pressure on their children than ever before. She stated her concerns:

Parent demand is so much higher than it used to be. They're demanding that we cater to them and make a way for them to be perfect in school, but they are also demanding too much from their kids. Kids are taking more rigorous caseloads of

classes and having to compete in elite sports and dance or other high intensity stuff. Parents are requiring kids to pay for their own stuff like their cell phones. They don't have time to have self-care. They're working, going to school, and have so many extra activities, and end up having these mental breakdowns. And the weird thing is that the parents don't want to take anything off their plates. If you bring in a parent and talk to them about it and the kids don't want to quit an activity either, then the parents don't enforce it. They promote it. They know there is a problem and they don't want to do anything about it. I have some kids that obviously need to lower their work hours but won't say "No" to their boss or parent out of fear of disappointing anyone. There are no boundaries when it comes to how much they have going on. All the parents want their kids to be the star student. They over burden them. They don't accept that their kid is average. They must be the highest achiever, and they will do whatever it takes to get them there. Like making them retake tests, even though they made a low A. There is no limitations to how much their kids are supposed to be doing.

Participant 1 explained his concern over the responsibilities that kids have now. He was amazed that parents felt as though these responsibilities were going to make their child learn to be more successful.

One of the things that I see that is very different now in our middle class kids is how much these kids are responsible for. On top of school and extra-curricular activities, they are responsible for their phone, insurance, and car. So they have to work and earn money. They need stuff and want stuff so they are going to find ways to make money. These kids don't even have the desire to go to college.

They just want to work and make money. There is too much pressure on these kids, and some of these kids are disenchanted with their parents. I deal with that every day. I'm seeing them leaving home. They're basically homeless because they have left their support and they go and stay with someone else. This makes them vulnerable to accept help from anyone or anywhere. This makes them vulnerable to things like trafficking.

Participant 8 discussed pressure on her elementary students. She said that the pressure begins early and is coming from the younger parents. She explained:

Our parents are getting kids way overinvolved in stuff. Like every night they have something. And now there is select sports, actually, there is a new one that is bigger and better than select. It's training that is supposed to make your kids the best. Every weekend there is something. They have a tournament, soccer, cheerleading. They don't have time to play. Kids work stuff out when they're playing. They are so brilliant when they are able to work it out through play. They don't have time for that anymore.

Participant 9 discussed how parents and schools are pressuring students. She explained:

There are so many expectations for these kids. Parents think they [children] have to be perfect. No room for error. Even teachers have been telling kids that they won't get into college if they don't have the AP classes. The average student is getting pressure from everywhere. They can't live up to that. Since the affluent parents bail the kids out every time they are about to make a mistake or fail

because their kids can't fail, then when it actually happens, they can't bounce back.

Focus Group 1 referred to parent pressure and how kids get tired of it and want to leave the nest. To them, this was a huge risk for trafficking.

These kids are breaking down and want people off their back. Some of them are leaving home, early. They can't fend for themselves. I can just see one needing money or something and someone just offers it. They offer freedom from the pressure or it appears that way.

Absentee parent/lack of supervision. Counselors reported a polarity in parenting. All participants reported this polarity and believe that it is more severe now than it has been in the past. Most of the discussion resided on the lawnmower parenting. However, the other side of the discussion was the lack of supervision of the current generation. Participants believed that the lack of supervision, even of the lawnmower parents, places these children in a vulnerable position. Parents are paving the path for their children, but it does not necessarily mean that they are present in their everyday lives. It was interesting to realize that participants rarely discussed parenting that seemed well rounded to them. They seemed concerned over parenting and discussed personal examples of how their parents were far different than those of today.

Participant 1 described the lack of support in parenting even when there are high expectations set by parents. He described how the support looks different and is perceived differently by kids.

One factor that I see so much of is a disconnect between young people and adults. It's so much more than it used to be. There was more parent support; the young people don't perceive the same amount of support as they used to. Without that support, they go looking for that. They need that from someone. A lot of them will take from anyone that offers it to them.

Participant 2 expressed her concerns over working class families and the time spent away from their kids, but she also had concerns about the higher socioeconomic families and how that status effects the parents being present in their lives. She explained:

Parents are doing so much and putting their kids in so much. They are having a hard time keeping up with all of their kids. They have all the kids in several activities and that leaves room for children to be unsupervised. Parents just don't have time to be supervising all this stuff. They are over scheduling their families. Working class families have a hard time too. Both parents are working all of the time and the older kids are having to take responsibility for younger siblings. That's tough when the older child is responsible for the others. There's no parent there to say, "Get up and go to school." Then I have kids that have a parent in jail. Those kids don't have any supervision and think they need to provide for their family. So, they try to make money to keep their siblings eating. No one is looking out for those teens.

Participant 2 was asked, "Why is sex trafficking more prevalent in this generation than in others?" She responded:

It's the lack of parental guidance, they want everything for their kids, but they're not the ones actually supporting them. They think they're supporting them by doing stuff for them, but that's not what they need. They don't have a good parental system and kids are just lost these days.

Participant 5 believed that not only do kids have a lack of parental supervision but they lack supervision in the schools.

Kids are so much more able to hide things now. They can get away with stuff, when older generations couldn't. Parents are just working hard and more and they're never around. They are providing the money and stuff but forget that they need to be there. Some of them leave one kid alone to go take the other here and there. Plus, our schools are getting so big. We have some schools with 4000 students. We can't possible pay enough attention to these kids.

Participant 6 responded to the question: "What do your students come in with on a daily basis?"

Kids being upset with parents. They really do need them to be around. They're upset because they're not there, but they [parents] expect so much. And then when they are there, everyone is fighting. Kids say that their parents won't listen to what they need, and so there's a lot of drama at home.

Participant 7 seemed upset that her efforts are, at times, wasted. She felt as though she does her best to help the students at her school and yet nothing happens at home.

They aren't getting support. There is less and less parent supervision. I have the kids that come in every week, and they do good with the coping skills we learn, but then can't use them. They have to practice them. And when the only guidance is coming from the school . . . ya know. Somebody at home is not reinforcing things. They have more and more lack of executive functioning nowadays. I think they're doing good, and then they can't use the stuff we learn in here. No one is helping them. Then I have other kids that their parents are dropping them off in the dark, out front, before the doors open. These kids are little. I also have a few kids that stay at the budget suites all night with guys walking around everywhere. Someone could do anything to these kids, outside the school or outside of their hotel room.

Participant 9 discussed the differences in socioeconomic status. She explained:

The kids at my Title I school just have parents that are absent or are working a lot. They just don't have anybody there. There is no one to check on them or tell them what they should and should not be doing. The affluent campus has parents that do too much, go out too much, and have the kids in too many activities. Either way, parents aren't there. Just looks different.

Participant 10 was asked the question: "Why do you think this area is extremely prone to sex trafficking?" She responded:

My particular school doesn't have a lot of absent, but I definitely think they are working too much. They are not monitoring their kids and aren't checking their friends. I don't think they take the time to be doing the parenting things anymore.

I think we try to help them at school, but if there isn't the support to follow-through at home, it doesn't matter.

Participant 10 was using the word "absent" to refer to parents who are not living in the home with their children.

Participant 11 noted that kids do want their parents' attention and they need that for their mental health.

These parents don't have a lot of communication with their children, no partnership. They [children] really want that. They are working all the time. The low SES kids have parents working all night. They need someone to be there.

Technology as a babysitter. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP, 2017), children 8-10 years of age spend almost 8 hours each day using technology. In addition, teenagers spend more than 11 hours per day using some sort of media (AAP, 2017). Their recommendations for technology use is less than 1-2 hours per day and no screen time under the age of 2 years (AAP, 2017). Technology use was a concern for these participants, as many believed it is allowed too much in the home. They believed that children are using technology too early and that parents are not aware of how it is affecting their children.

Focus Group 2 discussed the safety issues related to the use of technology and how parents are not attempting to monitor it. They explained:

Group Member 3: There is a sense of permissiveness. Either with the absent or busy parent. I say permissive in the sense of technology. It's used as the pacifier

behind closed doors. Keep the kids entertained. They can't keep up with it. Kids are getting past everything.

This participant was referring to the fact that they believe parents are giving kids technology so that they can accomplish their own tasks.

Group Member 4: You can give them an iPad to entertain them and they have the whole world at their hand. Everything and anyone can get to them. Anyone is there, the traffickers are there.

Group Member 2: I have a student that has watched porn for a long time. His parents don't censor anything on his phone or Internet.

Lack of technology/social media knowledge. According to Turner (2015), a key distinction of Generation Z is that they are the first generation to have never experienced life without the Internet. They are the first generation to be completely connected: in fact, they are spending as much time using technology as they do sleeping (Turner, 2015). Participants in this study had significant concerns over parental monitoring of technology and social media. All participants believed that parents are not aware of how their children are using technology and are unable to fully understand different types of technology.

Participant 3 discussed her concerns over parent knowledge of technology. She explained:

Parents are not monitoring their teenagers on the Internet. They aren't educated about it, and know very little. They know about Facebook, but these kids are using other stuff. They don't set boundaries with their children and the

technology. The kids aren't bothering the parents, so it's okay. It's a parenting issue. We are allowing them to use this stuff, like social media, and not watching. We are opening ourselves up to all of the negative stuff on social media because parents aren't educated. It's a parent thing. Society and technology—they don't know about this stuff at all. I mean, they need to be educated on technology and the predators that are on there [Internet].

Participant 5 talked about her students who get around parent guidelines for use. Very few parents have guidelines on how kids are using this stuff—all the apps and technology. They don't know about it. They don't know what they are doing on there. The ones who try to put guidelines in place have kids who are getting around it. I have a student that isn't supposed to have a Twitter account. He downloads the app to his phone everyday, once he gets to school. Then he deletes it when it's time to go home. Parents also put these rules into place only after something happens, like if they get caught doing something on social media, not before. Mostly, they don't know how you use these apps anyway.

Participant 8 believed that her elementary school was trying to educate students but said that parents knew very little about social media. She explained:

Starting in third grade, we start pulling kids aside. We try and explain that they need to have Internet and social media safety, but a lot of them think they are being safe. We say, "Be careful," and they respond with, "Oh, I know who I'm talking to on there." We do our best to educate kids on safety, but the parents

don't know anything. They can't help reinforce safety. They don't know how dangerous it is.

Technology

Technology has become an engrained part of everyday life for most of us. In fact, the children and adolescents in our society have never lived without it. Participants in this study expressed an overwhelming concern over the use of technology and its effects on everyday life. As stated earlier, parents are not often aware of what their children are doing on their devices. According to participants, parents do not often take into account the consequences of using technology without supervision. Additionally, using technology too often can hinder development in children. Developmental concerns were a substantiated part of the information that counselors had about the use of technology. Technology use has been shown to have a positive effect on children who use technology within small limits (Hinchliff, 2008). Studies have shown that small children can have developmental strides from using technology for 15-20 minutes per day (Hinchliff, 2008). Concerns about technology use come from lack of supervision, inappropriate use, and spending too much time on a device, allowing distractions or strangers to creep into their lives. In fact, all participants believed that sex trafficking has progressed because of technology. Sub-themes within this section are described as effects on social skills, development, identity development, relationships, bullying, and love and belonging.

Effects on social skills. Social skills of this generation were distinguished these students from previous generations more than any other aspect. Participants seemed enamored with the effects that technology, specifically social media, has had on students. All participants reported shifts in the way children and adolescents interact with society.

Many believed that their students lack the ability to have normal face-to-face interactions. When describing the lack of social skills in students, it is interesting to note that many of participants' responses were peppered with the term "face-to-face". In addition, participants felt as though this is a hindrance on their ability to interact as good participants of society.

Participant 2 was asked "What kind of cultural shifts are you seeing?" She described:

Culturally, technology has affected students. That has been pretty huge on how students are relating. Our district got generous and put an iPad in everybody's hands. Social media, bullying issues, students just getting lost in technology. They almost lack the skills to have face-to-face conversations anymore. Even when it comes to dating, there is an awkwardness, there is a strangeness of being face-to-face. There is such a different way of approaching people than there was 10 years ago.

Participant 3 gave detail in her ideas of how social media has affected this generation. She explained:

I think this generation is not good socially. They are so dependent on social media, they don't have basic skills. Like, I mean they can't look at someone in the eye when someone talks to them. They can't shake a hand without feeling awkward. They are constantly on their phones. They are never in the here and now. They don't know how to be in the here and now. They aren't even good with conflict resolution. They can't go to a person face-to-face and address

issues. They are really good at getting on their phone and creating drama or making it worse.

Participant 4 described technology as a barrier for success in her students. When asked, “What different types of barriers do these students have for succeeding in life?” she responded:

The only thing I see is actually the technology. These kids don’t have social skills to interact with people or what we call job skills. They are on their phone all day and don’t have to have face-to-face interaction. They don’t have to do it, so it’s easier to interact over the phone than in person.

Participant 6 responded to the question: “What do your students come in with on a daily basis?”

Talking is hard for kids these days. They aren’t used to talking face-to-face. They’re always on the phone. It causes a lot of relationship issues. Technology has definitely taken over. They don’t look you in the eye. They don’t know how to approach people. They are more comfortable on text than in person. Even on the phone, they can’t even do talking on the phone. They can’t even say “Thank you” in person. They always have a chance to think things out before they type it up. They can’t talk on the spot. It’s a sense of security for them to not have to stand in front of someone so they feel brave behind that phone.

Participant 9 talked about how her students demonstrate their lack of social skills in situations.

I feel like these kids are in specific situations all the time that shows me that they are not able to deal with social situations. They don't have social skills. Social media has made it where there isn't as much depth in real conversation, but at the same time everything is on display. There are no boundaries on social media.

Effects on development. Most participants discussed their concern that overuse of technology was thwarting children's social development. However, one participant expressed concerns over the use of technology and how it is affecting the development of young children. Gross and fine motor skills develop rapidly between the ages of 4 and 5 years, by activities that are physical and require large and small muscle groups in the body (Howe, 2017). Kindergarteners and first graders tend to have high levels of energy (Howe, 2017). Teachers have reported that allowing movement for these energetic young children is essential for physical, mental, and emotional development (Howe, 2017). One participant in this study described her concerns over the lack of development in young children. She attributed the lack of development to the low amounts of physical play in this generation.

