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A Qualitative Study of the Lived Relational Experiences of Sex Trafficked Women

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by

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Abstract

Research on sex trafficking has yet to explore the lived relational experiences of sex trafficked women. Relationships are crucial to human functioning and the lack of relationships can lead to adverse effects. The study utilized qualitative phenomenology as well as a humanistic-existential lens to analyze the data gathered from 10 participants through two semi-structured interviews. The themes from the initial analysis were: (a) Trauma Ridden Relationships, (b) Ambivalent Relationships, (c) If Someone Cared, (d) Friend or Foe, (e) The Double Edge Sword, (f) and Trust is Difficult. The themes from the secondary analysis with the humanistic-existential lens were: (a) Unconditional Positive Regard, (b) Existential Isolation, (c) and Meaninglessness and Meaning. This study emphasized the uniqueness of sex trafficked victims, an underlying presence of shame, potential issues related to an attachment base, and a protective factor in a supportive adult. The information gained from this study benefited future personal and professional relationships with sex trafficked women due to knowledge about the inner workings of relationships and underlying themes.

Keywords: sex trafficking, relational experiences

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Beverly and Charles Morris, thank you for teaching me to believe in myself and to always reach for the stars. I would not be here without your unconditional love and support. And to Michka, I love you and thank you for believing in my dreams.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Human trafficking is defined as the sale of an individual for profit (Human Trafficking Hotline, 2018f). Since 2007, 40,200 cases of human trafficking have been reported to the United States' National Human Trafficking Hotline (2018a). The National Human Trafficking Hotline (2018f) is a direct telephone service accessible in the U.S. that strives to deliver support and resources to individuals directly or indirectly impacted by human trafficking. In 2015, Taylor and Francis Online established the *Journal of Human Trafficking*, which is the first and only journal dedicated to providing research to the community about trafficked individuals. In the short time since the journal was founded, five volumes have been published annually with approximately 6 articles per volume on topics such as awareness, prevention, and knowledge of human trafficking, including sex trafficking (Taylor & Francis Online, 2015). Sex trafficking is described as when force, fraud, or coercion is utilized to cause an individual to commit a commercial sex act (Shared Hope International, 2020). A commercial sex act includes: a sexual act or pornography in exchange for anything of value (Shared Hope International, 2020).

Beyond the *Journal of Human Trafficking*, social work, criminal law, sexual or interpersonal violence, nursing or medical, and immigration or migration journals have published a smattering of articles on sex trafficking prior to 2000. Since 2000, there has been growing interest in this relatively new and important area of investigation.

The published research from all fields seems to commonly focus on sociodemographic information about the characteristics or risk factors related to becoming a victim of sex trafficking, the physical and mental health consequences of

being trafficked, the recruitment process, key identifying information for professionals, and attempts at accurately estimating the number of individuals involved in sex trafficking. Despite the growing research interest, there is still an overall lack of information about this population. Some examples of missing information about sex trafficked individuals include: any information on adult males and their sex trafficking experiences, an evidence-based practices for treatment, and the relational experiences this population has while being sex trafficked and after sex trafficking. This lack of information creates gaps in the literature that, if addressed, would increase awareness, prevention, therapeutic models, and policy. Such research is particularly important to inform the practice of mental health providers, agencies dedicated to assisting this population, and other service providers.

Background of the Problem

Across the world, the research states, there are approximately 4.8 million individuals currently being sex trafficked (International Labor Organization, 2016). The U.S. has an escalating population of victims being human trafficked and especially sex trafficked (Deshpande & Nour, 2013). Typically, the average age of initial entry into sex trafficking is between 12 and 14-years old (U.S. Department of Justice, 2004). The vast majority of these victims are commonly runaways, due to some form of abuse or neglect, which causes them to be vulnerable and impressionable targets for recruitment (Clawson, Dutch, Solomon, & Grace, 2009; Jordan et al., 2013; Oram, Khondoker, Abas, Broadbent, & Howard, 2015; Polaris, 2014; Raphael & Myers-Powell, 2010). When 25 ex-sex traffickers were surveyed about whom they were searching for, each in some capacity responded they were hunting for a “vulnerable woman” (Raphael & Myers-

Powell, 2010, p. 5). The survey deemed the ex-sex traffickers were referring to “vulnerable women” based on data informed by quotes gathered while surveying them (Raphael & Myers-Powell, 2010). Two examples of quotes from ex-sex traffickers about these “vulnerable women” include: “Girls who ran away from home or were put out by their parents. Ladies who were pretty but were on welfare, drop outs, you know you can smell desperation. If she is hungry, she will go...” and “Any player can tell when a girl has the look of desperation that you know she needs attention or love. It’s something you start to have a sixth sense about...” (Raphael & Myers-Powell, 2010, p. 5).

With increasing sex trafficking rates in the U.S., federal and state laws have been implemented to promote awareness, prevention, and protection (Deshpande & Nour, 2013; Atkinson, Curnin, & Hanson, 2016; Polaris, 2019). Despite federal and state laws, recruitment through practiced grooming strategies and social media sites seem to maintain the victim pool of young girls (Williamson & Prior, 2009; Raphael & Ashley, 2008; O’Connor & Healy, 2006; Raphael & Myers-Powell, 2010; Latonero, 2011). Commonly, the recruiters of victims know their victim and use strategies such as threats or violence to ensure the victim’s submission (Williamson & Prior, 2009; Raphael & Ashley, 2008; Whitaker & Hinterlong, 2008). If a victim does not directly know a trafficker, they can become connected on social media sites; the trafficker can groom through social media just like they would face-to-face (Raphael & Myers-Powell, 2010).

Victims of sex trafficking are generally exposed to a multitude of damaging conditions, which can harmfully impact their physical, emotional, and mental health (Desphande & Nour, 2013). A few examples of the physical, emotional, and mental health consequences of being sex trafficked include but are not limited to sexually

transmitted diseases or infections (STD/STI), neurological issues, physical injuries, gastrointestinal issues, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, and increased suicide attempts (Zimmerman et al., 2008; Kiss et al., 2015; Lederer & Wetzel, 2014). It is essential for medical professionals to be mindful of the symptoms and diagnoses related to the consequences of being sex trafficked in order to increase the likelihood of identifying victims and providing them with proper resources and services (McClain & Garrity, 2011; Deshpande & Nour, 2013; Coppola & Cantwell, 2016). However, medical professionals are not the only professionals who come into contact with victims of sex trafficking; victims of sex trafficking commonly have numerous interactions with professionals from a variety of fields (Polaris, 2014; Baldwin, Eisenman, Sayles, Ryan, & Chuang, 2011). Aside from medical professionals, victims of sex trafficking come into regular contact with law enforcement and social workers as well (Polaris, 2014; Baldwin et al., 2011).

