School Counseling Through a Developmental Lens: Implications for Working with

Adolescent Girls

Dana L. Brookover

University of Scranton

Mary A. Hermann

Virginia Commonwealth University

Michael E. Deitz

The College of William and Mary

Abstract

In order to support adolescent girls' social and emotional development, school counselors need to understand girls' current experiences and developmental needs. Researchers used phenomenological methodology to explore the experiences of 11 girls in Generation Z. They further examined girls' interactions with their high school counselors including whether these interactions supported their development. Five themes emerged: developmental challenges; societal impact on development; strengths and protective qualities; experiences with school counselors; and suggestions for school counselors. Implications of these findings are provided.

Keywords: school counseling, lifespan development, Generation Z, adolescent girls, social-emotional development

School Counseling Through a Developmental Lens: Implications for Working with

Adolescent Girls

In the Position Statement on Gender Equity, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2014) provided that school counselors are committed to promoting students' development by refuting negative cultural gender messages and creating more inclusive school environments. For decades, researchers and clinicians have reported unique challenges adolescent girls encounter in our culture (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Choate, 2020; Choate, 2018; Cohen-Sandler, 2005; Pipher, 1994; Simmons, 2018; Susman & Rogel, 2004; Twenge, 2017). These challenges include the negative impact of sexism (Choate, 2020; Simmons, 2018), relational aggression (Pipher, 1994; Simmons, 2011; Young et al., 2017), illusive cultural norms related to beauty (Choate, 2020; Pipher, 1994; Simmons, 2018); extensive care-giving expectations (Choate, 2020; Simmons, 2018); pressure to maintain good grades and be involved in numerous extracurricular activities (Choate, 2020; Cohen-Sandler, 2005), and overall expectations to be perfect (Choate, 2020; Flett & Hewitt, 2014; Simmons, 2018).

Recent cultural phenomena have created additional challenges for young women. For example, scholars have theorized that the prevalence of social media is negatively impacting adolescent girls (Choate, 2020; Simmons, 2018). Furthermore, incidents of sexual harassment and assault are astoundingly high; 81% of women have reported these experiences, with 57% of those instances occurring before the age of 17 (Kearl, 2018). These contemporary societal circumstances seem to be contributing to rising rates of mental health issues in the adolescent girl population (Choate, 2020; Choate, 2018; McGuinness et al., 2012; Mojtabai et al., 2016; Twenge, 2017). There

are developmental tasks of adolescence which are difficult to accomplish under current cultural conditions (Pomerantz et al., 2013; Simmons, 2018). These tasks can include developing an authentic identity (Erikson, 1980) and forming positive relationships (Etaugh & Bridges, 2018; Wong et al., 2015).

Enhanced understanding of the current generation of students is necessary in order to counsel students through a developmental lens (Elder & Shanahan, 2007; Wong et al., 2015). Twenge (2017) noted that members of this generation are accustomed to interacting and communicating in a world that is always connected through smart phones and other devices. Generation Z is also more diverse than previous generations (Swanzen, 2018; Turner, 2015). Further, adolescent girls within various minority identity groups have unique developmental considerations. For instance, Black girls often receive oppressive messages about Black women, which can lead to depressive symptoms (Stokes et al., 2020). Similarly, multiracial girl adolescents may struggle with the adolescent developmental task of achieving a sense of belonging more than their monoracial peers (Austin, 2018). Teacher bias further impacts youth of color (Cherng, 2017) as evidenced by researchers' findings that some educators discourage girls, especially underrepresented minority girls, from certain educational aspirations such as engaging in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) coursework (Falco, 2017; Grossman & Porsche, 2014; Kim et al., 2018).

School counselors are in a unique position to support the girls' authentic development as the role of school counselors has evolved significantly in the past several decades (Zyromski et al., 2019). The current role of the school counselor encompasses working with students from a developmental perspective and a socio-

cultural-political lens to promote wellbeing (Galassi & Akos, 2004; Stevens & Wilkerson, 2018; Vinayak & Judge, 2018). However, not all school systems have embraced current school counseling roles. For example, Zyromski et al. (2019) found the term "guidance counselor" was still prevalent and demonstrated that when this term was used to describe the work of school counselors, it negatively impacted school counselors' perceptions of their professional competence. Accordingly, these researchers reiterated "the importance of appropriate titles that represent an accurate scope of practice" (p. 3).

Although research has highlighted the current terminology (Zyromski et al., 2019) and roles of school counselors (Galassi & Akos, 2004; Stevens & Wilkerson, 2018; Vinayak & Judge, 2018), a review of the literature yielded no school counseling studies focused specifically on supporting holistic adolescent girl development in the Generation Z cohort. The current study was designed to address this gap in the literature. The researchers used phenomenological methods to explore the lived experiences of adolescent girls in Generation Z, as well as their perceptions on how school counselors can support adolescent girl development. The results of this study provide further understanding of the experiences of adolescent girls. Thus, these findings can inform the work of school counselors as they seek to promote students' development and foster gender equity (ASCA, 2014).