Participant 7, an elementary school counselor, was passionate about how technology is hindering the development of her students.

We have a lot of kids coming up that are lacking motor skills—gross and fine motor. It's sad. The kids are always on the technology. They don't play. These kids do so much when they play. They don't develop the way they are meant to develop. We have kids that are so aggressive now. A lot of my third graders have Facebook accounts. They play games online; parents aren't monitoring

them. They are playing games with strangers online. We even give them all an Ipad in fourth grade. They're always on it. Parents don't understand how danger it is. It's just convenient for them.

Effects on identity development. Participants had concerns over social media and the identity development of their adolescent students. Identity development is a milestone during adolescence, as outlined by Eric Erikson (1968). He proposed that the adolescent stage of development focused on identity versus role confusion. He believed that during this stage of development, the adolescent examines their identity in order to find their own role in society, separate from their parents. Participants discussed how these adolescent students try to find their identity among their peers. However, social media has changed the way they view themselves in society.

Participant 2 discussed how her students view themselves through social media:

My students often identify themselves with responses they get from social media. They define their popularity by how many *Likes* they get when they post something. It's not about who you are in your group. It's more about what you put out there on social media and how others respond.

Participant 3 shared the same sentiments about social media and technology. She explained:

You know, teens always value who they are with their peers. But technology has changed that. It's about how many *Likes* they get. It's about their status on social media, how many friends they have. Their popularity is determined by social media, and they are defining themselves by what people say on social media.

They put stuff out there to see what people will say. Every thought or opinion is on social media. Their identity, whether they're bullied or not, is on there. They don't filter anything and have a knee jerk reaction to share everything. They think that these people are their friends; they look for support from them. They aren't private like other generations and only share stuff with close friends. They are an open book on social media.

Participant 4 talked about adolescents' need for acceptance from their peers. She explained:

These kids and how they see themselves is from their peers. That's how they are, and they look for acceptance from their peers. But now, their confidence and acceptance is determined by how they are accepted on Facebook. They think how they are on Facebook is how their identity looks.

Participant 5 discussed how adolescents are labeling themselves as struggling with mental illness on social media and wanting a response. She described:

The social media never stops for them. There are on there all the time and way more transparent on there than in person. They share everything and place labels on themselves to see how other people react. I mean, we have kids that go into the hospital, psychiatric hospital, and share their experience on social media the next day. They wear it like a badge of honor, instead of a private struggle. They place their identity in that and see how others respond. They want everyone to see that they are struggling with mental illness. They put the label there to see how social media reacts.

Participant 9 discussed how social media has created a false sense of self in adolescents. She explained:

Social media is so superficial. I think kids are actually looking for those to genuinely care about them and who they are. They don't realize that it doesn't come from there. There is a false sense of self on social media. A false sense of popularity according to how many friends you have on social media. It's just a false system that they find themselves in. I was seeing a kid for depression, and he was having a hard time fitting in and finding friends. But he would come in and say that so and so was his best friend, and I know it's not. He found a person on social media that responded to him, and it made him feel accepted as a person. He feels like there is a relationship there and someone he can identify with, but it's not as deep as he thinks.

Participant 11 stated that her students don't have a strong identity with social media. She explained:

These kids, especially the higher SES kids, don't have a strong identity of who they are, or their identity is skewed. They don't realize they are valuable because they are a human and not because of what people say on social media. They don't understand that.

Effects on relationships. Participants detailed the effects that social media has had on relationships. These relationships include both friendship and dating relationships. Most often, each participant felt as though individuals in this generation

have a false sense of what friendship is. Many of the participants discussed their ongoing work with defining relationships and love within this population of students.

Participant 3 expressed concerned over how technology has affected how her students are interacting with one another. She explained:

They trust people on the Internet too much. I mean, they are always on the technology. They are meeting people they don't know on social media, then going out and meeting them. That's scary. They don't care how they hurt people on social media either and can't solve conflicts with friends. Friends just start fighting on social media, and it's there for a lifetime.

Participant 5 discussed how they do not understand the consequences that result from things they post on social media. Especially when it comes to their relationships. She described:

They are continuing to explore online relationships. They don't see how dangerous this could be. They find their friends on social media and don't understand that that is not how real friends work. They are so much more aggressive with each other now, even in friendships or dating. If they get mad, then it's put out there and everyone knows it. They post that stuff and don't think it's a big deal to humiliate other people, even friends that make them mad. They tear each other down emotionally. They also give each other passwords and stuff to each other. Then, when a relationship fails, you have someone that knows too much and they can get on your account and use it against them. When they break up, with their interchanging relationships, they put it out there in detail. They're

relationship struggles are for everyone to see, which makes it hard to recover any of those.

Participant 6 talked about how kids do not understand that they may not know who they are speaking to on social media.

I have students that tell me about their boyfriends that are out of state. How they want to go meet them in person because they care about them. They've never even seen them. This is just online stuff. They trust everyone and students get so upset when they feel betrayed on social media. They put themselves in some bad situations. They don't understand that you don't know who is really behind that computer. It could be someone totally different than what you think. They don't see it like that.

Participant 8 discussed how their campus police officer has created a Facebook account to see if kids are being safe on social media. She explained:

Oh, yeah, I'm worried about all these friends they have on social media. They don't really know how to define friendship anymore. I have a lot of girls telling me that they have boyfriends out of state that they met on kik or whatever, especially these girls with low self-esteem that are looking for relationships, and they'll take what they can get. Our school cop created an anonymous profile and students just friend him and don't even know who he is. There are no boundaries with relationships on social media.

Participant 10 discussed social media relationships but also talked about gaming. She explained:

I have kids getting involved with strangers and people they don't know online. They consider this real relationships. They are gaming and establishing relationships on there with strangers. Girls do a lot of virtual role play too. They go into these role play games and meet people with these avatars they have created. They will go into chatrooms where people can put their stories on there and have others comment. They base friendships on the comments they get back. Gaming is really big for boys. They look for approval and relationships on these games, instead of trying to build friendships with people they are around.

Participant 11 had strong concerns over relationship issues online. She has even reported a relationship that a student had online with an older male. She described:

Yeah, they friend a lot of people they don't know. I have a kid right now that believes his friends are his Twitter friends. He's a normal kid, but he truly believes these are his friends. We try to talk about the circle of trust, but he thinks that the Twitter followers are his circle of trust. He believes these are his people. I had had several clients that have been friended by men in their 20s, when they are only 13 or 14. We have had to report several and have had investigations because of these relationships. Social media is their relationship tool. So a normal conversation between you and me, or close friends is now to the world. They break up with each other on social media. They don't even do it in person. I even think that gaming is a bigger issue than social media. They are building relationships with these people on the game. I have been seeing gaming issues for a decade, social media is newer than that. These kids are actually talking to strangers, not typing on these games. There is a lot more bullying on there. I had

a kid that was so hyperfocused on that fact that someone shot him in a game. He was so angry. His friend shot him, at least that's what he thought. Their perception of friendship is so skewed.

Focus Group 1 talked about how social media has affected the dating relationship.

They discussed:

Courting is so different. They are so brave on social media and cross the line way more than they would in person. It's easier to talk and meet someone online than face-to-face. There is less work involved. They don't understand that there is stuff like catfishing, where people they meet are saying "I love you" and never even talk to them on the phone. They are not even the person they think they are. Then they are heartbroken and traumatized because they were legitimately in love with this person. It has totally changed relationships. You don't even have to date anyone. Just text or talk on social media for a week and you're already all heated up.

Focus Group 2 discussed how they were shocked that parents are promoting online relationships. They detailed:

Group Member 2: They don't even have to hang out anymore. Their social play is on gaming, snapchat, play station. They communicate with all these people. I had a young lady that was 14 and had met a friend over the Internet in Oklahoma. Her and her friend got her a concert ticket to have them meet. The date actually brought her to a hotel in Oklahoma to meet her online friend. They went to this concert and now she's coming down here to spend a weekend. Her parents are

allowing her to spend a weekend with a family that was met online. They are upper-middle class and her parents feel like she is getting something from this relationship. I've talked about concerns but they think it's okay. I'm shocked.

Group Member 1: Yeah, these kids aren't getting the same thing from these relationships as you would in a real one, but I think they perceive that they do.

They are distraught by stuff that happens online. They are traumatized by fighting with people online that they have never met. We need to educate kids about what is real and what is not. Parents have to do this but they're not.

Effects on bullying. Traditionally, bullying is intentional and repeated by an individual toward someone that cannot defend himself or herself (Fernandez, Felix, & Ruiz, 2015). These days, 81% or more of teens ages 12-18 years use social media as their primary source of communication (Hamm et al., 2015). The use of social media has changed the ways kids bully each other. Participants discussed some of the ways their students are using social media to bully and the reasons why they believe it occurs frequently.

Participant 2 discussed the increase in bullying incidents since social media has become a part of our cultural fabric. She explained:

Social media has really changed things. I deal with a lot more bullying since social media started. Even my daughter is dealing with social media bullying right now. It's hard. The big push right now in schools is dealing with cyberbullying. That's the big thing right now.

Participant 3 talked about how permanent bullying on social media can be. She described:

Technology is really affecting the kids. It really is. These videos are for a lifetime. They will always be somewhere out there. You can't get away from it. I just had a student say he watched a video of a group of boys bullying another boy on Instagram. It really affected him. Even the bystanders of cyberbullying are affected. They don't think about how this stuff hurts other people. They are so much more willing to say hurtful things; its stuff they would never say if they were face-to-face.

Participant 5 also reported an increase in bullying because of social media. She reported:

There is a lot more bulling. They just tear each other apart and don't think about the emotional aspect of a person. They are very courageous about their words when they are hiding behind their phones. I deal with cyberbullying every single day. They go from having a relationship with someone to getting angry and bullying them on social media. It's so fast and drastic.

Participant 7 described how elementary students are bullying each other on social media. She explained:

We have kids that cyberbully. It starts pretty young. My elementary students will video a kid or take a picture of them in class. They'll do things like put a poop emoji on their heads and send it out to other people or post it on social media. That's a lot of the bullying I see going on.

Participant 8 described how schools have to determine if it is the schools responsibility and the difficulty that can come with that.

We have a lot of kids that cyberbully. These middle school girls think it's okay to do this. They don't realize down the road how this is going to affect them or someone else. Parents always want us to do something about it. So then we have to determine if the video has gone to other students around the school or if it hasn't and where it came from. Sometimes it's a struggle when it's hard to determine what responsibility the school has over online bullying, if it's after school hours. Sixth-grade girls aren't ready to handle social media stuff like that. They aren't ready to have stuff out there and don't think about the consequences. It's so easy to be brave on social media. Maybe we should make them read the stuff out loud to the person they are bullying. That would change things. Maybe there needs to be an app for positive stuff like affirmations. I don't know, they probably wouldn't use it. We've had a lot of locker-room bullying too, like tea bagging, but now they just video that and post it online. Boys are so much braver about stuff. The only reason bullying looks different now is because of social media.

Participant 10 described how she has seen less of a power differentiation in bullying on social media.

I do see a lot of bullying on social media, but it's been a little different. They mostly bully back and forth. There really isn't a power differentiation. One starts it and the other keeps it going. It's mostly name calling and it escalates. I think

kids just say anything and people are more willing to fight back behind a phone or computer.

Effects on love and belonging. As stated earlier, many participants illustrated the reality that children and adolescents are now looking for their ways to fit in through means of social media or other technology. Often, counselors delineated the fact that students need to feel as though they are part of a group. They look for acceptance and love from anywhere they can receive it. Participants also described differences according to gender and how social media plays a role.

Maslow (1943) believed that individuals had 5 stages of needs. Within these needs is the concept of love and belonging, which is a major factor in the adolescent stage of development. Maslow (1943) attributed individual motivation and behavior to the desire to fulfill each need. Participants believed that the need for love and belonging was present in their students and was much of the reason for excessive relationships on social media. Without being asked, participants directly related the need for love and belong and social media to sex trafficking.

Participant 1 specifically discussed the vulnerability of his female students. He explained:

The young ladies are especially vulnerable to having perpetrators find them online. They are on social media looking for acceptance from someone, especially from boys. It's a dependency and need for love they have. It goes along with all the things we have always seen on this topic. It's just that they can now find their love, or they think, online.

Participant 2 shared the sentiments that females were more likely to look for love on social media. She described:

Females are more vulnerable to sexual things. They're more trusting and can fall into things because they're looking for something. A lot of girls have a low self-esteem and want to be loved, accepted, and feel attractive. They don't have good dads as role models. I have some that have dad in jail. So if someone calls them attractive online, then they feel as though they are receiving love. Girls want to fit in and be popular too. They really want other girls to put them in a group, on social media. This opens them up to stuff, trafficking too.

Participant 4 alluded to the idea that social media behavior is driven by the need to belong. She explained:

Boys and girls have so much social pressure to be a part of a group. They will do and say things they wouldn't normally in order to be accepted, and it's worse with social media. They place themselves in situations when they are looking for acceptance that will make them be in situations where they can be trafficked. They are so accepting and fascinated by the acceptance they receive from people they don't even know.

Participant 6 described how females, more than males, value love and attachment. She felt this was part of the reason they are vulnerable online.

Females really want attachment and love. You can tell most of their problems come from being wanted and loved. They look for it and often can find it, or

what they think is love, on social media. Girls want someone to say they will take care of them.

Focus Group 2 talked about how girls use social media and sexual images to gain love and acceptance from others.

Group Member 3: At the core, it's love and belonging. These kids want to fit in and people will give it to them on social media. But when it backfires, it's bad. They can't take it. Girls are posting so many sexual images. They're voluptuous; they photoshop and then post it on social media. They think if they do that, that some guy is going to give them love. They don't realize that that isn't the way you find love. Posting half-naked pictures of yourself is not going to get you in with the right guy or a group of friends, but that's what they think. They find they're belonging from social media.