Individuals who are being sex trafficked or have been sex trafficked maintain their basic human needs, such as the need to interact with other individuals (Jonason, Webster, & Lindsey, 2008). In general, all humans have this psychological need and when not met psychological and health dysfunctions ensue (Jonason et al., 2008; Bowlby, 1988; Perlman & Peplau, 1984; Hazan & Shaver, 1994). If this need is met then, it can provide an individual with emotional support, care, sexual gratification, trust, intimacy, love, and happiness (Hazan & Shaver, 1994; Reis & Shaver, 1988; van Deurzen, 2013). If social connections are unavailable then individuals can participate in what is considered “social snacking”, which can occur through mediums such as watching television or self-talk to fulfill this need (Jonason et al., 2008). Other individuals have

acquired a pet to substitute for another person (Jonason et al., 2008; Epley, Waytz, Akalis, Cacioppo, 2008). In relation to sex trafficking victims, there is limited literature about the relationships victims have with others in general while being trafficked and afterwards, but it has been noted that minors in treatment for sex trafficking need to learn a variety of life skills such as how to build healthy relationships (Twigg, 2017). Given evidence that sex trafficked children need to learn to build healthy relationships, one might assume that adults also need to learn how to as well.

Federal and State Laws

In the U.S. there are federal and state laws associated with sex trafficking. Laws related to sex trafficking began in the 1970s and have since then grown to meet the current needs of sex trafficked victims (Polaris, 2019). These laws include: The Mann Act, Trafficking Victims Protection Act, Prosecutorial Remedies and Other Tools to End the Exploitation of Children Today (PROTECT), and the National Defense Act of 2013 (Polaris, 2019). The instituted state laws have created more depth to federal sex trafficking laws by implementing regulations and educational procedures (Atkinson et al., 2016). However, age of consent laws mandated by each state have created a window of confusion when discussing sexually active minors. Each of the federal and the state laws were explained in detail below.

The first relatable legislation for trafficking was The Mann Act, which was originally established in 1910 and later updated in 1978 and 1986 (Polaris, 2019). This was the first act to protect minors against being taken across state lines or transported internationally with the intention of sexual exploitation (Polaris, 2019). Disregarding and

defying the act was determined to be punishable for up to twenty years in prison (Polaris, 2019).

In 2000, the U.S. passed into law the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA), which initiated legislation about human trafficking by mandating protections for victims, prevention methods, and penalties for traffickers (Polaris, 2019). In 2003, the law was reauthorized and included protection for victims and their families against deportation as well as allowing victims to sue their trafficker(s) and added human trafficking under the list of offenses under the Racketeering Influenced Corrupt Organizations (RICO) statute (Polaris, 2019). This update mandated the Attorney General report to Congress annually about the measures being expended to contest trafficking (Polaris, 2019). In 2005, the TVPA was reauthorized to begin a pilot program to assist state programs and sought out more possibilities for prevention (Polaris, 2019).

The TVPA 2008 reauthorization required the government to provide individuals applying for jobs with information about their rights as workers (Polaris, 2019). This reauthorization included more protections for those with T visas, which is a type of visa obtained by a victim of trafficking or a family member of someone who has been trafficked and allows him or her to remain in the U.S. if they agree to testify against his or her trafficker (Polaris, 2019; Rescue & Restore, 2012). Under this new authorization, unaccompanied traveling children, who are not citizens, are required to be screened as potential human trafficking victims (Polaris, 2019). As well as the additional preventative and protection strategies, this updated version of the TVPA improved the definition of various types of trafficking, making it easier to prosecute traffickers (Polaris, 2019).

The last updated version of the TVPA in 2013 reiterates the importance of the relationship between state legislature and law enforcement and the need to act mindfully when pressing legal charges against victims of trafficking (Polaris, 2019). This update strengthened organizations by reinforcing the concept of U.S. residents not being granted access to products created by victims of trafficking (Polaris, 2019). Lastly, the amendment protected U.S. residents during a crisis or disaster by improving the response rates in areas with high rates of sex trafficking to protect new potential victims (Polaris, 2019).

In 2003, the Prosecutorial Remedies and Other Tools to End the Exploitation of Children Today (PROTECT) Act increased the penalties for sex tourism (traveling to engage in sexual activities) with children in the U.S. and internationally (Polaris, 2019). The PROTECT Act introduced the Amber Alert System, which is used when a child has been reported missing and provides mass alerts to the public about the missing child (Polaris, 2019). This act promotes grants to be funded for children who are living in transitional housing locations and have suffered from sexual abuse (Polaris, 2019).

The National Defense Act of 2013 established the possibility for the government and contracts with government affiliations to be investigated for human trafficking (Polaris, 2019). This also permitted government agencies to terminate work contracts without penalty if a contracted agency or an individual within that agency is involved in human trafficking (Polaris, 2019). Government agencies worth more than half a million dollars, are required to sign paperwork confirming the agency and its employees are not involved in human trafficking (Polaris, 2019).

The 2015 Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act defines sex trafficking as,

“The recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, obtaining, patronizing, or soliciting of a person for the purposes of a commercial sex act, in which the commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such an act has not attained 18 years of age” (22 USC § 7102, 2015).

The Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act essentially protects individuals from being sex trafficked and recognized trafficking of children as a punishable offense. Children under the age of 18 are not required by law to provide proof of force, fraud, or coercion being present (Williamson & Prior, 2009).

Despite these federal statutes criminalizing human trafficking and providing prevention strategies and protection to victims, there have been 17 states to enact additional legislation to protect the community against human trafficking (Atkinson et al., 2016). Ten states, including Kansas, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New Jersey, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, and Washington either mandate or recommend education about human trafficking (Atkinson et al., 2016). Louisiana, Massachusetts, and Minnesota, however, only have human trafficking educational information about minors (Atkinson et al., 2016). California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, and North Carolina have included new regulations on reporting human trafficking (Atkinson et al., 2016). Of those states, Colorado, Massachusetts, and North Carolina have enacted both education laws and reporting laws (Atkinson et al., 2016). All of the reporting laws only mandate reporting about trafficked minors, except for Illinois that has extended the maximum age to 22-years old (Atkinson et al., 2016).

Of the 13 states that created educational laws regarding human trafficking, only three - Massachusetts, Missouri, and New Jersey - mandate education about human trafficking (Atkinson et al., 2016). Colorado, Michigan, Texas and North Carolina have established a task force to implement their education while the other nine states have not delegated who should be implementing this education (Atkinson et al., 2016). The guidelines for the intended education seem convoluted with no more information given other than the need for it to be created and approved by the task force and/or increase awareness of human trafficking (Atkinson et al., 2016). The individuals being provided a voluntary or mandatory human trafficking education seminar are determined by each state and vary from being totally unspecified to specifically targeting certain fields or careers like law enforcement, social workers, medical professionals, hotel and motel staff, employers, counselors, and the general public (Atkinson et al., 2016).

California, Colorado, Illinois, Maryland, and Massachusetts define a “reporter” of trafficking broadly as any individual in law enforcement, the medical field, school employees, and social workers (Atkinson et al., 2016). Florida and North Carolina have dictated through their legal system that all residents of either of those states are a mandated reporter (Atkinson et al., 2016). In each state, there are potential penalties associated with failure to report, which increase if repeatedly neglected (Atkinson et al., 2016). The majority of states with specific reporting laws require the incident of trafficking be reported immediately or as soon as possible and is typically done so via phone call to the Department of Child and Family Services (Atkinson et al., 2016). Commonly, the information included in a trafficking report is as follows: the child and legal guardians names, the residential address, the age of the child, extent of the abuse,

evidence of previous abuse, the name and address of the school or the last school the child attended, the name of the alleged perpetrator, demographic information about other children in the home, and any actions taken such as photographs or x-rays (Atkinson et al., 2016, p. 125-126).