Methodology

The goal of this research study was to explore participants' experiences with the phenomenon of navigating contemporary challenges related to adolescent girl development, thus phenomenology was utilized as our method in this study (Balkin & Kleist, 2017; Hays & Singh, 2012). Balkin and Kleist (2017) reiterated that philosophical

beliefs impact researchers' choice of phenomenological methods. Accordingly, we ensured that our methodology reflected our constructivist/interpretivist critical feminist ideology. As researchers who subscribe to a constructivist/interpretivist paradigm, we believe that knowledge and meaning are co-created and interpreted (Balkin & Kleist, 2017; Haverkamp & Young, 2007; Van Manen, 1990). A feminist lens further highlights women's unique experiences (Bloom, 1998; Creswell, 2014) and values women's ways of knowing (Belenky et al., 1997). A feminist theoretical framework also supports advocacy for social and political change that can enhance women's lives (Creswell, 2014; Hays & Singh, 2012; Patton, 2002). Van Manen's (1990) hermeneutic phenomenology is aligned with our constructivist/interpretivist philosophical stance and our critical feminist lens (Balkin & Kleist, 2017). Therefore, this methodology guided data collection and analysis.

Van Manen (1990) describes hermeneutic phenomenology as the interaction of six research activities: (1) examining a phenomenon of interest, (2) maintaining an interest in the phenomenon and participants, (3) exploring lived experiences, (4) deeply reflecting on essential themes, (5) honoring the art of writing and rewriting in the description of the phenomenon, and (6) considering the various dimensions of the phenomenon throughout the research process. All three researchers were deeply interested in the experiences of adolescent girls in our current culture. One of the researchers worked with adolescent girls as a school counselor, another as a teacher and school counselor, and the third researcher as a counselor and gymnastics coach. Although our experiences with teenage girls were valuable, we remained aware of potential researcher bias in order to more fully illuminate the essence of participants'

experiences (Patton, 2002). Therefore, before interviewing participants, we discussed our experiences with adolescent girls in order to bring increased attention to our perceptions related to the topic. We continued this reflexive process throughout data collection and analysis (Morrow, 2007). This process allowed us to use our insights while honoring the participants' unique experiences and deepening our understanding of the phenomenon (Haverkamp & Young, 2007).

Participants

After receiving Institutional Review Board approval, we recruited participants purposefully through flyers and social media (Balkin & Kleist, 2017). Eleven potential participants contacted us and indicated their interest to participate, and all eleven potential participants met the criteria of being a high school graduate between 18 and 22 years old. We chose this criterion so that each participant would be a member of the Generation Z cohort and would have an information-rich perspective on adolescent girl development. The potential participants met the additional criteria of having attended a public or private high school and having interacted with their high school counselor. All of the potential participants agreed to be interviewed. The interviews yielded rich data consistent with the study's purpose; therefore, this sample size was appropriate for this research study (Balkin & Kleist, 2017; Suzuki et al., 2007; Van Manen, 1990). Nine of the participants identified as White, one as African American, and one as Multiracial. Ten participants had attended public high schools and one had attended a private high school.

Data Sources

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Our overarching question was "How would you describe your experience of being an adolescent girl?" Follow-up questions included asking participants to describe their support systems during their adolescence, their ideas on cultural expectations for adolescent girls, challenges and barriers they experienced during that time period, and their perceptions of the strengths of adolescent girls. We also asked about participants' experiences with their high school counselors, including how their school counselors supported their development. We further inquired about their opinions on what school counselors should know about the development and experiences of adolescent girls.

Demographic questions (e.g., age, race/ethnicity) were included at the end of the interview. The first two authors interviewed the participants. Initially, the interviews were conducted in person. Shelter-in-place directives related to the COVID-19 pandemic were implemented during our recruitment and data collection phase, so we asked the remaining participants in our area if they preferred to be interviewed by phone or video. Participants living in other cities were offered the same option. Most of the participants chose phone interviews, though a few opted for video interviews. The interviews ranged from 25 minutes to 60 minutes. To maximize trustworthiness, the participants were invited to review and edit their transcripts (Hays & Singh, 2012; Morrow, 2005). One participant responded and asked us to remove an example in the transcript as she felt that information could compromise her anonymity. Accordingly, the example was removed from the transcript.

Data Analysis

Our data analysis reflected Van Manen's (1990) hermeneutic phenomenology methodological suggestions. All three researchers reviewed the transcripts to identify the dimensions of the experience and essential themes (Van Manen, 1990). As themes emerged, we noted confirming and disconfirming data in order to represent the complex nature of the phenomenon (Morrow, 2005; Van Manen, 1990). To further increase trustworthiness, the researchers completed this process independently (Hays & Singh, 2012). We compared our themes and reached consensus on the final themes and subthemes. We also sent the themes and subthemes to participants and invited feedback, though no participants responded. All three researchers participated in writing and rewriting the manuscript. Through this process, we identified quotes to highlight the participants' voices and illustrate themes (Balkin & Kleist, 2017; Hunt, 2011; Morrow, 2005).

Findings

We identified five themes within the data: (a) developmental challenges; (b) societal impact on development; (c) strengths and protective qualities; (d) experiences with high school counselors; and (e) suggestions for high school counselors. There were 17 subthemes embedded within the overarching themes. Quotes are included to illustrate the lived experiences of the participants.