Changes in Risk Taking Behavior

Risk taking behavior has long been part of adolescence. Adolescents have gone through physical and emotional changes that give them the desire for risk taking (Wang, Stanton, Deveaux, Li, & Lun, 2015). In contrast, they have not yet developed skills to determine the consequences of such behaviors (Wang et al., 2015). Participants in this study characterized several changes in risk-taking behavior over the years. In fact, discussions on risk-taking behavior were passionate and lively. Participants were concerned and excited to share their concerns with someone. Behavior changes discussed by these participants include: changes in drug use/addiction, changes in sexual behavior, females as sexual aggressors, teenagers selling themselves for drugs or money,

risk taking on social media, and pornography. Many participants attributed these changes to lack of parent monitoring, the rise of social media, and messages adolescents receive from media.

Particularly, Focus Group 2 had an extensive discussion related to the reasons why children and adolescents are participating in far more risky behaviors. Below is an excerpt from their discussion:

Group Member 1: I think they have so much more opportunity. Kids are more knowledgeable than they used to be. They have everything on social media that they can learn about and they don't respect their bodies.

Group Member 2: And it's the age of friends with benefits. They are having so much sex out of the context of relationships. It's just fun. It's another thing you do. Its superficial connections, and they just don't care. Especially girls. There is an element of just being okay with it now that didn't used to be there.

Group Member 3: I think its lack of parental guidance and inability to make good choices. Parents don't have control over the social media and what they are seeing.

Group Member 4: I also think we sexify our kids. I am shocked at young girls, really young, shopping at Victoria's Secret. And the undergarments for little girls now. We live in a sexualized world. I mean, my training bra was white with a band, there wasn't push up training bras with lace.

Group Member 1: And the stuff on TV and adds. We sexualize our women. That's what their bodies are for. There is so much sex on TV—casual sex with strangers, people using sex to get stuff, people demanding sex from others in a

lower position, doing drugs and getting high with parents. I just saw this on a show on NBC the other day. This is what they are learning.

Changes in drug use/addiction. Alcohol use and drugs is not new to adolescents. However, participants say that it looks different than it did in previous generations. They believe that previously (10-15 years ago) substance abuse in adolescents focused on alcohol use and experimentation and addiction was seen in marijuana. According to participants, drug use has shifted in age of onset, addiction, and types of substances used. Their responses, when asked about drug use, are as follows.

Participant 3 described and linked a lot of risk-taking behavior to being under too much pressure.

These kids do a lot of drugs and alcohol. I think they can't handle pressure at home and school so they turn to drugs. There are a lot more prescription pills around too. There are a lot that are taking mommy's and daddy's pills or trying to get prescriptions on their own. Some of them are about to have a mental breakdown, so they turn to drugs or cutting to get through it.

Participant 4 also alluded to the fact that drug use is used to cope with pressures. When asked, "How does this generation handle pressure differently than others?" she responded:

They don't have any coping skills. They don't know how to handle all the stuff. The stuff coming from parents to be perfect, all the stuff they see on social media. They turn to drugs, self-injury, alcohol, and sometimes, unfortunately, suicide.

Participant 5 discussed how drug use looks different in this generation of students.

She explained:

Drug use has definitely increased. The types of drugs are much worse. When I first started we saw casual marijuana use. Now it's hard stuff. I see coke, heroin, pills; that's big. I see meth. Kids are addicted to this stuff. It's not just experimenting anymore. I have so many kids in and out of treatment for addiction. They are constantly in and out of rehab. They are so much more vulnerable because they will do absolutely anything for the drugs. They used to start off with marijuana, now they start right off with meth.

Participant 10 shared the same experiences with her students. She described:

Kids are definitely using more drugs, even drugs with their parents. It's crazy. They are starting to use drugs much younger. A lot of kids are already coming into their first year of high school with drug experimentation. They used to start in high school. Now our high school kids are addicted. I have had some of the girls trade sex for drugs. This is such a real issue right now.

Participant 11 had the most vivid description of adolescent use and talked about her boys' group discussion on their personal drug use. She explained:

When I first started working, it was marijuana. In the past 10 years, it has shifted to heroin, a bar of Xanax, cocaine, and methamphetamine. Those are the big ones. Marijuana is normal and more like alcohol use used to be. It's the norm. They aren't just experimenting with harder drugs, they are struggling with addiction. I'm seeing 15- and 16-year-olds that are true addicts. We didn't use to

have true addicts. It was experimentation. Now we have real addicts. Yesterday my boys' group turned to talk about marijuana use, and I had three of them tell me they started using marijuana at age 7. They get it from their parents or extended family. Kids are addicted to so much, and they are doing drugs and putting it on social media. No shame.

Focus Group 2 had an extensive discussion on drug use in their students. They explained:

Group Member 1: Substance abuse is out of hand. Much harder drugs, way harder. A lot of students want marijuana legalized because it's normal anyway. They do it so much. There are a lot of prescription pain meds that are kept in the home now. Lots of parents on those and kids use them or sell them.

Group Member 2: We medicate our kids now. They have an outcry and they get meds—Xanax, ADHD meds—and they justify substance abuse because they have a prescription. More kids are doing harder drugs than ever before. They don't feel guilty about it either. That's different. They used to have guilt, not anymore.

Group Member 3: Especially our kids that like the true psychedelic drugs, they even get them from the Internet. It's like the synthetic version of LSD. I have numerous clients that do that. They just get online and get it shipped to their house.

Early onset of sexual behavior. Sexual behavior is not a new trend in adolescents. Although, participants reported that sexual behavior and risk taking have an earlier onset in this generation than they did in past generations. Participants attributed

sexual onset to the amount of information that is available to young children, citing our sexual society as the reasons they believe the onset of sexual risk taking and types of sexual behavior has changed over the years. Participants seemed worried that our society has allowed our children to see sexual promiscuity from a young age. They believe that messages that we send our children are “sexifying” them.

Participant 7 described how her elementary students are already showing signs of sexual interest. She described:

There is a pseudo maturity with these kids, and they are hyperly focused on relationships. Girls are interested in boys younger these days. There are parents that encourage the behavior. Like we have parents that drop their 5th graders off at the movies to go see a boy or girls. It’s a shame, that we have come so far as a society, yet women are objectified. At some level we enjoy it, getting whistled at in the street or whatever, dismissing behavior from males that objectify women. They learn this stuff.

Participant 5 talked about how young her students are beginning to have sex and how their ideas of what constitutes sexual activity is skewed. She explained:

They have so much more knowledge than they used to and so young. There is more sexual activity than in the past. These kids don’t have boundaries and don’t respect their bodies. Knowledge of sexual activity is also more open-minded than it used to be. By that I mean they are more open to experimenting sexually. They experiment and take risks. They disregard certain sexual activities as not being a big deal. Oral sex is not a big deal . . . at all. There is so much more freedom

with sexual activity now. The problem is that they have all of this sexual knowledge but they lack maturity in their behavior. It's a bad combination.

Participant 8 talked in detail about the sexual activity of her middle school students. She believed that sexual activity is one of the key changes in this generation and, like the others, attributes the sexual activity to the information that is available for kids to learn. She detailed:

As far as behavior changes, definitely more sexual behavior than there used to be. It seems like there is so much more sexual activity, especially in middle school. They do things a lot younger, but I think it's because they know so much more at a young age. They can get information anytime and are exposed to so much. There is more experimentation with stuff and willing to do things, sexually, that I never heard of. They just have so much more access than they did 10-20 years ago. Our kids are doing this thing called "card swiping." Basically, they run their hands up and down a person's butt crack. We call them in to talk about it, and the girls don't think it's a big deal at all. It's not a violation of personal space to them. Even 10 years ago I would have gotten a complaint about that. Today, we hardly get any complaints about sexual harassment stuff. They are okay with everything. Everyone is just permissive of being touched. This generation definitely doesn't value their bodies and nothing is sacred anymore. We have so many pregnancies now and it's no big deal. They brag about it and get excited.

Participant 10 brought up sex as a concerning shift in the behavior of her students. She explained:

There is a lot of risk-taking behavior, especially sexually. A lot of kids have multiple sex partners at a very young age. Like middle school is already having multiple sexual partners. They're experimenting younger and younger. They also get involved with people they don't know. They start to do a little and more and a little more and it's no big deal. They just want to be liked and don't realize that what they are doing is dangerous.

Focus Group 2 discussed the lack of attachment to sexual partners. They discussed:

I see multiple sex partners very early, not even knowing names, one night stands at age 14 or younger. Just being sexually naïve and not caring. None of them think oral sex is sexual activity. They are testing the limits and see sex as an opportunity.

Females as the sexual aggressors. Traditionally, participants stated that boys who attempted to convince girls to engage in sexual behavior were viewed as the sexual aggressors. Participants believed that they had seen a change in sexual behavior in females. All participants believed that females have become the sexual aggressors in society. Societal factors were mentioned as a reason for the change. Many participants attributed changes to messages that women receive from the media, television, books, and music. This particular sub-theme emerged unexpectedly in questioning participants about risk-taking behavior. Participants were not directly questioned about female sexual behavior, but each brought the subject to my attention. This sub-theme was found across each discussion of risk-taking behavior and brought up by the participant. Behavior was

described in the same way across the three areas of the Southwestern state that were sampled.

Participant 5 detailed the aggression of her female students, stating that it accounts for much of the sexual behavior changes in the past few years. She explained:

Females are more and more aggressive sexually than they used to be. They are more active than in the past. They don't understand boundaries or that they're bodies aren't meant to be the object of someone else. Females are becoming the persuader. They push to have sex and have multiple sexual partners. They're also going through relationships very quickly. They just move from one to another and it starts young.

Participant 6 described that females are not afraid of becoming pregnant. She explained, "I have seen a lot of sex risk taking, especially from the girls. Girls believe that they won't get pregnant and seem to think having sex all the time doesn't have consequences." Participant 8, who was from a different area of a Southwestern state than the others, reported the same behavior occurring at her school.

There is more female experimentation. They're just doing more and pushing it more. Girls have definitely become more sexually aggressive. They are willing to do just about anything, even the middle school girls. A lot of girls don't feel like sexual comments are inappropriate. Girls are touching boys inappropriately at school. Girls are more permissive than ever before and are okay with it. It is almost as if they are finding empowerment from it. They have learned from the messages we give them about how to use their body to get what they want.

Participant 10 described females as not caring about relationships anymore. They care more about sex than ever before. She detailed:

Sex just isn't a big deal anymore. I used to have boys that were wanting to have one night stands and brag about it, but now I have girls saying things to me like, "I was with two guys last night," and really thinking, "It isn't a big deal." They are almost bragging about it. They are okay with it. They don't care about relationships. I had a girl tell me that she ran away from home and stayed with several different guys over a period of time. That's one I worry about being trafficked.

Participant 11 discussed her female students as sexual aggressors, even within a female-female relationship. She explained, "I have seen more females being the sexual aggressors, more often. I have even seen it in female-female relationships. Females are more about the sex. I don't understand it."

Exchanging sex for money/drugs. Several participants brought up the exchange of sex for money or drugs. They said that in recent years they had begun to see students sell themselves to other students within the school. Mostly, this behavior was discussed as a female issue in the school. However, one counselor stated that a transgender student was also exchanging sex for money.

Focus Group 2 talked about teens selling themselves and how some counselors may not report it. They explained:

Group Member 1: There's an education problem. That's why some counselors don't report this stuff.

Group Member 2: But what is consensual? People think, “Oh, it’s sex, and they are choosing to give or sell their body away,” but what if you put the same thing into a family context, then they would report it. People don’t know what to do if kids are selling themselves to another kid.

Group Member 3: There are teenagers selling themselves to other teens. That’s education. I can see someone outside of counseling absolutely not wanting to report it. Like an administrator. Because they see it as teens doing it to themselves, so they don’t want to intervene. As I have learned about human trafficking, I’m surprised how much of a middle class issue this is and that it takes so many different forms. All kids are naïve and vulnerable. A middle class girl can be groomed. Girls are selling themselves. It’s education.

Participant 7 described several students that she has known to sell themselves to others. All have different reasons for their behavior. She reported:

I have high school kiddos prostituting themselves out. Not literally walking the streets, but are having sex with people that give them money. There is one student that has three or four guys that pay her, and she uses protection, but it’s very alarming that she’s okay with what she is doing. And mom knows she is doing it. We have brought mom in and visited with her. We originally talked to mom because she was messaging a guy on Facebook. He came to her house and forced her to have sex. I brought mom to school and her reaction really surprised me. It’s not what I thought it would be. Mom says, “She’s like me, and I can’t stop it.” Mom responded by buying her birth control. I try and talk to the girls about self-esteem and other ways to make money.

I also have a transgender male to female that I found out about from other concerned students. Several students have reported that she is having sex for money. I do know that she is saving money for her gender reassignment surgery. She's researched it, and knows how much she needs. She will do anything for that money and feels desperate.

Participant 10 reported girls selling themselves for drugs.

I've had some girls sell themselves for drugs. They get addicted and need it, so they'll just do whatever it takes. They find that they can use their body for payment. They tell me that they do it with various guys. It's dangerous. I don't understand how they don't see that it's dangerous.

Participant 11 described two instances of girls being sold or selling themselves for sex. This participant described it as trafficking rather than "selling themselves." It is interesting to point out that one of the schools that this counselor serves has a large immigrant program. She explained:

I had a girl that went out on her own and got trafficked. She was severely mentally ill, bipolar, and her family was dysfunctional. Her parents weren't treating her mental illness. She ended up in a bad place and needed drugs and money. She found herself being trafficked. They offered her drugs and money in exchange for sex, so she gave it to them.

I had another client that I found out was going to school during the day and she was sold at night. She would have lots of absences. She wasn't a normal

drug user. I mean she didn't desire the drugs. She did drugs when she was being sold. I guess to get through it.