These 17 states are seeking to improve education and reporting regulations in regards to individuals who have been trafficked, but a consensus on the overall educational experience has not been determined. In addition to a lack of overall consensus on educational strategies and reporting logistics about sex trafficking, there are differences with age of consent laws throughout the U.S. (U.S. Department of Health, n.d.). The age of consent refers to the age determined by each state as to when an individual can consensually participate in sexual intercourse (U.S. Department of Health, n.d.). These regulations typically include a minimum age meaning a person cannot be younger than that age to have sexual intercourse and age differential regulations pertaining to the minimum and maximum ages of individuals participating in sexual intercourse (U.S. Department of Health, n.d.). For example, the state of New Jersey has an age of consent regulation of 16, but individuals who are 13 years old can legally engage in sexual activities as long as their partner is within the age differential of 4 years (U.S. Department of Health, n.d.). However, in a state like Ohio with an age of consent of 16 it would be illegal to have sex with someone younger than 13 regardless of the age of the other individual (U.S. Department of Health, n.d.). If the individual is between the ages of 13-16 in Ohio, it is illegal for sexual intercourse to occur with a partner who is over the age of 18 (U.S. Department of Health, n.d.). In general, each state has delegated

their own laws in regards to minors having sexual intercourse and those who have sexual encounters with those under the age of 18 (U.S. Department of Health, n.d.).

The U.S. federal and state governments are shifting towards providing sex trafficking victims with assistance through awareness, knowledge, as well as promoting regulations about reporting sex trafficking. Aside from mandated federal laws, each state government is within their own right to dictate new laws if they adhere to the standard set by the federal government. Overall, there is a lack of a national consensus on educating the public about sex trafficking as well as reporting it and age of consent laws.

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to explore the lived relational experiences of victims of sex trafficking through a qualitative, phenomenological approach. Relational experiences in this context refer to the victim's perceptions of past and current relationships with family, friends, romantic partners, professionals, and others. The focus of the study is discovering the types and nature of the relationship's victims of sex trafficking encounter and maintain, understanding the experiences of relationships, and the perceived impact of these relationships on the victims of sex trafficking. A secondary goal of the study is to shed light on the lived relational experiences of victims of sex trafficking by applying a humanistic-existential lens to the qualitative data. The humanistic-existential theoretical lens is based in the philosophy of phenomenology, and is therefore congruent with a phenomenological qualitative analysis. In addition, the humanistic-existential tradition is based in relational knowing, making it a useful lens for the study.

Significance of the Study

Social learning theory posits that all learning is essentially relational learning or vicarious learning from watching the actions of others (Bandura, 1971). Similarly, a major trend in research on children is on social emotional learning, which also has a strong relational component (Hemmeter & Conroy, 2018; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Research about minors who were previously sex trafficked found that interpersonal relationships have the power to be both protective and foster resiliency in children (O'Brien, 2018). Relational experiences inform our identity and define our self-perceptions – both positive and negative. While healing from trauma, “Recovery can take place only in the context of relationships; it cannot occur in isolation” (Herman, 1997, p. 133). By creating new connections with others, damaged psychological faculties like trust are re-created (Herman, 1997). Even therapeutic processes, especially Humanistic theories, emphasize the importance of relationships in therapy by stating, “If I can provide a certain type of relationship, the other person will discover within himself or herself the capacity to use that relationship for growth and change, and personal development will occur” (Rogers, 1961, p. 33). Therefore, therapeutic relationships have the power to promote healing and growth (Rogers, 1961). If we can better understand relationships of sex trafficking victims with family, friends, romantic partners, and professionals such as case managers, counselors, and law enforcement, the knowledge would inform the therapeutic and healing processes.

This study contributed to the collective understanding of the relational worlds of sex trafficking victims, providing the field with information about the relational structure between the victim and their family, friends, and significant other(s). From the study we

hope to gain the knowledge to develop strategies for growth or continuation of practices by professionals and ideas provided by victims on how professionals could improve the experiences to be more positive and beneficial to the victim. This could expand the professional work of medical providers, law enforcement, and mental health care providers to be better prepared to encounter and interact with sex trafficking victims.

The family and friends of an individual who is currently being sex trafficked or has previously been could benefit from this information by having a better understanding of what the victim is or was experiencing during their relationship. If personal relationships are not possible to maintain during sex trafficking, then it could help family and friends gain more awareness and knowledge as to why the victim could not maintain the relationship. The reunification of child sex trafficking victims and their families includes issues such as the victim experiencing resentment towards the family for not understanding their trafficking experience, the family's inability to assist with anger and sadness, financial strains for healthcare costs, and the social stigma of having a relative as a victim of sex trafficking (Twigg, 2017). Providing the experiences of relationships with families and friends could give them a better understanding and the awareness of a need to prepare for emotions, financial burdens, and social stigma.

This study could promote policy changes amongst mental health professionals like counselors and social workers by informing their clinical practice. Other fields like law enforcement and the medical field could be impacted as well with information related to how sex trafficked women experience them and highlight areas of growth or improvement these fields can foster. It also provided information to families, friends, and

significant other(s) about the relationships sex trafficked women experience while being sex trafficked and afterwards.

Definitions

This section includes definitions of terms related to sex trafficking. There are many different understandings of the terms described here. The definitions in this section inform the reader of the intended meaning of the term as used in this study. The terms provided in this section are important in understanding the results section because it is the common slang utilized by individuals who have been sex trafficked.

Human trafficking -- “The act of recruiting, harboring, transporting, providing, or obtaining a person for compelled labor or commercial sex acts through the use of force, fraud, or coercion” (U.S. Department of State, 2013, p. 29). The term “force” implies any physical harm, restraint, or sexual assault to maintain control of a human trafficking victim whereas “fraud” insinuates the false promise of employment, wages, love, or that a better life will be provided to a victim (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2012). Similarly, “coercion” includes any type of psychological manipulation, threats, or shaming to obtain control of an individual (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2012).

Bonded labor--a specific form of coercion by using the manipulation of debt in any capacity that requires an individual to work until the debt is paid (U.S. Department of State, 2013). Labor exploitation typically occurs in a private residence where an individual works at as well as resides in (U. S. Department of State, 2013). In places such as these, there are legal difficulties of formally investigating such premises, and a victim can be retained on the property with his or her own living area while continually being

exploited (U.S. Department of State, 2013). All forms of trafficking can occur to children as well and labor trafficking minors is referred to as “forced child labor” (U.S. Department of State, 2013).

Child soldiers-- “a manifestation of human trafficking when it involves the unlawful recruitment or use of children - through force, fraud, or coercion - by armed forces as combatants or other forms of labor” (U.S. Department of State, 2013, p. 37). Through this type of exploitation, children can be used as fighters, guards, spies, servants, messengers, etc. (U.S. Department of State, 2013). It is highly common for both boys and girls to be sexually abused while being exploited in some form of a role as a child soldier (U.S. Department of State, 2013).