Developmental Challenges

The participants described the developmental tasks they experienced. This theme included two subthemes: navigation of developing authenticity and experiences with hormonal changes.

Developing Authenticity

Participants shared their experiences with formulating an authentic identity. One participant commented that it was struggle, explaining that adolescent girls work on "just finding their own identity and not letting other people, and what other people say, and what the media says form who they want to be." Another participant similarly expressed:

> I think when you're a young girl, you're trying to find yourself and find your own identity. But you also have all these other expectations of what a woman should be, and especially what a teenage girl should be. If you don't fit into that mold, it can be uncomfortable.

Hormonal Changes

Participants described the physical and emotional changes that come with puberty. A participant summarized this theme in her comment: "Puberty was gross, but it is for everyone—just learning about that stuff and how to deal with it . . . [and] physically dealing with the stress [of fluctuating hormones]." She added that it was particularly difficult to navigate these challenges when playing sports.

Societal Impact on Development

This theme highlights the participants' experiences and opinions about different facets of society (e.g., home, school, media) that impact adolescent girls' development. Four subthemes emerged: (a) impact of social media and technology; (b) pressures and expectations to "have it all"; (c) #MeToo movement; and (d) chilly STEM climate.

Impact of Social Media and Technology

The participants noted there were positive aspects to social media and the accessibility of technology. One participant shared, "Usually when I'm on my phone I'll be on social media, but I also am reading a lot. I'm just always learning."

Though benefits were shared, the experiences described mostly focused on the negative impact of social media on self-esteem and body image. A participant explained:

I think that social media takes a toll on all adolescents, but especially for females. You constantly see this image of what people want you to be or what people think is pretty or smart, or how a female should look or act.

The availability of social media led to the participants continually comparing themselves to both their peers and celebrities, as illustrated by one participant's observation: "I feel like it's hard for females to build self-esteem when they are constantly scrolling through social media. Seeing other females, that's just the first thing—you look at them and compare yourself." Another participant expressed concern that Photoshop "can make people believe anything that you put on the internet. It doesn't have to be real."

Participants shared that social media also led to cyberbullying and exacerbated relational aggression. One participant observed, "I think the only thing I personally experienced with social media and technology was . . . other girls bullying each other." Other participants mentioned the sexualization of adolescent girls on social media: "I think it's dangerous with some of the stuff that's happening, like with TikTok trends. It's

sexualizing females having all these younger girls do all these very sexual dances and stuff."

Pressures and Expectations to "Have It All"

Participants described the experience of attempting to balance the expectations to be physically attractive and meet current definitions of success while maintaining traditional "womanly" roles. For instance, one participant shared, "I think there's definitely still the expectation of having a family, but I think now it's more geared towards having a career first and then a family." Another participant explained, "I think the expectations are kind of like the 'new' woman, like the independent self- reliant woman, but still 'raise your sisters.'" She continued that these messages were "mixed with everything that comes out in the media now like, go to college, work hard, get your doctorate, have a good job, and you don't need anybody else."

This subtheme is further illustrated by the comment: "I think that there's just more pressure on girls . . . just to be so multi-faced and just be good at everything." The participants shared that they received messages from various sources, including their parents, regarding how they should strive for perfection. One participant talked about the advice from her mother who cautioned: "You're a woman, you have to work twice as hard [as the] average man, so make sure you have your stuff together." She continued by stating that her parents "make me try to be perfect at all times."

Information related to cultural norms that girls received often included self-sacrificing and conflicting messages. For example, one participant told us she received messages such as, "Girls should put energy into looking nice for other people and not necessarily for yourself." She continued, "There's also an expectation for teenage girls

to be sexy but not too sexy." Similarly, a participant noted how "guys wanted you to be athletic and to be similar to them, but not too athletic."

#MeToo Movement

The #MeToo movement impacted how the participants perceived the world. They shared their pride in women standing up for themselves, and how they felt safe to do so as a result of this movement. A participant explained, "I think when I was in high school it had just started becoming a thing when women were able to feel proud . . . and were able to be a voice for other women." The movement also illuminated the need to be careful: "So I think this is definitely a shift happening, but I think there's still lingering responsibility for the female to protect herself."

The participants also shared the impact of negative reactions to the movement. One participant talked about the men in her family:

> It was very interesting how quick they were to discredit everything that came out just because, why would you keep it [sexual abuse] a secret?.... It kind of made me discouraged in a way. It made me feel like if I ever went through a situation like that, I couldn't tell anybody either without being called a liar or a homewrecker.

Chilly STEM climate

The majority of participants mentioned the unwelcoming environment they encountered when they participated in STEM activities. They also expressed that teachers and school counselors discouraged their STEM goals. For example, a participant observed that her school counselor encouraged the girl students to enroll in advanced English classes but not Science classes. The participants mentioned the

nature of the boy-dominated STEM classrooms and clubs in high school as well. One participant shared, "In high school, more than middle school, it's more defined for girls that they are not to be in STEM-based classes." Another participant commented on a message from a teacher:

> The first day I walked into Physics, I was told I was going to have to work harder because it was a male-dominated field, and that only one girl in the class the year before had gotten an A, so it probably wasn't the best class for me. . . . I actually dropped out of the class because I was like, well if you're not going to teach me then I'm not going to take the class.