Something needs to be done in our schools. Money drives these kids to do stuff. For both of my girls that were trafficked, it was all about money and drugs. They're always needing stuff. My mentally ill girl is what you would call a willing victim. She sought it out and ended up in a really bad situation. Both were trying to survive.

Technology and sex. Technology, especially social media, has become an overarching theme that makes this generation different from previous generations. Participants described their students' sexual activity on social media as a risk-taking behavior. Participants also talked about the behavior as though sexual activity via technology was a common behavior. Each participant seemed shocked at what students are sharing through technology. Many said that they would have never thought of doing something like that during their adolescent years. Participants said they would have had fear of repercussions from parents and friends.

Participant 3 discussed sexting and a particular incident of sexual activity on social media. She explained:

This generation is so much more risk taking sexually. They let people videotape them and post it on social media for the world to see. They allow people to video or take photos of sex acts. We had an incident in school. Two couples went somewhere to have sex together. Two of them filmed the other two having sex and it got on social media. It was a big deal. They chose to do this. Girls want to

fit in and be popular, so they post sexual photos on social media. They post pictures of themselves without hardly any clothes.

Participant 4 also discussed the issue of sexting in her school. She explained:

The big problem with technology is all the sexting. That's a big problem right now. They don't understand the repercussions, and once that's out there in cyberspace, it's forever. They just don't see the consequences of that. And I hate to say this but girls do it a lot more than boys. More of them are sexting, sending pictures of themselves. It's more prevalent in girls.

Participant 5 talked about students in her school sexting. She described:

Yeah, there is a lot more sexting now. Naked photos being sent around, that kind of thing. It's almost what you do now. Kids are making themselves vulnerable because they are putting this stuff out there. Everyone can see it.

Participant 6 concurred that sexting was a main issue on her campus. She explained, "Kids are sexting and going a lot further than they would in person. They put stuff on social media that they wouldn't hand someone a physical picture of. Sexting is a problem with these teens."

Participant 10 talked about sexting as being something that kids just do now. She described:

There is a lot of media with sex. I have a few kids that film themselves, put it on there, that sort of thing. They are sending pictures of themselves. I had a student that was talked into sending pictures of herself to a stranger online. She has

thought about going further and meeting but I don't know if she will do it.

Another of my girls sent pictures for being asked by a stranger. Then she got mad because she found out that he asked a lot of girls for pictures in their bathing suits or whatever. She didn't feel special after that. They get talked into things so easily.

Participant 11 talked about how she attempts to educate her students on sexting.

We have a lot of issues with sexual pictures on Instagram and stuff. I have really had to start doing psychoeducational stuff with students about not sending pictures of body parts and stuff like that. They honestly don't think it's a problem. Some will continue even after I explain consequences and a few of them will stop. Negative ramifications for this is much higher in the higher SES kids.

Focus Group 1 had a conversation about their concerns on sexting and how it's different from other generations.

Group Member 1: I think girls have body image issues and want to please guys and be sexy.

Group Member 2: Sexting is bad. I don't think teenagers stop and think about what they are sending. Technology is changing the way they do things. They don't see it has having long-lasting repercussions.

Group Member 3: I was thinking about how they cross the line through a text and don't even think twice. I think our generation, which is like Generation X

and Millennials, I think, still hesitate on putting sexual stuff through social media or texts, but these kids don't.

Group Member 2: Yeah, and these girls post sexual images on social media and predators, traffickers can see that stuff. They know that these girls want to be wanted.

Friending/meeting strangers. Participants had concerns over technology/social media and how their students are “friending” and even meeting these strangers. They believed that the outlet of social media opens their students up to a world of strangers and that these adolescents are not aware of the associated risks. The friending sub-theme ran throughout much of the data, even in the ideas about how relationships have changed. Participants felt as though predators were on the other side of the phone and computer waiting to take advantage of teens looking for something. Their concerns over social media use seemed to escalate during conversations as they attributed technology/social media to much of the problems associated with adolescents.

Participant 3 described the behavior related to social media as scary during the interview process. She explained:

These kids are always on the phone and Internet. They are absolutely friending people they don't know. They are more worried about how many Likes they get and how many friends or followers they have, that it doesn't matter who they friend. They're meeting people on there through the Internet, and they trust these people. Just like that. And they aren't educated enough about it. Then you add the fact that parents aren't monitoring these kids technology use. It's so easy to

get ahold of a teenager. It's easy to just groom and meet a teenager online. They don't even have to work that hard. It's a lot easier to get a teenager than anyone is willing to admit.

Participant 4 talked about how kids are vulnerable to sex trafficking because of social media. She believed this to be the reason for the huge rise in sex trafficking in recent years. She described, "Well, kids are so vulnerable to these people. They're on social media with people they don't know. They facetime people they don't know. They think it's safe to build these relationships." Participant 5 talked about how her students were creating relationships online. She explained:

Kids don't understand the consequences of what they are doing. They are continuously exploring these online relationships and getting much more courageous about it. They hide it on their phones and delete things before parents can see it. Parents hardly check this stuff anyway. Kids are so tech savvy these days and give out any information that is asked of them.

Participant 6 explained how no matter what we discussed she kept thinking about social media. She explained:

I have students talking to men on the Internet, students with boyfriends across the country. They put themselves in these situations. No matter what, I keep going back to social media. They can reach them in so many ways. They are so much more susceptible because they meet these people and they know about every part of their life. It's easy for a stranger to work themselves into their lives and convince them to meet in person.

Participant 7 talked about her elementary students and how she has concerns of their speaking with strangers online. She explained:

We have kids that are constantly getting on stuff, even though the school has filters. We have to talk to them about strangers on social media and on gaming systems. They don't see the danger and think that building relationships is okay with strangers because they actually feel like they know them. I try and talk to them about it.

Participant 8 talked about a specific instance when one of her students friended a stranger online. She detailed:

Girls have boyfriends from across the country. I think they would actually go meet them. Especially the girls with low self-esteem. They friend these strange men. We had the FBI come to our school and showed us a picture of a girl that went to our school a few years ago. She was wearing a letter jacket so that's how they knew what school to come to. She met a guy on social media and met him at a hotel. She had sex with him and a while later she went missing. She was a good kid, a cheerleader. I thought, if this can happen to her, it can happen to anyone. There are so many strangers just sitting behind a computer.

Participant 10 also shared concerns over students' friending strangers. She explained:

There are kids friending people they don't know and calling them their boyfriends. And that's increasing. Even my kids on the spectrum go around

saying that they have boyfriends out of state. The social media thing has made them vulnerable to such a large crowd.

Technology and pornography. Pornography via technology was reported as a risk-taking behavior by participants and became an object of discussion amongst one of the focus groups. In their shared opinion, kids are more exposed and are able to participate in pornography use through technology. Pornography use in adolescents is rarely seen in the literature. Although, one study with 804 adolescents in Italy found that pornography exposure (magazine and video) were positively correlated with sexual aggression and violence in all ages of adolescents, but more so in early adolescents (Bonino, Ciairano, Rabaglietti, & Cattelino, 2006). The study found positive correlations for both male and female adolescents (Bonino et al., 2006). Participants in this study reported concerns that their students had been exposed to pornography, and many believed the exposure is frequent.

Focus Group 2 had a shift in discussion from sexting to pornography use and exposure among their students. Each counselor in the group gave accounts of sexting or pornography use in their students. They discussed:

Group Member 1: I have a second grader; he self-censored. He was watching pornography on a phone and put in measures to keep himself from looking at it. He's got older siblings too, and I'm sure he has been exposed to stuff. He has a natural curiosity and is drawn to it. I'm not sure he understands what he is watching. But he did stop himself and put up protection on his phone so he can't watch it.

Group Member 2: I see numerous kids watching online porn. Even in my middle school kids. Some of the autistic kids I see also watch it; that is some of their main focuses. They can't stop watching it because they're curious. I have had numerous over the past two years. Actually, our school just put policies in place for cell phone stuff because of the issues we have had with pornography over the past 2 years. They're bringing it into school, which we can't allow.

Group Member 3: It's impossible to keep up with. Porn used to be a magazine or video you had to rent. Now it's accessible at the drop of their fingertip.

Group Member 4: I had a girl that had her phone taken away by her parents for porn stuff. She ended up borrowing a phone from a friend at school and she was watching porn all day on the way. She has an addictive behavior to it.

Group Member 2: It has become such a fabric in society now. It's everywhere, it's the dollars. It's a huge money-making machine. And you think about how any hotel has on demand. And you can download apps from your TV provider and get Cinemax on there. Some of this stuff has bad themes like sex slaves. This is all part of the human trafficking thing. People are so accessible and sex is so accessible.

Group Member 1: I mean, look how normal we make this stuff look. Look at the nudity on TV. We used to be worried about kids seeing naked statues on field trips to the museum. Now they see pornography on any device. It's so mainstream.

Changes in Sexuality and Gender Identity

Participants reported a growing number of their youth coming to them questioning gender identity and sexual orientation, although participants believed that the adolescents of today consider themselves sexually fluid. This Increase has not been reported in the literature. However, gender fluidity is becoming a topic of discussion in research focused on sexual identity development (Katz-Wise, 2013). Research is still new on the topic. However, a few studies have shown that individuals may change their sexual orientation several times, in turn, believing they are gender fluid (Katz-Wise, 2013). According to Katz-Wise (2013), women seem to report more instances of changing their sexual preference over time. Participants reported that more females are coming to them with gender and sexual orientation concerns.

Gender identity. Participant 2 reported more transgender issues coming to the forefront of her counseling. She explained:

A definite shift in this generation is transgender issues. We definitely have more kids questioning their gender identity and I deal with this often. There are more people questioning that and if they really believe that they identify as another gender.

Participant 4, from the Texas Panhandle, did cite some issues with gender but said it was a very small group: “I see some of that but most of our kids don’t make it well known. It isn’t a large group.”

Participant 5 believed that there is an increase in questioning gender identity. She explained, “They are much more accepting of each other now. So I think we are seeing a

lot of kids come out and question their gender and things like that. It's a lot more of a thing now."

Participant 8, from West Texas, as reported before, has a transgender student that is selling herself to save money for gender reassignment. She explained about her gender identity:

We do see more gender identity issues. I do have a male to female transgender student that is open about it. None of the kids seem to mind or bully her for it. Mostly they are concerned over her behavior with selling herself.

Participant 10 also reported increases in gender identity issues, believing that females constitute most of it. She stated, "I have seen a growing number of kids identifying themselves or questioning their gender identity. Mostly, we talk about how to tell people. There is definitely more girls dealing with this."

Sexual fluidity. As stated before, participants have reported that many students consider themselves sexually fluid. Some of the participants attributed it to the fact that students are more accepting of each other and their sexual preferences than they used to be. Consistent with the literature, sexual fluidity is an ever changing and evolving sexual identity (Katz-Wise, 2015). It is interesting to note that sexual fluidity was more prevalent in higher socioeconomic schools. Participants who were working in multiple schools reported that fluidity was not a concern in the lower socioeconomic schools.

Participant 1 affirmed that students are more accepting of sexual minorities. He explained:

A big cultural difference in the generation is with the LGBT concerns that kids have. There is a clear acceptance and it is growing. Despite bullying online being on the rise, I think it is a more accepting culture. I don't see bias toward any specific group. The online bullying I see isn't for LGBT stuff; it's typically other things. I don't see stuff related to one specific race or gender identity.

Participant 5 also cited a growing number of her students accepting others and believing in sexual fluidity. She explained:

They are much more accepting of each other, as far as gender, religion, ethnicity, that type of thing. There is a sense of gender fluidness. They just kind of think that they are attracted to whoever they are attracted to. I think it's more with the girls.

Participant 8 stated that she has more girls questioning their sexual orientation than other students. She stated, "Females are definitely experimenting more sexually, like with their orientation." Participant 10 also believed that more girls are questioning their sexual orientation. She said, "I really have more girls with orientation issues. They come in and change orientation or constantly question their sexual preference. A lot feel like their preference changes."

Participant 11 described the consensus of sexual fluidity among many of her teens in higher socioeconomic schools.

The higher SES schools and kids definitely have more of a fluid sexuality. It's been interesting to watch. It has definitely changed in the last few years. Kids just like who they like. There is some that say they are pansexual. Some say they

are fluid. But they definitely have this evolving sexuality. They don't really label themselves as gay or straight. This isn't really brought to the table in the low SES kids. I don't really see that much. I'm not sure if they just don't want to talk about it or it really isn't as prevalent. But it is very upfront with the higher SES kids.

Mental Health

There is a growing concern over mental illness in children and adolescents. According to Spooner and Martinovich (2014), signs of mental illness often manifest during adolescence. However, because of this stage of development, behaviors can be attributed to the changes in the physical and mental growth of adolescents (Spooner & Martinovich, 2014). Participants in this study were extremely concerned about mental illness in adolescents. Many felt as though children and adolescents are exposed to too much. Participants were passionate about the changes in parenting, the pressure kids are under, and social media as being too much for kids to handle. Many felt as though they lacked the skills to process all of the information that is thrust at them. Participants also felt as though the mental health issue was less of an issue in lower socioeconomic children and offered explanations on why they felt this way. Sub-themes discussed were the lack of coping skills, mental illness in lower socioeconomic status, and mental illness in higher socioeconomic students.

Lack of coping skills. Coping skills was a predominate topic among participants in this study. All participants reported either the lack of coping skills or harmful coping skills in their students. According to the literature, poor coping skills are related to severe issues in adolescents, related to academics, mental illness, and suicide (Frydenber

et al., 2004). Additionally, participants were deeply worried about the inability of the children in this generation to handle everyday stresses.

Participant 1 suggested that his students are using poor coping skills to deal with issues at home and school. He explained:

I have an increase of students trying to make things better for themselves. I see a lot of them cutting to manage stress and anxiety. They have so much pressure, and they don't seem to have learned coping strategies at home or their parents just aren't there to help with that.