To elaborate further on the various types of trafficking, sex trafficking is defined by the 2015 Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act as,

“The recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, obtaining, patronizing, or soliciting of a person for the purposes of a commercial sex act, in which the commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such an act has not attained 18 years of age” (22 USC § 7102, 2015).

For victims under the age of 18, it is not necessary to determine if there is force, fraud, or coercion present (Williamson & Prior, 2009).

Sex trafficking, forced labor, bonded labor, involuntary domestic servitude, forced child labor, and the exploitation of child labor are all terms residing under the umbrella of human trafficking. For the purposes of this study, sex trafficking is the most important term to be familiar with.

Pimp, Trafficker, or Facilitator--The perpetrator facilitating force, fraud, or coercion to economically benefit from the sexual exploitation of a person (Raphael, Feifer, Bigelsen, Dempsey, & Rhodes, 2017).

Connector-- Appear as low-level participants in trafficking by providing an introduction between the intended victim and a trafficker (Williamson & Prior, 2009).

Recruiter-- An individual who recruits new individuals into trafficking for traffickers (Williamson & Prior, 2009).

Bottom bitch --Usually a woman who is close to the pimp, she is knowledgeable about his financial plans to foster compensation, has the power to demand the quota from the women, and she can implement punishment if another trafficked woman disregards the established rules (Williamson & Prior, 2009).

Watchers--A low-level position in the trafficking ring that escort women to and from their location for providing sexual services (Williamson & Prior, 2009).

Wife-in-laws--Two trafficked women that have been setup to live in the same residence together and are commonly asked to call their pimp “daddy” (Williamson & Prior, 2009).

The game or the life--Being sex trafficked (Awaken, 2018b; Williamson & Prior, 2009)

Client/John/Customer/Trick/Date--An individual purchasing services from a sex trafficked constituent (Awaken, 2018b).

Renegade/Unicorn--A person who is choosing to participate in prostitution and does not have a pimp (Awaken, 2018b).

Caught a case--Someone who was arrested for sex trafficking as either a pimp or victim (Shared International Hope, 2019).

Street name--a nickname a person is referred to as in order to avoid being identified by his or her real name.

Chapter II: Literature Review

The information provided in this section included details about the differences between prostitution and sex trafficking, the estimated number of sex trafficked victims as well as the statistical issues with those estimates, the recruitment process for sex trafficked victims, common characteristics of sex trafficked individuals, the physical and mental health consequences of being sex trafficked, information related to trauma, sex trafficking and the system, and the documented relational experiences of sex trafficked women.

Prostitution vs. Sex Trafficking

The terms prostitution and sex trafficking are commonly misused and confused for one another. This confusion is likely due to prostitution and sex trafficking having similar features. This section explains the difference between the two as well as two sides of a feminist debate about prostitution.

Prostitution is described as, “a sexual act in exchange for money or anything of value (drugs, shelter, etc.)” (Raphael et al., 2017, p. 5). A prostitute is the term used to describe an individual who ascribes to prostitution. In the literature, the term prostitution is used interchangeably with sex work, sex trade, sex trade industry, and commercial sexual exploitation (Raphael et al., 2017; Farley, 2006). Prostitution can physically occur on the street, in a massage parlor, strip club, home, or hotel (Farley, 2006). In the U.S., prostitution is illegal except for in ten counties all located in the state of Nevada (Thomson Reuters, 2019; Rindels, 2018). The counties that uphold prostitution include: Churchill, Esmeralda, Lander, Mineral, Nye, Storey, Elko, Humboldt, Lyon, and White Pine (Rindels, 2018). Prostitution remains legal in counties with less than 400,000

residents or if the local government determines otherwise (Thomson Reuters, 2019). The counties with legalized prostitution require prostitution only to occur in licensed locations known as brothels, which are mandated by regulations (Thomson Reuters, 2019). Those regulations include: prostitutes be 18 or older and participating on their own free will, prostitutes regularly submit to STD and HIV testing, condoms must be used, a brothel cannot be located within 400 yards of a school or church, a brothel cannot be located on a main street, and a brothel cannot be advertised where prostitution is legal (Thomson Reuters, 2019).

As previously mentioned, sex trafficking requires an individual is subject to force, fraud, or coercion to perform a commercial sex act whereas prostitution is the exchange of sex act for compensation (*22 USC § 7102*, 2015; Raphael et al., 2017). Therefore, providing consensual sex acts is the primary difference between the two, and despite this discrepancy there are still disagreements as to whether an individual can genuinely consent to prostitution (Baker, 2015; Farley, 2006).

Many prominent anti-trafficking groups like the feminist abolitionist group believe a woman would not participate in prostitution unless forced or coerced and believe prostitution is a form of violence (Farley, 2006; Baker 2015; Weitzer, 2007). Wisterich (2000, p. 63) described prostitution as a, “choice for those who have no choice”, Farley (2006, p. 110-111) describes it as, “...global forces that choose you for prostitution are sex discrimination, race discrimination, poverty, abandonment, debilitating sexual and verbal abuse, poor education or no education, and a job that does not pay a living wage.” Ultimately, this ideology believes there are structural factors influencing an individual to perform sexual acts for compensation.

Several abolitionists seek to eradicate prostitution by ending the “demand” for sexual services through shame and criminalizing consumers (Bergquist, 2015). Another component, highlighted by anti-trafficking groups, is how a vast majority of prostitutes typically begin their sex work as minors, who would have been defined as child sex trafficking victims according to the TVPA (Bergquist, 2015). Leading one to wonder if sex trafficked children grow into adulthood and continue to be sex trafficked or if they continue consensually.

However, those who are opposed to this ideology believe a woman can choose to perform commercial sex acts for compensation and should be allowed to do so (Weitzer, 2007; Baker, 2015). The goals of this group are to empower women, increase harm reduction, and provide supportive services and resources to benefit this group (Weitzer, 2007). The movement against sex work has been described as a “moral crusade” to criminalize prostitution in the U.S. and in doing so can cause greater risks for sex workers (Weitzer, 2010; Bergquist, 2015).

Ideas regarding consent and prostitution are convoluted. As well as the notions about legalizing prostitution and the impact it would have on sex trafficking. Economic theory has produced two considerations opposite of one another about the impact of legalizing prostitution (Cho, Dreher, & Neumayer, 2012). The first consideration is referred to as the scale effect and emphasizes how some people are naturally deterred from participating as a sex worker or consumer of sex work because it is illegal (Cho, 2012). If prostitution becomes legalized, then individuals who normally might not have become a sex worker or consumer might do so because it is no longer illegal (Cho, 2012). Even if taxes were increased upon legalization then businesses could continue to operate

illegally and would only be impacted if tax evasion were enforced more strictly than prostitution before it was legalized (Cho, 2012). If the demand for the supply of sex workers increased then the amount of sex trafficking victims would increase to meet the needs of consumers (Cho, 2012).