Other participants explained that STEM classes and organizations were intimidating due to the fact that almost all of the students were boys. One girl further observed, "In math and science classes, it seemed that guys just had more confidence with answering questions." She concluded, "Guys just always seem to understand."

Strengths and Protective Qualities

The participants described the unique strengths of adolescent girls. The four subthemes that emerged were: (a) being open-minded; (b) resiliency; (c) being supportive of other girls; and (d) support systems.

Being Open-minded

The participants noted how Generation Z adolescent girls are accepting of others and open to varying perspectives. This is illustrated by one participant's observation, "I think nowadays a lot of [teenage girls] are empowered and have a voice and are very open-minded." Another participant shared that having access to social justice

movements (e.g., #MeToo, #BLM) has resulted in girls' willingness to hear and accept others' perspectives.

Resiliency

In general, the participants viewed adolescent girls as strong and resilient in their ability to face the challenges of adolescent development and make a place for themselves in the world. A participant shared, "I had gone through some family stuff when I was around 14 or 15, and I think that broke me down and built me back up in a way. So I became a very strong person." Another declared, "Females are independent and strong . . . honestly, they don't need anybody to support them or help them. We can do it on our own." Participants also discussed their perceptions of sensitivity and emotional intelligence. One participant observed, "I think girls are raised to be sensitive and I am a very sensitive person, and I think that should be celebrated as a strength." Another participant similarly shared, "I think that girls are so strong . . . I've seen the mental toughness and just the kindness."

Being Supportive of Other Girls

Though participants experienced some instances of relational aggression, they also described how encouraging each other and "girl power" supported their development. They noted how creating bonds with other girls was a strength of adolescent girls. One participant elaborated by stating: "Female to female friendships are very special and very emotionally complex and very deep . . . [and] are just so important." Another shared that "women are definitely always willing to help other women within mentoring programs and outside of mentoring programs. I see it a lot at my school…They kind of stick together and help one another."

Support Systems

The participants detailed the importance of friends and family as they navigated their developmental challenges. Which source of support they preferred varied among the participants. Some girls relied on their family for support more than their friends. Other girls found more support from their friends. For example, one girl shared how she relied more on her friends at school: "There was a lot happening on the home front... I would have to reach out to people at school to get the things that I was missing at home. So those connections became stronger as a result." The relationships the participants prioritized varied with circumstances as well. For instance, a participant explained that she moved several times and whenever she moved to a new town, "I would really rely more on my family as my support system. And then as I made friends, they would become more of my support system."

Additionally, participants shared that relationships with both family and friends assisted in the development of their self-esteem. A participant commented, "So I feel like when I'm with my friends I have pretty good self-esteem." Another participant expressed, "I am very lucky to have such a close relationship with my family. And they were able to help me build high self-esteem."

Experiences with High School Counselors

Participants shared information on their interactions with their high school counselors. Their experiences were both positive and negative. Four subthemes emerged: (a) positive relationship elements; (b) salient counseling topics; (c) negative experiences; (d) outdated view of the school counselor role.

Positive Relationship Elements

Almost every participant identified components of their school counselor's demeanor that supported their relationship. The participants described elements like their school counselor's "open door policy," how they felt understood by their school counselor, the strong rapport that they built, and the trust they shared with their school counselor. One participant recounted, "I trusted him so much because he wasn't condescending to me. He took me seriously and he took my concerns seriously. He honestly wanted to find what was best for me. And he listened to me." Another said,

> I think that he was really good at creating a safe space, and creating a place where I knew that within reason I could say anything and it wouldn't go anywhere else… I felt that he could hear what I was saying and was actually processing it… He made sure that his door was always open to me and that I knew that if I needed to talk to him, he would move around what he had to do in order to see me.

Similarly, another participant explained, "If you wanted to just go and hang out with him, his door was always open. He had a really good memory of all his students." She added that he even remembered the universities to which she was applying.

Salient Counseling Topics

Beyond describing their positive rapport with their school counselors, the participants shared the specific counseling topics about which they would visit their school counselor. Topics included academic planning and college counseling. One participant appreciated, "Just having him be the guru of college, he knows everything. And I have somebody who's in my corner wanting to help me know everything too."

Another participant shared how her counselors "supported me in finding a college, choosing classes, and transitioning into a new school." A participant also explained, "He was trying to just put things in perspective for me." She added, "I felt better [every] single time I left his office."

> Participants described their school counselors' classroom interventions as well:
> We had something called "counselor workshop" . . . and freshman year, it was about getting acclimated to high school. And then it slowly transitioned into career exploration or college exploration. . . . [It also] touched on mental health and dealing with stress and things like that. And so I think it was helpful to be in a class for that and not necessarily have to reach out to someone.

Negative Experiences

Despite many participants' positive interactions with school counselors, some participants shared their less than ideal experiences with their high school counselors. Many students described how "busy" their school counselors were and other challenges that prevented participants from being able to connect with their school counselors. One participant remembered, "Although this counselor was nice, she didn't understand some issues. And I feel like she was very rushed." Another participant commented on her school counselor's lack of cultural competence:

> I think she really didn't understand how important it was for me as a Black woman to get my college education and not just be satisfied with the GED or high school diploma. I remember multiple times when I would go to her office and she would say, "Oh well, you know, you don't have to go [to college]." That's not what she told my [White] friends.