Participant 2 talked about how teaching kids coping skills is her number one concern when dealing with all of the pressures and stresses they have. She explained:

So, when kids come see me, they typically already have some sort of emotional disturbance. My number one thing is developing coping skills. These kids have a lot of depression and anxiety. There is a lot of trauma and loss. They've seen a lot. They either have no coping skills or bad ones. We have students who are cutting [themselves]; we have some that have no emotional regulation, and it really effects their every day. They get upset; they lose it and go from 0-10 very quickly [rapid escalation in emotion]. Then I have students that shut down and withdraw, and it effects their ability to function at school. They are failing, having somatic issues, going to the nurse all the time. The lack of coping skills is not with one socioeconomic status; it's equal opportunity. I think these kids are vulnerable to so much because of their depression and anxiety. They are trying to find someone to act like they care, especially the girls that are anxious and

depressed. They may look for someone and find a person that is looking to exploit them.

Participant 3 talked about how she believes technology is enhancing the depression and anxiety. She explained:

Technology is really effecting this generation of students. Students don't know how to cope with all the stuff that's out there. There is so much online bullying and videos that people take of them. Depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, and drug abuse. All really bad.

Participant 3 also discussed the coping skills in her students. She stated:

I think there is more depression and anxiety in this generation because they don't deal with stuff face-to-face. They make problems worse by getting on social media and trying to be brave. They are opening themselves up to so much negativity on social media. With all the stress they have, teenagers are turning to negative coping skills. They are vulnerable to predators because they are looking for something to help them feel better. We have these predators offering them the world.

Participant 4 shared the same sentiments about the coping skills of their students. She explained:

The stuff I'm seeing every day is some bullying, but mostly it's the suicidal threats, cutting, self-injury. But this stuff is a result of bullying online. They can't get away from it, and they have never learned good coping skills. They have to find some way to handle it.

Participant 5 talked about all of the issues that kids are dealing with and their lack of coping skills. She explained:

There are less coping skills than there used to be. Parents demand so much, so they're not helping the issue. A lot of times they are making it worse. There is a lot of bullying on social media. It's hard to teach them coping skills when they feel like nothing works. We at least have girls that tell us they are using bad coping skills. The guys are harder to get to and help. They are less likely to seek help. I have even had boys that have been assaulted, and we don't know until much later because boys just don't want to feel weak. It's hard for them. I have so many kids that go to the hospital now. It used to be a couple a year; now it's a couple a week.

Participant 6 talked about her students being unable to handle breakups and turning to poor coping skills. She also discussed the parent's role in coping. She also referred to the Asian culture. She explained:

We have a lot of kids with suicidal thoughts, especially my Asian students. They live in a culture where you just don't acknowledge that. It's hard for them. We have a lot of other kids just upset because they fight with parents and they say that their parents don't listen or acknowledge their feelings. Kids are breaking up and they can't deal with it. It's worse than before. A lot of them don't know how to cope with stuff. When things go wrong they can't cope. I think it may be because parents don't want them to fail. Since they can't cope, they just lock themselves in their room and cut. Some girls tell me they go for a walk, but that's

not really safe anymore. A lot of them think there is something wrong with them because they are so upset all the time.

Participant 7 described the lack of coping skills in her elementary students. She explained:

I have incredibly aggressive and violent behavior in kindergarten and first grade—kicking and hitting. The kids are in heightened states of anxiety when they are challenged in any way. When they feel squeezed, whether it's a teacher saying something or their self-esteem is low, they lash out. It's a huge red flag for when they go to middle school. I work with kids and their coping skills but parents don't reinforce them. Kids are ultrasensitive these days.

Participant 9 said that if students don't ever have to go through anything, then they never have to learn to cope, attributing the lack of coping to parenting. She explained:

They aren't learning coping skills. The kids who actually have to go through stuff and learn about consequences early on have coping skills. But everyone protects kids from everything these days, so they don't have a reason to learn any coping skills. There is a lot of depression, anxiety, cutting, and anger issues in these kids. Kids with mental illness are so desperate to belong and feel accepted. These kids are so vulnerable to things, even trafficking. If someone offers them love, they will go towards that. Show them love and they will come.

Participant 10 had also seen an increase in poor coping skills among her students.

When we talk about changes in our teens today, I would say there is a lot more cutting. There are definitely more suicidal outcries too. Parents don't take it seriously though. I think they are immune to it or something. Like, "Oh, it's the same old thing." Kids are also coping by verbally attacking people. They attack back. They are more aggressive now.

Mental illness in low-socioeconomic students. Surprisingly, participants felt as though mental illness was not as much at the forefront of issues concerning those that fall along lower socioeconomic lines. They believed that mental illness is present but not as prevalent or severe. Some of the participants believed this may be cultural, in that it is okay to release emotions in that culture, yet not acceptable in higher socioeconomic cultures.

Participant 5 stated that the pressures differed between low and high SES kids. She stated:

I have these lower-class kids that are just under stress because they work too much and they're trying to provide for their family. That's a lot of pressure. But they cope and handle it as best they can. It's the other kids that are using such poor coping skills.

Participant 9 discussed details in the differences she was seeing in low and high SES students. She described:

My lower socioeconomic school that I have has kids that externalize things. I don't see as much of the true mental illness there. I feel like it's acceptable for them to externalize feelings like anger. They may not be doing appropriate things

by yelling or hitting, but they are letting it out. They show how they feel. That's not how the affluent kids are, everything is internal over there. The low SES kids are just trying to get by; I think they have other things to worry about and deal with.

Participant 10 talked about clear differences between the low and high socioeconomic students. She explained:

We have had a huge blow up of mental illness in the last 10 years. We have kids at the lower socioeconomic schools suffering from depression and anxiety, but the difference with them is that it is more trauma-based stuff. They have been through a lot. A lot of abuse and loss is associated with that and that is understandable. The mental illness with higher socioeconomic is what I think of as true mental illness. It's strange.

Focus Group 2 discussed differences in socioeconomic status. They described:

Group Member 1: Outcries look different in low SES, their response, and they typically just want out of a situation. Higher SES isn't about getting out of a situation; it's an actual suicide outcry.

Group Member 2: I think it's just more acceptable to present outward in low SES. So, you can show your emotions, even if it's fighting or whatever. In higher SES, it's not acceptable to throw a fit.

Mental illness in high socioeconomic students. According to participants, mental illness was more prevalent and severe in their upper socioeconomic class students. They perceived mental illness as affecting students on the extreme ends of the

socioeconomic spectrum. However, participants also distinguished the mental illness impacting students in the upper socioeconomic class as different from that affecting the low socioeconomic students, as the former is less likely to be trauma-based. They also believe that the depression and anxiety in these students is less responsive to treatment.

Participant 9 believed that mental illness varies according to societal norms and pressure that is placed on students of differing socioeconomic classes. She explained:

We just had two kids at one of the affluent schools commit suicide in the last 2 weeks. They were popular kids. These affluent kids are babied so much. Their parents make so many excuses for them, that when something actually happens, they can't take it. Then we have a suicidal kid. They don't learn how to cope. Kids at affluent schools learn to blame others for their actions. There are a lot of girls at the affluent school that have a history of cutting. They hold everything in, and they don't have coping skills, so they turn to cutting. It's an outlet. There is a ton of depression and anxiety in the affluent population. There is also a huge rise in autism in affluent schools. These kids that suffer from mental illness are desperate to belong.

Participant 11 detailed the ideas of mental illness in the upper socioeconomic class. She described:

When I first started, I could count severe mental illness cases on one hand. Maybe one a year. Now I have severe stuff. We have kids with psychosis, severe bipolar disorder. We would have problems acting out years ago, but not this stuff. In the last 12 years, we have seen so much mental illness. I've had major

depressive disorder, bipolar, emerging schizophrenia, and then we have the drugs on top of that. The higher SES kids are the ones that have psychotic features with their depression. I don't know why. There is a lot more addiction with those kids too.

Focus Group 2 had an extensive discussion on mental illness in higher socioeconomic students. They explained:

Group Member 1: We have exposed kids to too much. They can't handle it. I have such an increase in mental illness.

Group Member 2: And they have so much access all the time. I mean, even I get overwhelmed by all this stuff. It's coming from everywhere and it's non-stop.

Group Member 3: And the demand on the affluent kids is so much—select sports, academics, work—and parents don't listen up. Parents want teachers to back off but they don't want to back off on the advancement of their child. There is no time for play. Kids aren't kids anymore.

Group Member 4: The environmental stressors are bringing on the mental illness in these kids. These kids are acting out with suicide. They are telling us they can't take it. When I started in the district 16 years ago, I didn't even have a cutter. This year, halfway through, I have probably done 40 cases at the school. And I never had major depressive disorder and so much anxiety. These kids are so different. I have had to do so much more continuing education.

Poverty

Poverty itself is something that has been a concern for counselors in a school for a long time. It was surprising to hear counselors lump all the kids in poverty together. Most of the counselors felt as though changes in the generation did not pertain as much to them. Many stated it was because of cultural background. However, all participants believed that the cycle of poverty would not change. Therefore, these students are not necessarily shifting as rapidly in the other aspects discussed. Participants noted that the kids in poverty do not have devices as often as the kids in middle to upper class homes. This means that they are not exposed to the same aspects of technology and social media. They also felt as though kids in poverty have priorities that are less on social status and nice things and more on assuming a caretaking role or role of the financial provider in the family. Participants also noted that these students have less pressure to achieve perfection, academic success, and athletic recognition from parents. Participants believed that kids in poverty are vulnerable, because of the ramifications of living in poverty.

Participant 1 discussed his kids that are trying to provide for themselves. He stated:

These kids are looking anywhere where they can get money. They need a job to get by, and they don't have a desire for college. They could easily be deceived by someone stating that they could give them money. These kids go out on their own because they don't have a support system. They are opening themselves up to be misled.

Participant 2 explained:

A lot of times the kids in poverty are just trying to survive. I have a lot of students who come to school but they don't even care about graduating. They just want to work in construction with their uncle. A lot of the older ones are responsible for the home and taking care of younger siblings. They have to grow up fast.

Participant 3 described her students' struggles with poverty. She explained:

These kids are worrying about what they are going to eat. They don't have the supplies they need. We kind of set them up for failure in the school. We ask that they complete all this homework on technology. Some schools give them technology. But we don't consider that they don't have Internet at home. They may not have a phone data plan or a computer. I have a girl that has to stay after school every evening and use the computers. She's here for a long time and does her best to get it done before everyone is gone. We assume all kids are in the same boat.

Participant 8 discussed her poverty stricken population at her school.

The cycle of poverty always comes around. I have kids that try to get out and some do, but around here, they just stay in the same trailer park. We have a lot of teen pregnancies in poverty, and it cycles back through. I am now working with kids of kids I taught years ago. They were teen moms; now these kids are going to be teen moms. We are a different campus. We try and take some of these kids to a restaurant in town. I lot of these kids have never even eaten at a restaurant

and used a napkin. We take soap to some of these kids. They would love to find a way out. It's hard.

Vulnerability to Sex Trafficking

In addition to generational changes among children and adolescents, counselors were asked how these changes relate to sex trafficking. Organizations that fight against human trafficking believe that traffickers target children and adolescents that show vulnerability. The Alliance for Freedom Restoration and Justice (2016) claims that homelessness, not having a father figure at home, low self-esteem, and many other factors contribute to the vulnerability of the youth of this generation. However, little research has been conducted on these assumed vulnerabilities. Participants related each theme found in generational changes to sex trafficking. In fact, all counselors believed that each theme is a factor in the rapid increase of sex trafficking in our society. Specifically, parenting and technology were highly concentrated throughout all data found. Participants felt as though poor parenting, attitudes toward personal achievement, risk-taking behaviors, sexuality changes, and poverty put their students at high risk of trafficking. However, the theme of technology was identified as the gateway that allows perpetrators to access vulnerable youth.

Participant 3 talked about the parenting and social media aspect that makes teens vulnerable.

Well, this generation is so vulnerable because of all the parenting issues. Parents aren't monitoring their kids anymore. They have so much pressure on them, and parents don't let up on expectations. That makes them go look for stuff. Then

you have technology. Kids are looking for ways to cope, and they find it with poor habits or strangers online. They look for an escape, and anyone can offer that to them. My low SES students are just seeking money, a better world, and that can be so enticing for them. And my girl students, we raise them to be pleasers, and they don't know how to say "No." They don't have boundaries for stuff, so they can be talked into just about anything.

Participant 4 shared her thoughts on the vulnerability to sex trafficking. She explained:

It's definitely a lack of parental guidance, and kids just don't have support systems like they used to. The parental system is broken, and kids don't have anywhere to turn. Then they are on social media with people they don't know. They have so much pressure to be accepted and can be pushed to do stuff they wouldn't normally do. They place themselves in situations where they can be trafficked. Some of them want money and drugs. That's part of it too.

Participant 5 talked about kids giving out information that could lead to trafficking. She explained:

Definitely technology is a reason. Kids make themselves vulnerable by giving out information they shouldn't. Kids are more tech savvy than we are and get around stuff. Parents are also just not around as much. They are both working so much or there is only one parent trying to provide. Parents also pressure and overextend the kids so much. The mental illness and drug use is there too. All these drugs and addictions make them vulnerable if someone offers them that.

Participant 6 described how her thought process has changed on sex trafficking.

She described:

I went to a training, and so after that I thought I knew a lot. I was still thinking that it's just the kids in poverty or those that are homeless. But I keep going back to social media. Traffickers can reach them anywhere. These kids need love and to have relationships with people. They are finding that on social media.

Participant 7 discussed her ideas about sex trafficking vulnerability. She explained:

There is less and less parent supervision. And kids have a sense of anonymity on social media. Then you add the fact that they are entitled and don't have to work for anything. Everything is instantaneous, even affection. We, as a society, are also still willing to objectify women. This is all stuff related to why they are trafficked.

Participant 8 described how easy it is to get ahold of children these days. She shared:

These parents are doing stuff like the one I told you drops the kid off at the bus and, then when they get home, they have to wait outside for an hour until mom gets home. Or the elementary kids that are dropped off at the fair and picked up hours later. Then these kids do so much on Facebook or other sites. Then you get a girl with low self-esteem friending a strange man. It's easier now. You used to have to kidnap kids; now you can just sit behind your computer and lure them in.