The other consideration is referred to as the substitution effect, which replaces legalized prostitutes as the supply for victims of sex trafficking (Cho, 2012). The idea is that consumers would favor prostitutes who reside in close proximity over victims of sex trafficking (Cho, 2012). However, after analyzing the data collected from the Global Programme against Trafficking in Human Beings (GPAT) database about human trafficking inflow from 150 countries, it was discovered the scale effect surpasses the substitution effect (Cho, 2012). Countries with legalized prostitution have a larger influx of human trafficking victims, and sex workers are not being substituted as the total supply in prostitution (Cho, 2012). However, even with studies such as this one, there are individuals who support the legalization of sex work to promote the empowerment, protection, and regulations to recognize sex work as genuine labor (Weitzer, 2007). Despite disagreements amongst individuals in regards to prostitution, the primary difference between prostitution and sex trafficking is the notion of consent. Sex trafficked individuals cannot and are not consenting participants when being forced, frauded, or coerced into providing sexual acts for another's fiscal benefit. However, within prostitution a prostitute participating in sexual acts for compensation is doing so willingly and is therefore consenting.

Estimates of the Prevalence of Sex Trafficking

This section expands upon statistics related to global and national rates of human and sex trafficking. Also included in the section are concerns about the mechanisms of collection and the analysis of sex trafficking data.

The phrase “human trafficking” serves as an umbrella term for a variety of trafficking types like sex trafficking, forced labor, bonded labor, involuntary domestic servitude, forced child labor, and the exploitation of child soldiers (U.S. Department of State, 2013). According to the U.S. Department of Justice (Bureau of Justice Assistance, U.S. Department of Justice, 2015), human trafficking is one of the most profitable and quickly growing illegal organizations in the world, and the International Labor Organization (2016) estimated there have been roughly 40 million victims of human trafficking. Another form of human trafficking, “labor trafficking” or forced labor, is similar to sex trafficking because it requires a victim be forced, frauded, or coerced to obtain free labor (U.S. Department of State, 2013). The International Labor Organization (2015) has estimated there are roughly 20.9 million adults and children who are victims of forced labor. The majority of those victims are adult women, which include about 11.4 million victims (International Labor Organization, 2015). A few examples of settings forced labor could occur in are restaurants, private homes, construction sites, hotels, and meat-packing facilities (U.S. Department of State, 2013).

As previously stated, the International Labor Organization (2016) estimates there are 4.8 million people globally being sex trafficked. Within the United States, the National Human Trafficking Hotline (2018a) has been collecting data based on hotline calls, emails, and webforms since 2007 to document human trafficking. Since 2007, there

have been 186,234 calls received, 13,337 emails received, 15,436 webforms, and 51,919 human trafficking cases reported (National Human Trafficking Hotline, 2018a). In 2018, the National Human Trafficking Hotline (2018a) was contacted 41,088 times and 10,949 cases of human trafficking reported; the top 3 states with the most reported cases were California with 1,656, Texas with 1,000, and Florida with 767. Of those reported cases, there were 7,859 reports of sex trafficking, 1,249 reports of labor trafficking, and 639 reports of sex and labor trafficking (National Human Trafficking Hotline, 2018a). The majority of victims in these reports were women (7,126), and men (1,137) (National Human Trafficking Hotline, 2018a). There were also more adult victims (5,070) than children (2,378) in the group (National Human Trafficking Hotline, 2018a). Most of the victims, 1,499, were citizens of the United States while the other 1,237 were foreign nationals (National Human Trafficking Hotline, 2018a).

The reports taken by the National Human Trafficking Hotline may lead to some concerns when compared to the state-to-state research figures due to their lack of correspondence with one another. The discrepancy in the figures could be caused by reporting directly to law enforcement or the lack of reporting sex trafficking. Elizabeth Smart, a survivor of human trafficking and an advocate against trafficking, was asked in an interview about why she did not run away while being trafficked and she responded, “It’s not because any of us enjoys being hurt. It’s not because any one of us enjoys being raped or kidnapped. It’s because we do everything we can to survive, and there’s reasons why we make those decisions” (Salinas, 2018). The notion of fleeing from trafficking might seem like an easy feat, but there are valid reasons as to why victims of trafficking choose not to (Salinas, 2018). A few of those reasons include: threats and intimidation,

shame, addiction to drugs or alcohol, debt bondage, being isolated in an unfamiliar country, distrusting authorities, a sense of deserving to be trafficked, and Stockholm syndrome, which is the emotional attachment to a trafficker (Salinas, 2018; Department of Homeland Security, 2017; Reid, 2016; Hammond & McGlone, 2014; Bradley, 2013). With the immeasurable amounts of internal and external barriers deterring victims of sex trafficking from escaping, it seems applicable that those same reasons cause them to not report.

The upcoming studies present information gathered by a specific state that represents the estimates for sex trafficking in a Northeast state, two Western states, a Southwest state, and a Midwest state. The states were chosen to represent a region of the U.S; the additional Western state was added due to this study's origination in a Western state. The study for each state presented data related to sex trafficking from a specific area in the state or for the overall state. The data then was compared to the reports gathered in that state from the National Human Trafficking Hotline.

Researchers in New York (NY) surveyed and interviewed 159 agencies such as county law enforcement, rape crisis agencies, and juvenile detention facilities in 11 counties within NY (Gragg, Petta, Bernstein, Eisen, & Quinn, 2007). After analyzing the data it was concluded there were 2,652 children being commercially exploited in NY (Gragg et al., 2007). The National Human Trafficking Hotline (2018b) reported that in the state of New York there have been 2,461 total human trafficking cases reported since 2007.

Carpenter and Gates (2016) facilitated a research project in San Diego with an emphasis on gang involvement in sex trafficking across a 10-year span. Overall the

researchers had 702 participants from prostitution first-offender programs, sex trafficking victim intake forms, information police arrest records, high school focus groups, and in-depth interviews with gang members who had been previously affiliated with sex trafficking (Carpenter & Gates, 2016). Through the analysis of survey data collected from this broad group of individuals it was estimated that there were anywhere between 3,417 - 8,108 people being sexually exploited over this 10-year period (Carpenter & Gates, 2016). Another concluded estimate was that law enforcement typically only arrests between 15-20% of individuals committing trafficking offenses (Carpenter & Gates, 2016). It was stated in the report that, “Virtually no community in San Diego remains untouched by sex trafficking” (Carpenter & Gates, 2016, p. 18). The National Human Trafficking Hotline (2018c) has concluded there have been 8,516 reports of human trafficking made in the state of California since 2007. This figure represents the entire state of California whereas the study from Carpenter and Gates only represents a sizeable city in the state.

The most recent estimates of human trafficking in Texas assume there have been 313,000 victims of human trafficking and about 79,000 of those were minors who were victims of sex trafficking (Busch-Armendariz et al., 2016). Researchers in Texas further explored the financial burden human trafficking causes the state, which was about 6.6 billion dollars (Busch-Armendariz et al., 2016). Despite the enormous figures Texas concluded, there were differences in the figures from the National Human Trafficking Hotline (2018d), who reported there had been 4,788 human trafficking cases reported since 2007 in Texas.

The Polaris Project developed a document based on information from the National Human Trafficking Hotline for the state of Nevada that suggested there were 539 human trafficking cases reported from 2012-2016, and there were potentially 970 people being trafficked (Polaris, 2017). Based on a research article that collected information from Backpage, an online advertisement website open to the public that has historically been used to sell victims of sex trafficking, researchers estimated the number of individuals sexually exploited per month as 5,016 (The Human Trafficking Initiative, 2018). This article highlights areas within Nevada as being more popular for the commercial sex market like Reno, Elko, and Las Vegas (The Human Trafficking Initiative, 2018). In comparison, the National Human Trafficking Hotline (2018g) has registered 1,205 human trafficking cases reported since 2007.