Outdated View of School Counselor Role

Many of the participants referred to their school counselors as "guidance counselors." Their perception was that school counselors were only available for academic planning and college counseling. For example, one participant stated, "So I never saw [a school counselor] until I was a senior in high school, because their main job is to get people to go to college." Another commented, "I didn't realize it was an option that I could just go see my counselor 'just because.' I thought there had to be a solid reason." Similarly, a participant indicated she thought school counselors "only did scheduling," and another participant believed "they were there for academic purposes. . . . I think that we just didn't really see them as being able to help with [mental health issues]." One participant concluded "they could've been more open about being available and what they could actually do."

Suggestions for High School Counselors

The final theme reflects participants' suggestions for school counselors as they work to support adolescent girls' development. Participants' advice included three subthemes: (a) provide college exploration opportunities; (b) understand cultural and generational differences; and (c) address wellness and mental health.

Provide College Exploration Opportunities

The participants wished their high school counselor had provided more individualized opportunities to explore college options. For example, one participant summarized this theme by stating, "I wish they would have helped me look for different schools" that were highly regarded in her proposed major. She continued, "I wish that my counselor had shown me how I could look at the professors that I would be studying

with, and look up what the alumni were doing, and what facilities each program and each department had."

Understand Cultural and Generational Differences

Participants indicated that school counselors could benefit from seeking more awareness about their students' experiences. For instance, the participants shared that their culture, their gender, and their relationship with social media were all important facets of their experience in adolescence. In describing her interactions with her school counselor, one participant noted:

I think she just couldn't empathize or try to connect with me because we were from different cultures. And I think that counselors do need to understand that not every teenage girl is going to have the same experiences in her life. Everybody comes from different backgrounds.

In terms of social media, one participant shared, "I think counselors need to have an understanding of the nuances of social media. . . . If you don't know the difference between a direct message and a post, how are you going to help students work through cyberbullying?"

Address Wellness and Mental Health

The most frequent suggestion for high school counselors related to girls' social and emotional development. The participants encouraged high school counselors to reach out directly to girls to check in. They further suggested school counselors go beyond surface-level conversations with their students. For example, one participant recommended "having some kind of wellness check or something, just a meeting about whatever. . . . When we met with our counselors, it was just about course planning. It

was just about college planning, but it was never just about you." A participant added, "I feel like just a more direct approach to wellbeing [would be helpful]…. I don't like when people dance around issues of depression and anxiety because it's real and it exists and we need to directly address these things." Participants also offered suggestions such as "having small groups where everybody or people who are similar in background can just come to talk about their experiences." And one participant recommended "passing out some self-care tips during homeroom."

Discussion

The experiences described by the participants reiterate themes in existing research and provide additional information on how high school counselors can effectively address the developmental needs of adolescent girls. Findings from this study further illuminate the impact of current cultural norms on Generation Z adolescent girls' development. Findings highlight that this generation of girls is expected to excel in both traditional and contemporary gender roles.

Aligning with research on the Generation Z cohort, technology played a large role in participants' daily lives (Turner, 2015; Twenge, 2017). Participants described benefits related to technology such as access to information. They also reported the negative impact of technology, especially social media. Girls expressed that the prevalence of social media inhibited their authentic identity development. The inevitable comparisons to friends' carefully-selected, digitally-enhanced posts left participants feeling inadequate (Simmons, 2018). Social media created particular challenges related to maintaining a positive body image as electronically altered postings are misleading and

unattainable. Participants also noted that social media left them vulnerable to relational

aggression (Young et al., 2017).

Participants further highlighted the ubiquitous message that girls need to take

advantage of all opportunities and do everything perfectly (Simmons, 2018). While high

expectations from teachers and parents have been framed as a developmental asset

(Stevens & Wilkerson, 2010), the participants reflected on two identified Postfeminist

narratives: Girl Power and Successful Girls (Pomerantz et al., 2013). Within these two

narratives, adolescent girls feel the imbalance between girls and boys in relation to the

pressure girls experience to succeed in school, engage in multiple extra-curricular

activities, and meet cultural beauty norms (Pomerantz et al., 2013). While school

counselors have high expectations for all students (Stevens & Wilkerson, 2010), it is

important for them to remain aware that perfectionism can trigger anxiety and

depression (Flett & Hewitt, 2014).

Another noteworthy finding is that although we did not ask any questions

specifically about participants' experiences with STEM education, almost all of the

participants reported challenges related to what Jorstad et al. (2017) called the "chilly

climate" in STEM classes and activities (p. 253). Participants' comments highlighted

findings in research related to how teachers and school counselors can discourage

STEM involvement and negatively impact adolescent girls' self-efficacy in STEM

classes (Grossman & Porsche, 2014; Kim et al., 2017).