Participant 9 talked about how entitlement makes kids vulnerable. She described:

First, they have access to anything online. Affluent kids are taught they don't have to work for anything. There is a sense of invulnerability with them, and that's a huge risk. My poverty kids are just trying to deal and get stuff. And mental illness is big. They want so desperately to belong.

Participant 10 talked about her concerns with females putting sexual images on social media.

All the stuff we talked about makes them vulnerable. They don't have skills; they want to be liked. Girls' being more promiscuous and not acting like sex is a big deal. Girls putting themselves out there with sexual images on social media, and social media makes them vulnerable to a larger crowd.

Focus Group 1 felt as though all of the issues they discussed make teens vulnerable. They discussed:

Group Member 1: The first thing I think about are my frequent flyers. These are my kids with mental illness that are always in the office. They need attention and want someone to take them out of the hole they are in.

Group Member 2: Yeah, mental illness, abuse in their past, foster kids, kids that have already gone to the psychiatric hospital—those are all so vulnerable.

Group Member 3: The kids that think nothing can touch them, the ones that have those lawnmower parents, they assume nothing will happen when talking to strangers online.

Group Member 2: And social media, the social media is there. Parents aren't. Parents are pushing too hard, yet not offering support for any of it.

Focus Group 2 shared their ideas about children and teens not being able to decipher between a real and fake relationship. They explained:

Group Member 1: First, they're glued to the technology. And they can't discriminate between what is real and what isn't. They think strangers online that tell them they love them, really do. And their phones are always giving away their location.

Group Member 2: Girls are so sexually provocative on social media. Traffickers look for that! These are girls that are looking for love and a relationship. That's easy. And they'll send sexual pictures when asked. All the sexting!

Group Member 3: Definitely mental illness and risk taking, we see so much of that. And the parents are making it worse. They have pressure from all sides, even schools do it!

Group Member 4: Yeah, parenting is so different. I used to see a few parents not monitoring kids. Mostly from low SES kids that have absent dads and moms that are always working. That kind of thing. Now the high SES parents are spreading themselves too thin. They want their children to appear perfect on paper, but they are never around to help.

Conclusion

Participant were all able to provide insight into the generational shifts and how they make our children and adolescents vulnerable to sex trafficking. This chapter provided information pertaining to themes that emerged from the data. Themes that emerged were (a) changes in attitude toward personal achievement/progression, (b) changes in parenting, (c) technology, (c) changes in risk-taking behavior, (e) changes in

sexuality and gender identity, (f) mental health, and (g) poverty. In addition, several sub-themes emerged and provided further detail into changes seen by participants.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This chapter includes a summary of the results for each research question, implications for theory, implications for practice, implications for policy, and recommendations for counseling professionals. Areas for further investigations and concluding thoughts are also included in this chapter.

Summary

This study explored the following research questions: What is the current knowledge school counselors have pertaining to sex trafficking? What are the identifiable trends in American children and adolescents that place them in a vulnerable state? In what ways are current trends in children and adolescents making them susceptible to sex trafficking?

To answer the research questions, I conducted the study based on a grounded theory approach. Grounded theory was used to enquire about the experiences that school counselors have in changes within the child and adolescent population, in a school setting. A survey utilizing open-ended enquiry was used for knowledge and demographic questions. They served as a stepping stone for investigation during the interview process. All participants were part of the survey and interview process. Interviews were semi-structured. A set of basic questions was used for each interview and other questions were added during the interview process. These questions were asked based on answers given by each participant.

Participants were randomly selected to participate in two focus groups. Focus groups were split based on specific areas of a Southwestern state. Focus Group 1

contained participants from the Western and Northwestern area of the state. Focus Group 2 was comprised of participants from Northern area of the state. Questions used for each focus group were based on findings in the interview process. Focus groups were used for further enquiry into the data presented in each interview.

The interview participants were all counselors working with children and adolescents in the school system. Interview participants varied in years of experience, and the schools they served varied in demographics. Counselors were either licensed professional counselors contracted within a school or a certified school counselor. Many participants were also licensed professional counselor supervisors. Most of the Northern Counselors were working in more than one school campus, ranging from elementary to high school. These counselors provided a diverse repertoire of experiences with respect to socioeconomic status, race, and ethnicity of the students they served. One such counselor worked for a campus with an immigration program. Her experiences were the most in-depth and diverse.

All of the counselors interviewed, except three, had at least 10 years experience as a counselor in schools. The three participants that had less than 10 years of counseling experience had previously taught in the school system. The longevity of counseling experience of each counselor enriched this study, in that they were able to articulate clear changes that have occurred in our youth, over time.

Theory development from a grounded theory approach is based on themes that emerge in the analysis of data (Berg & Lune, 2012). In this study, data coding provided identifiable themes in child and adolescent vulnerability to sex trafficking. Themes that

emerged were (a) changes in attitude toward personal achievement/progression, (b) changes in parenting, (c) technology, (c) changes in risk taking behavior, (e) changes in sexuality and gender identity, (f) mental health, and (g) poverty. Further analysis of data provided sub-themes within each category. The sub-themes that emerged included: (1)entitlement, (2) lack of motivation, (3) study skills, authority issues, (4) entitled parents raising entitled children, (5) from helicopter parent to lawnmower parent, (6) parent pressure for achievement/perfection, (7) absentee parent/lack of supervision, (8) technology as a babysitter, (9) lack of technology/social media knowledge, (10) technology effects on social skills, (11) technology effects on development, (12) technology effects on identity development, (13) technology effects on relationships, (14) technology effects on bullying, (15) technology effects on love and belonging, (16) drug use/addiction, (17) early onset of sexual behavior, (18) females as sexual aggressors, (19) exchanging sex for money/drugs, (20) technology and sex, (21) friending/meeting strangers, (22) technology and pornography, (23) gender identity, (24) sexual fluidity, (25) lack of coping skills, (26) mental illness in low-socioeconomic students, and (27) mental illness in higher socioeconomic students.

Summary of Research Questions

Research Question #1

What is the current knowledge that professional school counselors have pertaining to sex trafficking?

Initially, participants were fairly confident in their knowledge of sex trafficking. Participants recruited were those who had some prior knowledge of the subject or received some training. A few reported that their knowledge came from an intern who

was working in the area. Most reported receiving some training from an organization that presented at their school or a conference. Participants were excited to share their thoughts on the subject during the individual interview process.

During interviews, participants shared that most counselors who work in schools are either unaware of sex trafficking or believe that it does not occur in their area. Participants from the larger area sampled, specifically, felt as though their co-workers or counselors around the area were in denial about sex trafficking in their area. Participants from this area were aware that they were living in an area that has a higher rate of sex trafficking but believed that most did not know about the rates of trafficking in their area. In fact, many reported that counselors put “blindness” on and do not want to admit that it occurs in their area.

Upon completion of the initial interviews, they were prompted to reflect upon their interview prior to meeting of the focus group. All participants in both focus groups arrived with a different perspective of sex trafficking. Every focus group discussion began by inviting participants to express their concerns over their lack of knowledge on the subject. It was evident that participants had begun to evaluate their interviews. In fact, there is an apparent disconnect between knowing and doing for school counselors on this particular topic. Each have knowledge of sex trafficking but lack the necessary tools needed to put their knowledge into action.

Participants in Focus Group 1, who all received training from a well-established, anti-trafficking organization, came to the discussion admitting that they had not received enough information. They reported that they had not received substance or knew what to

do when they suspect something. Participants reported the need to have sex trafficking information specific for school counselors. Both focus groups shared the same sentiments. One focus group member stated:

I just don't know enough. We need a program for this. Like, What do we do? What things do we address? We don't even know enough about it to start addressing stuff. We need just specifically to address our kids.

The rest of the participants voiced similar concerns on the subject.

Research Question #2

What are the observed generational shifts in children and adolescents?

Most of the study focused on this question because of the responses received from participants. Themes found in this study answered this particular question. Participants have clearly seen changes in children and adolescents in the subsequent years. The researcher did not anticipate the magnitude of these changes. Participants were zealous in their portrayal of changes that have occurred from previous generations to the one currently in their schools. It was evident that participants had great concern for our youth and how changes in our society are affecting their well-being. Seven main categories were found in analyzing data for trends.

The first theme, changes in attitude toward personal achievement or progress, contained four sub-themes. These include entitlement, lack of motivation, study skills, and authority issues. Participants often referred to this generation as being far more entitled than the Millennials. Entitlement seemed to be at the core of this theme, with the other areas serving as constituents. Participants described their students as believing

themselves to be deserving, regardless of effort. They had observed students' lack of motivation to work toward goals and expectation of instantaneous results. Entitlement and motivation issues were linked to the lack of study skills among their students. Participants were insistent that they had not learned study skills because they had been given everything. They gave examples of students being permitted to submit assignments until the last day of school and have any assignment reassessed in quest of a perfect score. As a result, the students had not developed proper study skills. In addition, problems with authority was an overarching sub-theme. Participants described students as having more authority issues than any other generation. They cited instances of children having meltdowns when they are told "No" or are asked to complete a challenging task. Participants who were working with older students described them as being more aggressive in disagreeing with their teachers. It was found that students had also been requesting frequent schedule changes because they disagreed with policies or workload set forth by teachers.

The second theme, changes in parenting, was a main topic of discussion during each interview and focus group. In the interviews participants described key parenting concerns. Sub-themes that emerged were entitled parents raising entitled children, helicopter parent vs. lawnmower parent, parent pressure for achievement/perfection, absent parent/lack of supervision, technology as a babysitter, and lack of technology/social media knowledge.

During individual interviews, participants deduced that parent entitlement had created ultra-entitled children. According to literature, the millennial generation has been the first to be described as entitled (Froiland, 2015). Parents with this mindset are now

raising young children, and participants attributed this to youths' inability to cope with everyday stresses. The idea of lawnmower parenting was derived from this concept. The term lawnmower parent, a term I had never heard before, according to participants, behaves differently than a helicopter parent does. The differences lie in the fact that lawnmower parents do not hover over their children to ensure they are being treated fairly, but rather pave the way for their children. Paving the path for their children eliminates the need for the children to exert the effort needed to succeed, while presenting what appears to be a perfect child. As a result, parents pressure their children to perform perfectly in academics, sports, and volunteer work. Participants believed that children are unable to maintain the appearance of perfection. They are managed at every moment and not allowed to play or have self-care time. This all leads to stress that is unmanageable.

Lack of supervision by parents, also fell within this category. Participants believed that parents are paving the path for their children by intervening in school prior to an occurrence of an issue. However, parents are working more than ever. According to participants, parents are not present with their children and do not monitor their use of technology such as social media. In fact, parents are using technology as a means to "babysit" their children, in order to keep them occupied. Additionally, parents lack proper knowledge of technology, specifically social media, in order to keep their children from being exposed to inappropriate content. During focus groups, participants became spirited in the discussions of the exposure that parents allow during use of technology.

The third theme, technology, was related to the use of technology and how it is effecting different areas of this generation. Turner (2015) explains that the current

generation in our schools, Generation Z, is the first to have never lived life without social media and other forms of technology. Clearly, this is a difference between generation z and other subsequent generations. Sub-themes within this category include: (a) effects on social skills, (b) effects on development, (c) effects on identity development, (d) effects on relationships, (e) effects on bullying, and (f) effects on love and belonging.

A running theme throughout data analysis was the lack of social skills among the youth of today. Participants described students as unable to have face-to-face conversations. Other descriptions included the lack of ability to look someone in the eye or shake hands without feeling awkward. Some participants detailed a lack of job skills. Participants conveyed the effects that technology is having on developmental skills. For example, an elementary counselor described many students as lacking fine and gross motor skills. She believed that children are exposed to too much technology and not allowed free play, which aids in the development of motor skills.

Identity development was a part of this theme, in that participants believed that social media is affecting personal identity development. Participants discussed the adolescent need to fit into a group. Self-perception, according to participants, is being shaped by how they feel they are perceived in social media. Relationships are also being affected. Disagreement in relationships are being played out on social media. Often, disagreements escalate until it is irreparable. Participants also believed that their students are fulfilling their need for love and belonging through social media outlets. They cannot discern between a true relationship and one that is online and superficial.

The fourth theme, changes in risk-taking behavior, was widely discussed in each interview and in each focus group. Sub-themes included (a) changes in drug use, (b) early onset of sexual behavior, (c) females as sexual aggressors, (d) exchanging sex for money/drugs, (e) technology and sex, (f) friending/meeting strangers, and (g) technology and pornography. These topics are commonly discussed in conversations on adolescent behavior. However, participants believed that significant changes have occurred from the previous to this current generation and are not discussed in the literature.

First, drug use and addiction have become common among teens. Participants delineated changes in drug use over time. Many discussed issues with true addiction that often begins in middle school and using drugs like marijuana is considered the norm. Sexual behavior, they say, has become extensive. Participants described sexual behavior as beginning in early middle school and participating in extreme experimentation with multiple sexual partners. In addition, all participants identified females as the sexual aggressors and were adamant that this was not the case in past years. Female sexual behavior was described as lacking respect for one's body and not believing sex is anything more than what individuals do on a regular basis.

Several counselors gave specific examples of students selling themselves-performing sexual acts- for money or drugs. Participants included this in the discussion of sexual behavior, believing that students did not think it was harmful to sell themselves to other students. Sexual behavior is also being posted on social media by their students. Most of the participants interviewed related stories of current students filming or posting pictures of their participation in sexual acts, on social media. The majority of participants stated that students are friending strangers on social media and sending sexually explicit

pictures when asked. Some of them have gone or plan to physically meet strangers they have met online. Technology has also been used as a means to watch pornography. For example, one participant described one of her 6th-grade students as having a pornography addiction.