Exploring sex trafficking, more specifically in Las Vegas, they had implemented a collaborative research project between the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police and Arizona State University Office of Sex Trafficking Intervention Research (ASU STIR, 2014). The purpose was to examine law enforcement efforts in identifying and investigating sex trafficking and while doing so researchers identified 190 victims of sex trafficking: 62% were minors and 34% were adults (ASU STIR, 2014).

In 2013, the Attorney General, State Representative, Governor, and Legislature of Michigan launched the first Michigan Commission on Human Trafficking to facilitate a plan to discover, identify, and prevent human trafficking (Michigan Commission on Human Trafficking, 2013). The report concluded there was a lack of data on human trafficking and estimated there were hundreds and possibly thousands of people currently being trafficked (Michigan Commission on Human Trafficking, 2013). Despite the lack

of concrete data, the National Human Trafficking Hotline (2018e) reported 1,359 registered cases of human trafficking in Michigan since 2007.

Although some states implement strategies to collect estimates of sex trafficking there are barriers in place negatively impacting their ability to do so. These barriers then impact the ability for states to collaborate on a national estimate.

Challenges with the Estimates of Sex Trafficking

Despite the previously provided estimates of sex trafficking in the U.S., there are several issues with these figures. Brunovskis and Surtees (2010, p.4), stated, "...on the scale of human trafficking or reported increases or decreases in prevalence of trafficking are generally not trustworthy and contain a number of biases making them of little practical value." These figures are deemed untrustworthy because of a number of reasons like the inherent nature of trafficking and/or the methods of research (Edwards & Mika, 2017; Weitzer, 2012; Brunovskis & Surtees, 2010; Tyldum & Brunovskis, 2005).

Human trafficking is a criminal offense and therefore offenders and victims of sex trafficking remain hidden subsequently, limiting the amount of awareness or knowledge about the population (Edwards & Mika, 2017; Weitzer, 2012; Tyldum & Brunovskis, 2005). This hidden population impacts research because those individuals are inaccessible (Tyldum & Brunovskis, 2005). After thoroughly reading the literature about sex trafficking, the bulk of the articles provide data from individuals who sought treatment after being sex trafficked. This idea is explored by researchers Brunovskis and Surtees (2010), who document their desire to explore the reasons for victims denying anti-trafficking services and were unable to ethically access that population without compromising the victims rights to privacy and confidentiality. As well as the issue of

accessing this population, obtaining research data from someone who is actively being trafficked could be dangerous for both the trafficked individual and the researcher (Brunovskis & Surtees, 2010). The question to consider as well, is if individuals who are currently being trafficked would be willing to or capable of providing information for research purposes (Brunovskis & Surtees, 2010).

Many sources of research provided on sex trafficking estimates lack a data collection section, methodology, and measures of validity, which is creating potentially invalid, unreviewed information, and not evidence-based works (Edwards & Mika, 2017). Tools used in research need to be reliable and valid, which means it measures what it intends to and does so consistently (Spector, 1981). Overall, the brunt of studies on trafficking lack empirical data and could potentially result in an individual or agency being misinformed and harming victims of trafficking (Zhang, 2009; Edwards & Mika, 2017).

As the topic of sex trafficking is further delved into it is important to remember these issues in the present literature. The majority of the information presented primarily focused on victims of sex trafficking, who have been removed/rescued or escaped/left their situation because of the complexities in researching those who are currently being trafficked. The majority of the research within this study included articles with methodology sections, references, and underwent a peer-reviewed process.

In conclusion, it is estimated that there are about 4.8 million individuals globally being sex trafficked. In the U.S., thousands to hundreds of thousands of reports about human and sex trafficking have been made. However, there are concerns about the data

collection process and how accurate these figures represent the issue of sex trafficking globally and in the U.S.

Recruitment of Sex Trafficking Victims

There are a variety of methods utilized by a facilitator (or pimp) to identify, fraud, force, or coerce an individual into becoming a victim of sex trafficking. This section highlighted the prevalence of a sex trafficking victim knowing someone from the sex trafficking lifestyle before become trafficked herself. As well as what it means to be groomed, guerilla and finesse pimping, means of control, and the use of social media sites.

Sex trafficking victims are commonly approached by someone they know to join domestic sex trafficking (Williamson & Prior, 2009; Raphael & Ashley, 2008). Research provided by Raphael and Ashley (2008) analyzed 100 women, all who identified themselves as providing sexual acts for compensation and having a pimp. The research catalogues their experiences as becoming a part of the sex trafficking lifestyle. Of those 100 participants, 68% were recruited into domestic sex trafficking; 23% indicated a boyfriend recruited them, 19% specified a friend, 12% reported a pimp, and 10% described a family member recruited them into sex trafficking (Raphael & Ashley, 2008). Of the participants, 23% conveyed how they had to begin prostituting themselves around 15-years old in order to survive due to a poor home-life situation and then many found themselves being recruited into sex trafficking (Raphael & Ashley, 2008).

The grooming process is typically used to foster a connection between sex traffickers and their victims (Herman, 1992; Priebe & Suhr, 2005; O'Connor & Healy, 2006). The steps to groom a victim include: ensnaring, creating dependence, taking

control, and total dominance (O'Connor & Healy, 2006). The ensnarement process requires the trafficker to win trust from the victim and ideally the victim would fall in love with the trafficker (O'Connor & Healy, 2006). After the victim has fallen in love with the trafficker, the trafficker then becomes more possessive and isolates the victim (O'Connor & Healy, 2006). The trafficker would become controlling, dictate her choices, enforce rules, and demand the need for her for the trafficker to be proven (O'Connor & Healy, 2006). After the trafficker has gained control, he then convinces her to perform sexual acts on others for the trafficker to gain money. Overall, the goal of grooming is to create a sense of fear and gratefulness for being allowed to continue to live (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2012).

There are two methods described to recruit sex trafficking victims – finesse and guerilla pimping (Williamson & Prior, 2009). The finesse method utilizes the technique of the “bait and switch” on young girls (Williamson & Prior, 2009). The sex trafficker gains the trust of a girl then tricks her into believing she is being presented with an opportunity (Williamson & Prior, 2009). Once trust is established and a commitment is made, it switches to financial gain for the sex trafficker (Williamson & Prior, 2009). For example, a woman could be promised the opportunity to model for an escort agency by a sex trafficker who is promoting an upcoming modeling business (Williamson & Prior, 2009). The woman then takes the bait and becomes a worker in the escort business, which has no modeling aspect and was never intended to (Williamson & Prior, 2009).

On the other hand, guerilla pimping is facilitated through intimidation, threats, and violence (Williamson & Prior, 2009). A victim of sex trafficking was quoted saying, “He told me that I couldn’t come in every night unless I made \$1,500. One night I only

made maybe \$700. I was tired. I didn't feel good and I was ready to go in. I got back to the hotel room and he tried strangling me, cuz I didn't have enough money" (Williamson Prior, 2009, p. 51).