Unique findings from this research include the impact of the #MeToo movement

on adolescent girls. Historically, scholars have reported that girls lose their voices as

they enter adolescence (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Pipher, 1994). Yet in the current study,

participants seemed to be emboldened by social justice movements as participants took pride in girls' use of their voices to address inequities in our culture. #MeToo also helped participants gain awareness of the prevalence of sexual harassment and sexual assault (Kearl, 2018). Participants noted that the movement educated them about the need to take precautions to keep themselves safe, which they observed perpetuated the cultural narrative that it is the responsibility of women to protect themselves as opposed to the responsibility of men to refrain from engaging in abusive behaviors. Furthermore, based on some reactions to the movement, a few participants expressed concern that if they experienced sexual assault and came forward, no one would believe them.

The participants' perceptions of the strengths of adolescent girls add to the literature as well. Findings indicate relationships continue to be important to girls, and that relationships with family and friends support girls' development (Etaugh & Bridges, 2018; Wong et al., 2015). The participants appreciated how girls can be supportive of one another and viewed girls' sensitivity as a strength. Participants identified their peers' resilience and nonjudgmental attitudes as strengths as well. These findings complement existing research in that resilience and empathy have been found to be predictors of psychological well-being among adolescent girls (Vinayak & Judge, 2018).

Unique findings of this research also include the information provided by participants about their experiences with their high school counselors. The participants appreciated when their school counselors showed unconditional positive regard and established trusting relationships. These results align with findings that positive relationships between school counselors and students help students navigate developmental challenges (Wigfield et al., 2005).

Participants alluded to negative experiences as well. Many of the participants called their school counselors by the antiquated term "guidance counselor" (Zyromski et al., 2019, p. 3) and believed that they only provided academic planning and/or college counseling. Participants also noted that their school counselors were very busy and they expressed disappointment when they described instances in which their school counselors were too busy to talk to them. Several participants further explained that school counselors who were not aware of social media nuances could not fully understand their experiences. And, a few participants commented that school counselors' stereotypical beliefs related to gender and culture were detrimental.

According to participants, there are a myriad of ways in which school counselors can support adolescent girl development. Participants urged school counselors to support students of all genders and cultures. Participants also encouraged school counselors to provide more college exploration opportunities. And participants recommended that school counselors address students' wellness and mental health, activities that can counter the growing rates of depression and anxiety in girls.

Implications

Themes from the data support the need for school counselors to understand students' experiences and to work with students within a socio-cultural-political context and a developmental framework (Galassi & Akos, 2004; Stevens & Wilkerson, 2010). To support adolescent girls' developing authenticity, school counselors can contextualize cultural norms and engage in values clarification activities. School counselors can discourage perfectionism and promote resilience as well. Furthermore, engaging in media literacy activities, including healthy ways to navigate social media, is

recommended. School counselors can also leverage girls' strengths, including strengths identified in this study. And school counselors can continue to help girls find their voices through social justice activities. Having regular mental health and wellness checks with students is advised as well.

Both the chilly STEM climate and messages related to the #MeToo movement demonstrate that adolescent girls continue to experience sexism. School counselors can help eliminate gender biases and stereotypes in school environments through activities that include educating girls about STEM careers (Schmidt et al., 2012), encouraging them to take advanced-level Mathematics and Science courses, and working with students to improve their self-efficacy in STEM classes (Falco, 2017; Falco & Summers, 2019). Participants also suggested that school counselors provide more individualized college exploration experiences and resources. And school counselors can create an environment in which girls know their experiences with sexual assault and abuse will be honored.

It was important to the participants that they felt their school counselor was multiculturally competent, trustworthy, and genuinely wanted to listen to them, yet many participants believed school counselors were not available to talk about social and emotional concerns. These findings illuminate that high school counselors should not assume their students know their role. Accordingly, school counselors may want to incorporate classroom instruction with all first-year high school students to explain their role and highlight their open-door policy. Students also seemed to be aware that their school counselors were overburdened, and thus school counselors need to continue to advocate for appropriate school counseling duties and lower school counselor to

student ratios so they are less overburdened (Schmidt et al., 2012; Zyromski et al., 2019).

In terms of counselor education, researchers have illustrated the importance of including lifespan development training in school counseling curricula (Walley & Grothaus, 2013). The findings of this study support the necessity of lifespan development training, especially coursework related to supporting the developmental needs of K-12 students. Study findings support the need for counselor educators to incorporate the impact of gender and current cultural norms on development in these classes. Study findings also highlight the importance of coursework in which counselors-in-training explore cultural stereotypes and refine their multicultural counseling skills (ASCA, 2015).

Limitations and Future Research

This study provides rich data about adolescent girls' experiences. However, the study is not without limitations. During recruitment and data collection, the COVID-19 crisis necessitated a pivot from in-person interviews to interviews conducted by video or telephone. The use of telephone interviews with some participants prevented us from observing nonverbal communication in those interviews, which may have inhibited our understanding of those participants' experiences (Suzuki et al., 2007). A broader diversity of participants could provide additional perspectives as well.

Considering the findings and limitations, further qualitative and quantitative research on this topic is warranted. Future research can focus the experiences of Generation Z students, of other gender identities as well. It is also imperative that we continue to gain a greater understanding of the persistence of the chilly climate in high

school STEM classrooms. Additional research on effective school counseling interventions with adolescent girls, especially interventions related to challenging cultural norms and navigating social media, is indicated as well.