The fifth theme, changes in sexuality and gender identity, was discussed among many of the participants. Within this category are two sub-themes of gender identity and sexual fluidity. Participants affirmed that they have a growing number of students seeking counsel on and questioning their gender identity. Many said that more females have expressed their concerns over gender identity. Sexual fluidity was also characterized during individual interviews. Participants articulated that their students have a sense of sexual fluidity. Many change sexual preference often and do not describe themselves as heterosexual or homosexual. Rather, they have heard more use of the terms sexually fluid and pansexual.

The sixth theme, mental health, was illustrated throughout each interview. During focus groups, the increase of mental health issues was attributed to all of the other themes discussed. The sub-themes in this category include: lack of coping skills, mental illness in low-socioeconomic students, and mental illness in high socioeconomic students. Coping skills was a term widely used among participants. In fact, it was seen during discussions of parenting, technology, risk taking, sexuality, entitlement, and poverty. Participants believed that the lack of coping skills in this generation is a result of faulty parenting and technology overexposure, such as social media. Participants expressed concerns over lack of parent support, too much pressure from parents, lawnmower parenting, and exposure to inappropriate content on social media. They believed that

poor parenting is hindering child and adolescent development of natural skills needed to cope with everyday occurrences. In addition, students are exposed to content on social media, which they are not prepared developmentally to handle.

Many participants work at several campuses in their district. These participants described differences among low and high socioeconomic students. Low-socioeconomic students were described as having anxiety and depression as a result of trauma or loss. They were also described as being receptive to help given by counselors. Severe mental illness and an increase in autism were discussed as present in the high socio-economic students. Participants conveyed high socio-economic students as having “true” mental illness, in that many have depression with psychosis and emerging schizophrenia. Participants chronicled a rapid increase in child and adolescent hospitalizations. Many said that 10-15 years prior hospitalizations were rare, and many participants hospitalize several clients each week. Mental illness was not as widely seen among low-socioeconomic students.

The seventh theme, poverty, was slightly different than other categories found during analysis. Consistent with the literature, children and adolescents often go long periods without being monitored, as a single parent may be working several jobs (Frazier et al., 2015). Participants reported children being left alone in front of the school for hours prior to opening and left alone in apartments during the evening. Poverty was described as unchanging. Participants believed that generational shifts were more often seen in the middle- to upper-class students. According to their observations, the cycle of poverty does not change. While middle- to upper-class homes are affected by technology and entitlement issues, few of the low-income families are frequently exposed to the uses

of technology. Participants believed that adolescents on both ends of the socioeconomic spectrum suffer from parenting issues, including lack of parent supervision. However, lack of supervision differed. Supervision of adolescents in higher socioeconomic classes were described within the context of technology. Participants also expressed concerns with parents who find it more important to climb the social ladder, rather than have involvement with their children. In contrast, parenting concerns in poverty were associated with leaving children alone at night in hotel rooms or apartment complexes.

Research Question #3

How do school counselors perceive these generational shifts make children and adolescents more susceptible to sex trafficking?

Little research, if any, has been conducted on the vulnerability of children and adolescents have to sex trafficking. Much of the information obtain on this subject comes from information provided by survivors of this crime. One such survivor offered her ideas on why teens are vulnerable to sex trafficking. According to Smith (2014), American youth are vulnerable to sex trafficking for several reasons that include poverty, sexualizing our children, and victims of previous sexual assault. Participants connected every theme found to address the previous question to child and adolescent vulnerability to sex trafficking.

Participants believed that each factor has played a key role in the rise of sex trafficking over the years. They argued that children and adolescents of today are far more susceptible to sex trafficking than were those of previous generations. Parenting, technology, and risk-taking behavior were all highly discussed as reasons for susceptibility. Participants described students as having a perception of invulnerability

because of lawnmower parenting. They also discussed parents and their lack of knowledge and monitoring of technology use. All participants cited concerns over friending and meeting strangers online. Participants also believed that students posting sexually explicit photos and videos made them a target to predators. Technology was seen as the main reason traffickers have easy access to children and adolescents. Participants were clearly concerned over social media, stating that predators do not have to work to take children, but rather can sit behind a computer and lure them in. Participants connected other issues such as mental illness, sexuality, risk-taking behavior, and poverty to trafficking as well. In the end, participants characterized the root of each problem as the need for love and belonging. They concluded that much of the behavior seen could be attributed to the need for love and belonging and that adolescents are susceptible to predators who will offer them love, acceptance, and a better life.

Through surveys, individual interviews, and focus groups, the themes found in data were used to develop a new understanding of the changes occurring among children and adolescents that increase their susceptibility to sex trafficking. Information obtained in this study will aid counselors in the prevention of sex trafficking. Counselor educators will have a comprehensive understanding they can use in training their students to address these issues with their young clients. Clearly, there is a need for further research on each individual theme delineated from this research. The findings from this study have provided clear categories that need to be addressed in order to prevent sex trafficking among our youth.

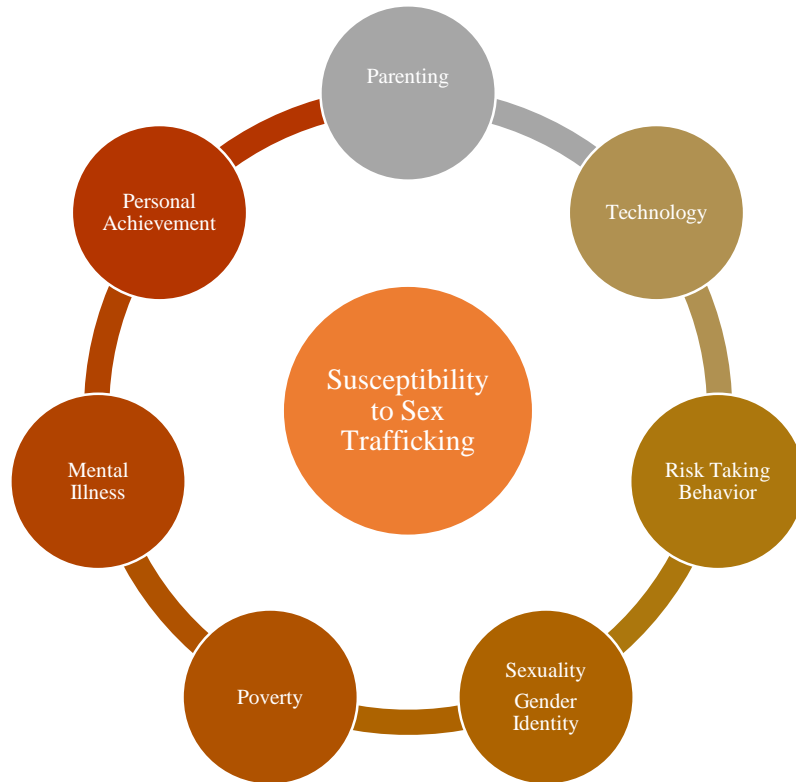


Figure 1: Axial coding diagram portraying generational changes in child and adolescents and their interrelationship to sex trafficking susceptibility

Implications for Theory, Practice, Education, Policy, and Research

Research participants in this study clearly identified changes in the behavior of children and adolescents that have occurred over time and explanations of how these behaviors make them more susceptible to sex trafficking than previous generations. This study identified vulnerabilities that should be addressed in the prevention of sex trafficking. In addition, this study supported the notion that counselors and other school officials do not have sufficient knowledge of sex trafficking or the preceding vulnerabilities in order to protect their students from falling victim to it.

Some vulnerabilities, such as substance abuse, have been discussed in previous research. However, to my knowledge, such vulnerabilities have not been studied in the

context of sex trafficking or according to current generational changes. Therefore, data collected in this study substantiate the need for counselors and counselor educators to anticipate the changes occurring with our children and adolescents and how those changes places them in a vulnerable state. Education on current trends in our youth is essential to counselors and counselor educators.

Theoretical Implication

Based on information presented in this study, theoretical implications call for consideration of the cultural contexts in which the issues were emphasized. In order to address issues related to risk-taking behavior and identity, the role of society and relationships with others must be taken into consideration (Corey, 2009). Additionally, a need to focus on client abilities and competencies presents itself, in order to address issues related to self-worth and ability to overcome adversity. The complex nature of issues presented in data also shows that, at times, career development may be part of client needs. The above mentioned needs may be best approached by utilizing feminist theory and solution-focused brief therapy.

Practice Implications

This study focused on the cultural changes in behavior of children and adolescents and how those behaviors make them susceptible to sex trafficking. In doing so, this research begins to help counselors identify vulnerabilities in their clients in order to effectively prevent sex trafficking. Some vulnerabilities identified are not new. However, these appear to be different in our new generation of children and adolescents. Counselors must be aware of changes in order to properly address issues with their clientele. The practices of identification and intervention are key in prevention. Thus,

this research provides counselors with the elements that should be addressed in the clients of this generation.

Implications for Counselor Education

This study focused on counselors that work within the school system. Current counselor education programs, even those with accreditation from the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Education Programs (CACREP), do not address many of the areas identified in this study. All participants in this study were concerned that they are not prepared to identify potential victims, educate students and faculty, or provide resources for parents and students. In fact, many felt that they were not educated enough to realize that student vulnerability can lead to sex trafficking. CACREP has outlined competencies for counselor education programs and has specific areas that address school counseling. According to CACREP (2014), school counselors must understand their roles as a leader, advocate, and agent of change. Counselors are not prepared to advocate for or foster change within a system, as it pertains to the identified changes occurring in their students' behavior. CACREP also outlines that counselors must characterize risk factors and warning signs of students at risk. Furthermore, counselors are also not prepared to provide curriculum and interventions on the subject at hand. Finally, counselors should be prepared to implement strategies for peer interventions. Without proper knowledge, counselors cannot implement strategies for intervention.

Counselor education programs must be aware of the changes occurring in their clientele's behavior. Currently, practicing counselors within the school system do not believe they have the knowledge or tools to prevent students from becoming victims of

sex trafficking. School counseling programs must adjust to the needs of the counselors' future clients.

Implications for Policy

The State of Texas Code 261.101.b details the requirements for a professional to report child abuse or neglect (Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, 2016). This code clearly states that a professional should report any suspected child abuse within 48 hours (Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, 2016). In addition, the Texas Education Code and the Texas Administrative Code both require that schools govern abuse reporting, create policies, develop programs related to anti-victimization, and implement professional developments for training (Texas Education Agency, 2013).

Participants in this study reported that they had possibly counseled children who were victims or had known victims. However, many reported the child to Child Protective Services for other reasons. All participants cited that their schools do not have policies in place for sex trafficking and do not provide related professional development opportunities. They also believed that administrators would not report children or adolescents if they were known to be selling themselves, because they would view this behavior as a choice. Many agreed that schools do not understand the topic enough to determine when to report. Counselors do not know of resources, such as trafficking hotlines, used to report suspected sex trafficking. All participants believed that schools need policies in place and must provide education for all school personnel. Counselors also expressed a desire for curriculum that would address issues of vulnerabilities and awareness for their students.

Research Implications

The purpose of this study was to explore the generational shifts in children and adolescents and how they affect their susceptibility to sex trafficking. In addition, this study explored counselor knowledge of sex trafficking within the school system. Insights into the changes occurring among children and adolescents have identified key areas of vulnerability, while highlighting further areas of inquiry. First, it would be beneficial to see if findings could be replicated within other areas of the country. Second, given that only counselors were interviewed within the school system, it would be beneficial to interview others working in schools such as teachers, social workers, and school psychologist, to gain further insight.

Further, research regarding each individual theme identified could impact how we prevent or intervene in each vulnerability. Technology has clearly affected our youth. Research determining the effect that technology has had on social skills, relationships, and mental illness could be used to design more effective treatment for children and adolescents. Moreover, understanding how entitled parents impact their child's ability to be successful in life would benefit parenting programs.

Recommendations

In this section, several recommendations are made for counselors and counselor educators. First, increase the awareness of not only counselors, but all those in education, on sex trafficking and child and adolescent susceptibility to sex trafficking. Second, educate counselors and other school personnel on sex trafficking, how to identify vulnerabilities, how to identify a victim, and steps to take when they suspect victimization. Third, create professional development training programs on sex

trafficking that are specific for those working with children and adolescents in schools. Fourth, develop curriculum for school counselors to use in addressing all areas identified as sex trafficking vulnerabilities. Fifth, develop curriculum that school counselors can use to bring awareness to their individual campuses. Sixth, advocate for school counselors to receive support from school district administrations in order to address identified issues. Seventh, educate school counselors, administrators, teachers, students, and parents on technology use.

Recommendation 1: Increase School Counselor Awareness Regarding Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking

Results from this study indicate that counselor awareness is almost non-existent. During the interview process, it became apparent that counselors were not aware of student vulnerability to sex trafficking, until thought was provoked during the interview process. Sex trafficking is the fastest growing criminal industry, and traffickers are targeting children and adolescents (Rescue Her, 2015). Increasing school counselor awareness of sex trafficking will also increase awareness throughout the education system.

Recommendation 2: Educate Counselors on Sex Trafficking, How to Identify Vulnerability, How to Identify Victims, and Steps to Take When Victimization is Suspected

Education on domestic minor sex trafficking is pertinent to preventing any member of our youth from falling victim to this crime. Traffickers identify vulnerabilities in children and adolescents in order to groom them or lure them into sex trafficking (Smith, 2014). With adequate education, counselors in the school system are

in position to prevent a student from falling prey to a sex trafficker. In addition, participants admitted that they do not know what steps to take once a victim is suspected or identified. Counselors who had received training from an anti-trafficking organization did not walk away knowing how to address the issue once it has been identified. Counselors working with children and adolescents need to be educated on the steps needed in intervention.