Parallel to finesse and guerilla pimping, Whitaker and Hinterlong (2008) suggested there are four contexts of control which are control-seeking, control mechanisms, controllability, and resistance. A control-seeking trafficker would have the desire to limit the choices available to a victim of trafficking; such as what she can or cannot wear (Whitaker & Hinterlong, 2008). The mechanisms of control can include threats, intimidation, violence, and accrument of debt to maintain and manage control of an individual (Whitaker & Hinterlong, 2008). Another context is the ability for an individual to resist being controlled, which might demand more controlling behaviors to manage that kind of individual (Whitaker & Hinterlong, 2008). The domains of a single individual the trafficker could have the ability to control have been categorized as: socially, financially, physically, culturally, psychologically, and institutionally (Whitaker & Hinterlong, 2008). Individuals who can autonomously manage these categories are less likely to be controlled or groomed (Whitaker & Hinterlong, 2008).

Whether it is through grooming, finesse pimping, guerilla pimping, or general contexts of control, each of these provide similar methods to gaining and maintaining control of another individual. These methods, however, seem like in-person approaches and yet sex trafficking through social media websites and online advertisement websites is possible as well (Litam, 2017; Williamson & Prior, 2009; Jordan et al., 2013). Some of the websites historically known as being tools for sex traffickers and sex trafficking include: Myspace, Twitter, Facebook, Craigslist, and Backpage (Raphael & Myers-

Powell, 2010; Williamson & Prior, 2009; Jordan et al., 2013; Litam, 2017; The Human Trafficking Initiative, 2018; Latonero, 2011). Typically, social media websites are managed to connect with and groom future victims of sex trafficking while advertisement websites are used to sell victims (Raphael & Myers-Powell, 2010; The Human Trafficking Initiative, 2018).

There are a variety of methods of control, grooming, and pimping that a pimp can utilize to identify, force, fraud, or coerce an individual into unknowingly becoming a victim of sex trafficking. Some versions of pimping are more threatening and domineering compared to the “bait and switch” method. Social media is also an adequate source of contact to initiate and groom a victim of sex trafficking.

Characteristics of Sex Trafficking Victims and Risk Factors

The literature emphasizes common characteristics amongst sex trafficking victims as well as specific risk factors that increase the likelihood of an individual becoming sex trafficked. This section identified and described those risk factors.

The Illinois Criminal Justice Authority (2013, p. 2) described potential victims of sex trafficking as, “...any age, race, or gender; however, young girls are most vulnerable and at risk to be coerced into the sex trade.” According to the U.S. Department of Justice (2004), the average age of entry into sex trafficking is between 12 and 14 years old. Risk factors that increase the likelihood of being sex trafficked include: poverty, running away, homelessness, a limited education, lack of family support, a history of sexual, physical or psychological abuse, mental health issues, learning disabilities, residing in a vulnerable location, substance abuse, or having a parent with substance abuse issues

(Clawson et al., 2009; Jordan et al., 2013; Oram et al., 2015; Sprang, & Cole, 2018; Kaestle, 2012; Polaris, 2014).

Running away from home has been correlated as a significant indicator of trafficking because it places children in immediate danger as they are now homeless, without employment, support, and have limited education (Kaestle, 2012; Illinois Criminal Justice Authority, 2013). Especially since after a child runs away from home, they are typically approached for sexual exploitation within 48 hours of leaving (Spangenberg, 2001). The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention is mandated to determine the number of children who were reported missing and then recovered (NISMARTC, 2002). Through their research, it was discovered that a large portion of these children were running away because of physical, sexual, or psychological abuse (NISMARTC, 2002). Of those who run away from home, 20% to 40% identify within the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT+) community and are therefore considered to be at a higher risk of being sex trafficked (Ray, 2006).

Childhood sexual abuse is a significant risk factor for trafficking (Kaestle, 2012; Clawson et al., 2009; Reid, 2011). In a study conducted by Norton-Hawk (2002), 68% of 50 sex trafficked women were sexually abused as children before being sex trafficked. Reid and Piequero (2013) analyzed data collected from 1,354 adolescents in juvenile adult court with 86.4% of their sample being male and 13.6% being female. While analyzing the data, researchers grouped the participants as either “early” or “late” starters (Reid & Piequero, 2013). The “early” starters had become involved in prostitution before the age of 17 while the “late” starters were 17-years old or older (Reid & Piequero, 2013). Of the female early starter participants, 33% reported sexual assault or rape and

40% of the late female starts reported sexual assault or rape as well (Reid & Piequero, 2013). Of the male early starter participants, 8% reported rape or sexual assault while no male late starter participants reported rape or sexual assault (Reid & Piquero, 2013).

The common characteristics of sex trafficked individuals include people from any age, race, or gender; however, young girls are especially at risk for sex trafficking (The Illinois Criminal Justice Authority, 2013). The overall risk factors for being sex trafficked include: poverty, running away, homelessness, a limited education, lack of family support, a history of sexual, physical or psychological abuse, mental health issues, learning disabilities, residing in a vulnerable location, substance abuse, or having a parent with substance abuse issues (Clawson et al., 2009; Jordan et al., 2013; Oram et al., 2015; Sprang, & Cole, 2018; Kaestle, 2012; Polaris, 2014).

The Consequences of Being Sex Trafficked

Victims of sex trafficking suffer from physical and mental health consequences due to from being sex trafficked (Lederer & Wetzel, 2014; Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, 2013; Zimmerman et al., 2008; Kiss et al., 2015; U.S. Department of State, 2009; McClain & Garrity, 2011; Oram, Stockl, Busza, Howard, & Zimmerman, 2012). The information provided was a comprehensive framework on sex trafficked women. A variety of researchers have beneficially impacted the field by providing research that fosters awareness and knowledge about the physical and mental health consequences of being sex trafficked.

Physical Consequences

The research indicates specific physical consequences due to sex trafficking. The physical consequences include: headaches, back pain, pelvic pain, gynecological

infections, physical injuries, neurological issues, cardiovascular issues, gastrointestinal issues, dental problems, rectal trauma, infectious diseases, and reproductive issues (Zimmerman et al., 2008; Lederer & Wetzel, 2014; Kiss et al., 2015; McClain & Garrity, 2011).

In a study of 192 previously sex trafficked women entering post-trafficking services from a few European countries, 95% of them reported physical or sexual violence while being trafficked (Zimmerman et al., 2008). The data included information about the physical symptoms the participants had been experiencing within the past 2 weeks: 82% reported headaches, 69% reported back pain, 59% reported pelvic pain, and 58% had gynecological infections (Zimmerman et al., 2008). Of the 192 participants, 63% reported more than 10 concurrent physical health issues after leaving their sex trafficking situation (Zimmerman et al., 2008).

Lederer and Wetzel (2014) conducted a study across cities in the U.S. with 106 survivors of sex trafficking and of those survivors, 105 reported at least one physical health issue. Of the 105 participants, 91.5% reported having a neurological side effect and 82.1% indicated they were having struggling to remember things (Lederer & Wetzel, 2014). Of the 105 participants, 70% reported having a physical injury and frequently specified it was to either the face or head (Lederer & Wetzel, 2014). More than two-thirds of the women had contracted some form of a STD/STI, 39.4% reported being diagnosed with chlamydia and 26.9% reporting a previous diagnosis of gonorrhea (Lederer & Wetzel, 2014). Other figures indicate: 67.9% had cardiovascular issues, 61.3% specified gastrointestinal issues, and 54.3% reported dental problems (Lederer & Wetzel, 2014).