Over 25 years ago, Pipher (1994) explored the world of teenage girls and encouraged us to "work together to build a culture that is less complicated and more nurturing, less violent and sexualized and more growth-producing" (p. 13). Instead, our findings suggest that traditional norms related to adolescent girls have not faded and new expectations for girls have emerged. Furthermore, media have perpetuated a more complicated, less nurturing, and more sexualized culture. School counselors can utilize study findings to create and deliver school counseling programming that addresses girls' developmental needs and supports girls as they navigate current cultural norms. And school counselors can work to promote gender equity by continuing to advocate for a more growth-producing culture for adolescent girls.

References

American School Counselor Association (2015). The school counselor and cultural diversity. https://www.schoolcounselor.org/asca/media/asca/PositionStatements/ PS_CulturalDiversity.pdf

American School Counselor Association. (2014). The school counselor and gender equity. https://www.schoolcounselor.org/asca/media/asca/PositionStatements/ PS_GenderEquity.pdf

Austin, S. J. (2018). A mixed methods exploration of the role of friends and identity in multiracial adolescent girls' mental health (Doctoral dissertation, UCL (University College London)).

Balkin, R. S., & Kleist, D. M. (2017). *Counseling research: A practitioner-scholar approach.* Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.

Belenky, M. F., Clinchy, B. M., Goldberger, N. R., & Tarule, J. M. (1997). *Women's ways of knowing: The development of self, voice, and mind.* Basic Books.

Bloom, L. R. (1998). *Under the sign of hope: Feminist methodology and narrative interpretation.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Brown, L. M., & Gilligan, C. (1992). *Meeting at the crossroads: Women's psychology and girls' development.* Harvard University Press.

Cherng, H. (2017). If they think I can: Teacher bias and youth of color expectations and achievement. *Social Science Research, 66,* 170-186. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2017.04.001

Choate, L. H. (2020). *Depression in girls and women across the lifespan: Treatment Essentials for mental health professionals.* Routledge.

Choate, L. H. (2018). Depression in girls during the transition to adolescence: Risks and effective treatment. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Counseling, 4*(1), 50-66. https://doi.org/10.1080/23727810.2017.1351808

Cohen-Sandler, R. (2005). *Stressed-out girls: Helping them thrive in the age of Pressure.* Penguin Books.

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches (4th ed.).* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Elder, G. H., & Shanahan, M. J. (2007). The life course and human development. In W. Damon, R. Lerner, & R. Lerner (Eds.), *Handbook of Child Psychology*. Wiley. https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470147658.chpsy0112

Erikson, E. H. (1980). *Identity and the life cycle.* Norton & Company.

Etaugh, C. A., & Bridges, J. S. (2018). *Women's lives: A psychological exploration* (4th ed.). Routledge.

Falco, L. D. (2017). The school counselor and STEM career development. *Journal of Career Development, 44*(4), 359-374. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0894845316656445

Falco, L. D., & Summers, J. J. (2019). Improving career decision self-efficacy and STEM self-efficacy in high school girls: Evaluation of an intervention. *Journal of Career Development, 46*(1), 62-76. https://doi.org/10.1177/0894845317721651

Flett, G. L., & Hewitt, P. L. (2014). A proposed framework for preventing perfectionism and promoting resilience and mental health among vulnerable children and adolescents. *Psychology in the Schools, 51*(9), 899-912. https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.21792

Galassi, J. P., & Akos, P. (2004). Developmental advocacy: Twenty-first century school counseling. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 82*(2), 146-157. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6678.2004.tb00296.x

Grossman, J. M., & Porche, M. V. (2014). Perceived gender and racial/ethnic barriers to STEM success. *Urban Education, 49*(6), 698-727. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0042085913481364

Haverkamp, B. E., & Young, R. A. (2007). Paradigms, purpose, and the role of the literature: Formulating a rationale for qualitative investigations. *The Counseling Psychologist, 35*(2)*,* 265-294. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0011000006292597

Hays, D. G., & Singh, A. A. (2012). *Qualitative inquiry in clinical and educational settings.* New York: Guilford Press.

Hunt, B. (2011). Publishing qualitative research in counseling journals. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 89*(3)*,* 296-300. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6678.2011.tb00092.x

Jorstad, J., Starobin, S. S., Chen, Y., & Kollasch, A. (2017). STEM aspiration: The influence ofsocial capital and chilly climate on female community college students. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 41*(4-5), 253-266. https://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2016.1251358

Kearl, H. (2018). The facts behind the #metoo movement: A national study of sexual Harassment and assault. Stop Street Harassment. http://www.stopstreetharassment.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Full-Report-2018-National-Study-on-Sexual-Harassment-and-Assault.pdf

Kim, A. Y., Sinatra, G. M., & Seyranian, V. (2018). Developing a STEM identity among young women: A social identity perspective. *Review of Educational Research, 88*(4), 589-625. https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654318779957

McGuinness, T. M., Dyer, J. G., & Wade, E. H. (2012). Gender differences in adolescent depression. *Journal of Psychosocial Nursing and Mental Health Services, 50*(12), 17-20. https://doi.org/10.3928/02793695-20121107-04

Mojtabai, R., Olfson, M., & Han, B. (2016). National trends in the prevalence and treatment of depression in adolescents and young adults. *Pediatrics, 138*(6), e20161878. https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2016-1878

Morrow, S. L. (2005). Quality and trustworthiness in qualitative research in counseling psychology. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 52*(2)*,* 250-260. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-167.52.2.250

Morrow, S. L. (2007). Qualitative research in counseling psychology: Conceptual foundations. *The Counseling Psychologist, 35*(2), 209-235. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000006286990

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods (3rd ed.).* Sage Publishing.