Recommendation 3: Develop a Sex Trafficking Professional Development Specific for Counselors and Other School Personnel

Educating counselors and other school officials on domestic minor sex trafficking will not only heighten awareness, but should also impact the prevention of this crime. Training programs currently in place are generalized to all populations or lack the flexibility to be tailored to the particular needs of a school. Currently, sex trafficking prevention programs do not address training on specific vulnerabilities that have been identified by those working closely with children and adolescents. A program based on the identified vulnerability factors would benefit schools who are currently dealing with these issues within their student population. Identifying and intervening in the lives of vulnerable youth may be the best approach to prevention. A participant in the study stated:

We need a program for this. My mind has me thinking of all the things that make these kids targets. We, as a school, are not prepared to know or understand what makes these traffickers get kids. I would say that most counselors don't even know that this area is considered a highly trafficked area. We need to know what it looks like, what makes them a target, how we can prevent it, and what to do if

we notice something. I didn't even know there was a national trafficking hotline I can call. This is stuff everyone should know. It's happening; we just like to close our eyes to the issue.

Recommendation 4: Develop a Curriculum for School Counselors to Use in

Addressing All Vulnerabilities Identified

Giving counselors resources to use in addressing their students' needs is essential to the well-being of their students. Addressing issues regarding risk-taking behavior, parenting, mental illness, sexuality, entitlement, technology, and poverty would benefit student outcomes. Curriculum should include specific lessons, resources, therapeutic technique suggestions, and activities. Issues identified within each category should be addressed. For example, participants believed that social skills have declined since social media has become part of our cultural fabric. One such lesson could include activities designed to teach students basic social skills. Participants stated that there is a need for such a curriculum. One participant stated:

I would love to have some lessons and activities, videos for my kids, or activities they could use through an app. I would want some curriculum that addressed a lot of my main issues. We have cyberbullying stuff right now, but that's the thing right now. Everyone wants to address cyberbullying. We aren't really teaching kids how to properly use social media or to be safe, just about bullying. There are so many other things that need to be addressed. Maybe a curriculum that I could implement a little over the entire year would be great. One lesson could address each thing.

Recommendation 5: Develop a Curriculum for School Counselors to Bring Awareness to Individual Campuses

Awareness is the beginning stage of prevention. Participants agreed that all individuals involved in the school system should become aware of sex trafficking. This includes parents, teachers, administrators, superintendents, students, and other workers. Counselors are in a position to implement awareness training programs at staff development. Once counselors are educated, they will be able to bring awareness to their campuses at all levels. One participant stated:

If I had curriculum I would educate my entire campus about this. Especially my students. I honestly don't feel like the administrators are aware at all. They're clueless about this stuff, or they don't want to know. If I can't have something for staff development, an awareness program for students would be beneficial. I need more training first.

Recommendation 6: Advocate for School Counselors to Receive Support From Administrators to Address Identified Issues

School counselors may desire to implement programs into their schools. However, many cannot do so without support from their administrators. Permission must be attained in order to implement any curriculum into the school system. In order for administrators to agree to implement such programs, there must be an assurance that there is a need for such a program. Additionally, curriculum would need to be age specific to the student population. Advocacy is an essential part of the counseling profession. At times, advocacy can take on a key role in school counselor

implementation of a new program. Educating both administrators and counselors can bridge the gap needed to leverage the partnerships in sex trafficking prevention.

Recommendation 7: Educate School Counselors, Administrators, Teachers, Students, and Parents on Technology Use

Technology was a major theme in this study. Counselors discussed technology in a manner that gave much of the blame for changes in this generation. Educating administrators, teachers, students, and parents on technology may help combat some of the effects related to this issue. Developing programs related to technology must include parent education in order to help navigate proper technology use among their children and adolescents.

Unanticipated Findings

During the course of this research, a few unanticipated findings became evident. These findings were unanticipated because they did not answer the initial research questions. After counselors completed their answer to the questions, many interviews shifted to the lack of support from administrators. Participants were asked if they were currently addressing the issue on their campus. A few participants said that their administrators allowed them to spend time with students and conduct counseling. However, I received many responses to the contrary. Further, counselors seemed to feel disdain for the fact that schools are reactive rather than proactive.

Participant 1: We are often so spread thin. And I would love to counsel and get to know my kids. We were seeing kids every week and making a difference. My administrator actually told us to stop. Completely stop seeing kids because we

have too many other administrative duties. I think they may hire a special ed counselor. I'm worried they will end up using them for the same things.

Participant 9: Administrators just want to put a Band-Aid on everything or act like it's not there. If they act like it isn't there then they don't have to address it. I want to do this stuff in school. We need it, especially over here. I just think they would be scared we would scare the kids or parents. They don't want us to take time out to do this stuff.

Participant 11: They just want good test scores. There are so many taboo things that they are scared of. The problem is that kids are doing this stuff. Actually, they're doing much worse than what parents or anyone else want to think they're doing. It has to be addressed. These kids are lost.

Focus Group 2:

Group Member 1: Right now, we're only allowed to do cyberbullying stuff. We are doing that because kids are committing suicide over it. So, we can't prevent anything.

Group Member 2: I don't even think we are doing that well. Schools are a bureaucracy, and that does not include doing things well. They only want to implement programs when they think they are going to get sued. It's not that the counselors don't want to help, it's just that we are so restricted. They address issues by ignoring them. Then they don't have to work on anything.

Additionally, an unexpected desire for counselor training programs and the implementation of an anti-trafficking program within the school was expressed in the

interviews. All participants had some knowledge or training on sex trafficking. However, after interviews took place, they indicated a lack of adequate knowledge in order to affectively prevent sex trafficking in their students. Participants all desired resources for vulnerabilities discussed. However, participants felt that programs must be specific to the developmental levels of their students.

Conclusion

Sex trafficking is becoming an increasingly evident issue among minors. There are clear generational changes occurring in children and adolescents that make them susceptible to becoming a victim to sex trafficking. Traffickers are well informed of vulnerabilities they can prey upon. Individuals seeking to lure a child are already aware of how it can be done. Those working with children and adolescents must be vigilant in addressing the susceptibility of their students, in order to prevent sex trafficking. Counselors must identify changes in behavior exhibited by the new generation of children and adolescents in order to adjust their current intervention strategies. As counselors, we are called to social justice and advocacy. Advocating for our children and adolescents to be free from the bondage that is sex trafficking should be a priority for all society.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Participant Recruitment Letter

Dear Counselor,

Human Trafficking is the fastest growing criminal industry in the world. Specifically, domestic minor sex trafficking is on the rise in our neighborhoods across the country. School counselors are at the forefront of new trends in adolescent culture that may make them susceptible to sex trafficking. The new research, with your help, will provide a basis for the development of a training model. The theory and training model will be specifically for counselors to prevent vulnerable youth from falling victim to this crime.

We are currently looking for licensed school counselors or licensed professional counselors that are contracted in schools to participate in this project. Counselors should have some background knowledge of human trafficking to participate. Participation is confidential and no identifying information will be linked to information collected.

The researcher will send out a questionnaire with a few open-ended questions. The researcher will set up a time and place for an interview. Interviews typically last from 30-60 minutes and can be scheduled at your convenience. Interviews will be audiotaped and kept confidential. Individuals willing to participate in a focus group may be asked. Please be aware that you will discuss your interview with other participants. Thank you for your time and consideration in helping with this important project.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call or email Krystal Humphreys, 806-928-1101, krystal.d.humphreys@ttu.edu.

Sincerely,
Krystal D. Humphreys, M.Ed., LPC-Intern
Doctoral Candidate, Research Assistant
Texas Tech University
2500 Broadway, Lubbock, TX 79409
(806)928-1101

Appendix B

Information Sheet

Please share your thoughts in our research project.

What is this project studying?

The study is called “Perception of American adolescent culture and how it makes our teens susceptible to sex trafficking.” This study will help us learn what current trends in adolescent culture are fueling their susceptibility to this growing crime. We hope to publish this study and create a training program specific to school counselors, on this subject.

What would I do if I participate?

In this study you will be asked to complete a survey with open-ended questions. A follow-up interview will take place after the survey is completed. You may be asked to participate in a focus group, where you will share your ideas with other counselors who are participating in the study. Some questions will be about you. Some will be about your thoughts. Some questions will be about how you feel or what you do, as related to the subject.

Can I quit if I become uncomfortable?

Yes, you may quit at any time. Your participation is completely voluntary. Dr. Crews and the Institutional Review Board have reviewed the questions and think you can answer them comfortably. You do not have to answer any question that you are not comfortable answering. You can stop answering or stop the interview at any time. You are free to leave at any time that you wish. You will still receive the benefits of participation even if you choose to leave. Participating in this project is your choice. We do appreciate any help you are able to provide to our project.

How long will participation take?

We are asking 60-90 minutes of total time. This includes time for the survey.

How are we protecting privacy?

The questionnaires or questions in the interview will not ask any personal information to protect your privacy. Interviews and focus groups will be audio-recorded. Audio-recordings will be kept on a flash drive, in a locked cabinet. No identifying information will be asked during the interview or focus group.

How will I benefit from participating?

Your expertise will provide this project with valuable information. The information gathered will later be used to create a training program specifically for your field.

I have some questions about this study. Who can I ask?

- The study is being conducted by Krystal D. Humphreys, PhD candidate, from the Department of Educational Psychology and Leadership at Texas Tech University. If you have questions, you can call her at 806-928-1101.
- TTU also has a Board that protects the rights of people who participate in research. You can call to ask them questions at 806-742-2062. You can mail your questions to the Human Research Protection Program, Office of the Vice President for Research, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas 79409, or you can email your questions to hrpp@ttu.edu.

Appendix C

Consent Form

Please share your thoughts in our research project.

What is this project studying?

The study is called “Perception of American adolescent culture and how it makes our teens susceptible to sex trafficking.” This study will help us learn what current trends in adolescent culture are fueling their susceptibility to this growing crime. We hope to publish this study and create a training program specific to school counselors, on this subject.

What would I do if I participate?

In this study you will be asked to complete a survey with open-ended questions. A follow-up interview will take place after the survey is completed. Some questions will be about you. Some will be about your thoughts. Some questions will be about how you feel or what you do, as related to the subject. You may be asked to participate in a focus group. Focus groups will discuss your ideas in the interview with other participants. The focus group is intended to see if other schools have similar issues related to sex trafficking. You may decline participation at any point in the study.

Can I quit if I become uncomfortable?

Yes, you may quit at any time. Your participation is completely voluntary. Dr. Crews and the Institutional Review Board at Texas Tech University, have reviewed the questions and think you can answer them comfortably. You do not have to answer any question that you are not comfortable answering. You can stop answering or stop the interview at any time. You are free to leave at any time that you wish. You will still receive the benefits of participation even if you choose to leave. Participating in this project is your choice. We do appreciate any help you are able to provide to our project.

How long will participation take?

We are asking 45-90 minutes of total time. This includes time for the survey. If you are requested to participate in a focus group, it may include an additional 30-60 minutes.

How are we protecting privacy?

The questionnaires or questions in the interview will not ask any personal information to protect your privacy. The interview and focus group will be audio taped. No identifying information will be asked during the interview or focus group. Audio-files will be safely stored in a locked area.

How will I benefit from participating?

Your expertise will provide this project with valuable information. The information gathered will later be used to create a training program specifically for your field.

I have some questions about this study. Who can I ask?

- The study is being conducted by Krystal D. Humphreys, PhD candidate, from the Department of Educational Psychology and Leadership at Texas Tech University. If you have questions, you can call her at 806-928-1101. Or email at krystal.d.humphreys@ttu.edu.
- Texas Tech University also has a Board that protects the rights of people who participate in research. You can call to ask them questions at 806-742-2062. You can mail your questions to the Human Research Protection Program, Office of the Vice President for Research, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas 79409, or you can email your questions to hrpp@ttu.edu.

Signature Date

Printed Name

This consent form is not valid after Month/Date/Year

Appendix D

Interview Protocol

1. I will ask the participant to state their chosen pseudonym.
2. I will describe the purpose of the research study to the participant.
3. I will cover the IRB statements for the participant, discuss confidentiality, and that they may quit at any time during the interview process.
4. I will describe the semi-structured approach to the interview.
5. Questions were semi-structured and based on several main questions. However, additional questions were added during the interview according to what is discussed by the participant. The following questions were used as a basis for the interview:
 - a. Describe your campus and your students for me.
 - b. Tell me about generational shifts you have noticed in your students
 - c. Do you believe these changes have differences according to gender?
 - d. What kind of changes have you seen in risk taking behaviors?
 - e. Describe some of the main issues that your students deal with on a daily basis.
 - f. What barriers do your students have to succeed that are different from other generations?
 - g. How do you students handle pressure at home and school?
 - h. What are the differences in issues between your low-socioeconomic students and your higher-socioeconomic students?
 - j. Is there a difference, socially, in this generation of students?
 - k. Tell me about your perception of sex trafficking?
 - l. Do you believe school counselors in your district know about sex trafficking?

m. Describe your thoughts on why sex trafficking is becoming more prevalent among this generation of students?

n. Thinking about what you have told me about your students, what makes them susceptible to sex trafficking?

o. Do you think schools are taking enough preventative measures for sex trafficking?

After questions are completed, the interviewer will ask the participant if there are any questions or concerns. Participants will be contacted with emerging themes that have been derived from data.

Appendix E

Demographic and Knowledge Survey

Perception of American Adolescent Culture and
how it makes our Teens Susceptible to Sex Trafficking
A Doctor's Dissertation
Initial Survey
Krystal D. Humphreys

Pseudonym

Please choose a pseudonym and list *below*. Make sure to remember your name and that it does not contain *any* identifying information. You will be referred to by your chosen pseudonym in order to protect your confidentiality during the process of this study.

Demographic Items

1. Please list your education (BA, BS, MA, M.Ed.).

2. Please list all licenses and certifications held.

3. List years of counseling experience *and* type (school, clinical, private practice).

4. Briefly describe the demographics (e.g. dominate race represented) and socio-economic status of your school.

Initial Survey Items

1. Briefly describe your knowledge of human trafficking. For example, what do you know about the subject? How did you come about this information (e.g. the internet, presentation)?

2. With your current knowledge, briefly describe the difference between a sex trafficking victim and a prostitute?

3. Briefly *list* trending issues that you have on your campus (these will be discussed in the interview).

4. Of the listed items in question #3, which ones do you feel are different in this generation than in previous generations of students?

5. Describe the students that you would consider vulnerable on your campus.