Pipher, M. (1994). *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the selves of adolescent girls.* Ballantine Books.

Pomerantz, S., Raby, R., & Stefanik, A. (2013). Girls run the world? Caught between sexism and postfeminism in school. *Gender & Society*, *27*(2), 185-207. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0891243212473199

Rumsey, A. D., Golubovic, N., Elston, N., Chang, C. Y., Dixon, A., & Guvensel, K. (2018). Addressing the social and emotional needs of refugee adolescents in schools: Learning from the experiences of school counselors. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Counseling, 4*(1), 81-100. https://doi.org/10.1080/23727810.2017.1351811

Schmidt, C. D., Hardinge, G. B., & Rokutani, L. J. (2012). Expanding the school counselor repertoire through STEM-focused career development. *The Career Development Quarterly, 60*(1), 25–35. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-0045.2012.00003.x

Simmons, R. (2011). *Odd girl out: The hidden culture of aggression in girls.* First Mariner Books.

Simmons, R. (2018). *Enough as she is: How to help girls move beyond impossible standards of success to live healthy, happy, and fulfilling lives.* HarperCollins Publishers.

Stevens, H., & Wilkerson, K. (2010). The developmental assets and ASCA's national standards: A crosswalk review. *Professional School Counseling, 13*(4), 227-233. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F2156759X1001300403

Stokes, M. N., Hope, E. C., & Cryer-Coupet, Q. R. (2020). Black girl blues: The roles of racial socialization, gendered racial socialization, and racial identity on depressive symptoms among Black girls. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 1-15. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-020-01317-8

Susman, E. J., & Rogol, A. (2004). Puberty and psychological development. In. R. M.

    Lerner & L. Steinberg (Eds.), *Handbook of adolescent psychology* (Vol. 2, pp. 15-

    44). Wiley.

Suzuki, L. A., Ahluwalia, M. K., Arora, A. K., & Mattis, J. S. (2007). The pond you fish in

    determines the fish you catch: Exploring strategies for qualitative data collection.

    The Counseling Psychologist, 35(2)*,* 295-327.

    https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0011000006290983

Swanzen, R. (2018). Facing the generation chasm: the parenting and teaching of

    generations Y and Z. *International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies,*

    9(2), 125-150. https://doi.org/10.18357/ijcyfs92201818216

Turner, A. (2015). Generation Z: Technology and social interest. *The Journal of*

    Individual Psychology, 71(2), 103-113. http://doi.org/10.1353/jip.2015.0021

Twenge, J. M. (2017). *iGen: Why today's super-connected kids are growing up less*

    rebellious, more tolerant, less happy--and completely unprepared for adulthood.

    Atria Paperback.

Van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action*

    Sensitive pedagogy. State University of New York Press.

Vinayak, S., & Judge, J. (2018). Resilience and empathy as predictors of psychological

    wellbeing among adolescents. *International Journal of Health Sciences and*

    Research, 8(4), 192-200.

    https://www.ijhsr.org/IJHSR_Vol.8_Issue.4_April2018/29.pdf

Walley, C. T., & Grothaus, T. (2013). A qualitative examination of school counselors' training to recognize and respond to adolescent mental health issues. *Journal of School Counseling, 11*(11), 1-32.

Wigfield, A., Lutz, S. L., & Wagner, A. L. (2005). Early adolescents' development across the middle school years: Implications for school counselors. *Professional School Counseling, 9*(2). doi: 2156759X0500900206.

Wong, D. W., Hall, K. R., Justice, C. A., & Hernandez, L. W. (2015). *Counseling individuals through the lifespan*. Sage Publications.

Young, R., Len-Ríos, M., & Young, H. (2017). Romantic motivations for social media use, social comparison, and online aggression among adolescents. *Computers in Human Behavior, 75*, 385-395. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2017.04.021

Zyromski, B., Hudson, T. D., Baker, E., & Granello, D. H. (2019). Guidance counselors or school counselors: How the name of the profession influences perceptions of competence. *Professional School Counseling, 22*(1), 1-10. https://doi.org/10.1177/2156759X19855654

Biographical Statements

Dr. Dana L. Brookover is an assistant professor in the Department of Counseling and Human Services at The University of Scranton in Scranton, Pennsylvania. She is a former school counselor, and her research interests include equitable college and career readiness, lifespan development, and social determinants of health.

Dr. Mary A. Hermann is an associate professor of Counselor Education in the Department of Counseling & Special Education at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia. She is the founder and director of the Women's Lifespan Development Research Lab.

Dr. Michael E. Deitz is a resident in counseling (LPC-R, VA) in private practice and adjunct faculty at The College of William and Mary. Michael strives to understand the lived experiences of different populations to promote advocacy for marginalized groups. His passions are in qualitative research and lifespan development.