A vast group of researchers analyzed the health of 1,102 women, men, and children after being trafficked in Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam (Kiss et al., 2015). From the sizeable sample 288 of the participants were women, 383 were men, and 344 were children with 281 being girls (Kiss et al., 2015). Of the participants, almost half of them experienced physical abuse, sexual abuse, or both (Kiss et al., 2015). Excluding the male participants because they were typically trafficked for labor purposes like fishing; there were 17.2% of the women who reported a serious injury or accident at work and 11.1% of the children did as well (Kiss et al., 2015). Headaches were indicated by 21.5% of the female participants and 20.1% of the children, nausea or indigestion was reported in 11.8% of the women and 11.1% of the children, back pain was reported by 19.1% of the women and 17.2% of the children, over-exhaustion was reported in 17% of the women and 13.1% of the children (Kiss et al., 2015).

An article by researchers McClain and Garrity (2011) emphasized information for nurses' benefit to enhance their awareness and knowledge to assist them in better identifying, intervening, and advocating for sex trafficked individuals especially adolescent victims . The physical symptoms provided included: STDs, HIV/AIDS, vaginal or rectal trauma, infertility, dental problems, infectious diseases like tuberculosis, bruises, and scarring (McClain & Garrity, 2011). The majority of the list provided by the authors has been seen in previously mentioned research articles pertaining to health issues related to sex trafficking.

Overall, the most commonly reported physical health issues include: neurological, gastrointestinal, and reproductive issues (Zimmerman et al., 2008; Lederer & Wetzel, 2014; Kiss et al., 2015; McClain & Garrity, 2011). However, the research also reports,

back pain, pelvic pain, gynecological infections, physical injuries, cardiovascular issues, dental problems, rectal trauma, and infectious diseases (Zimmerman et al., 2008; Lederer & Wetzel, 2014; Kiss et al., 2015; McClain & Garrity, 2011).

Mental Health Consequences

The research indicates specific mental health consequences due to sex trafficking. The consequences include: suicidal thoughts, attempted suicide, acute stress disorder, depression, anxiety, PTSD, and borderline personality disorder (Zimmerman et al., 2008; Lederer & Wetzel, 2014; Kiss et al., 2015; McClain & Garrity, 2011).

The previously mentioned study of the 192 European women included information about the data collected on mental health issues as well (Zimmerman et al., 2008). Of those 192 women, 39% reported having suicidal thoughts within the past week, and there were noted patterns of higher rates of depression and anxiety in trafficked women than the compared group of non-trafficked women (Zimmerman et al., 2008). The reported symptoms of depression was the most commonly reported (Zimmerman et al., 2008).

Lederer and Wetzel (2014) had 104 of the 106 respondents report at least one psychological issue from when they were being trafficked; however, on average, there were more than a dozen psychological issues reported per participant. Commonly reported psychological symptoms from experiences while they were being sex trafficked were depression (88.7%), anxiety (76.4%), flashbacks (68%), PTSD (54.7%), attempted suicide (41.5%), and feelings of shame (82.1%) (Lederer & Wetzel, 2014). Women then re-reported those psychological symptoms after being removed from or escaping their trafficking experience, and 80.7% had depression, 63.9% had flashbacks, 61.5% had

PTSD, 20.5% attempted suicide, and 71.1% had feelings of shame (Lederer & Wetzel, 2014). Within the participant group 38.7% suffered from acute stress, 30.2% were diagnosed as bipolar, and 13.2% were diagnosed with borderline personality disorder (Lederer & Wetzel, 2014).

The vast sample from Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam included data in regards to mental health issues as well (Kiss et al., 2015). Of the 288 women who participated, 66.6% reported depression, 48.1% reported anxiety, 43.9% reported PTSD, and 6.3% had attempted suicide in the past month (Kiss et al., 2015). Of the 344 children who participated, 57.3% reported depression, 32.3% reported anxiety, 26.5% reported PTSD, and 5.5% reported they had attempted suicide in the past month (Kiss et al., 2015). In the children's group, girls scored higher in depression and PTSD symptoms versus the boys (Kiss et al., 2015). McClain and Garrity (2011) presented a list for nurses that included psychological symptoms such as depression, panic attacks, feelings of shame, stress-related disorders, and confusion.

Overall the most commonly reported mental health issues across the research included: depression, PTSD, anxiety, and suicide attempts (Zimmerman et al., 2008; Lederer & Wetzel, 2014; Kiss et al., 2015; McClain & Garrity; 2011). It has been suggested that with the multitude of severe consequences faced by sex trafficked women that they might not be capable of making decisions for their own safety (Zimmerman et al., 2008).

Trauma

Trauma can be defined as a profoundly distressing experience that includes either physical harm, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, or neglect. This section outlined the roles

of the brain and its responses to trauma, the recognition of trauma in the mental health field, and therapeutic trauma treatment modalities.

The Brain and Trauma

This section explored the various roles and internal levels of the brain. Each role the brain performs is significant to meet an individual's basic needs as well as maintaining relationships (van der Kolk, 2014). The levels throughout the brain are essential for human survival and each have their own role to play and a duty to interact with other levels (van der Kolk, 2014; Servan-Schreiber, 2004). If trauma is experienced the brain could respond by dissociating, derealization, depersonalization, emotional reactions due to triggers, and create flashbacks (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; van der Kolk, 2014).

The role of the brain is to maintain human functioning by: a) triggering internal signals to inform a person of what he or she needs – food, rest, shelter, etc., b) implementing an action to meet the needs, c) fostering the energy and actions to retrieve the needs, d) alert the individual if danger or opportunities occur, e) and adjusting behaviors on a moment-to-moment basis (van der Kolk, 2014). Since human beings are mammals, they are innately driven to thrive and survive within relational groups (Jonason et al., 2008; Bowlby, 1988; Perlman & Peplau, 1984; Hazan & Shaver, 1994; Leary, 1990; Baumeister & Tice, 1990; van der Kolk, 2014). If the internal signals are not functioning to meet a person's needs or if a relationship ceases an individual can begin to experience psychological issues (Jonason et al., 2008; Bowlby, 1988; Perlman & Peplau, 1984; Hazan & Shaver, 1994; van der Kolk, 2014).

More specifically the brain has multiple layers within itself that have a variety of functions (van der Kolk, 2014). The most primitive part of the brain is often referred to as the reptilian brain, which controls basic functioning like eating, sleeping, crying, breathing, urinating, and defecating (van der Kolk, 2014). These basic functions are critical for human beings and can create disequilibrium if disturbed (van der Kolk, 2014). The following level in the brain is the mammalian brain that facilitates responses through lived experiences as well as genetics and temperament (van der Kolk, 2014). The mammalian brain's role is to determine if something is enjoyable or scary, observe danger, and decide what is important in order to survive (van der Kolk, 2014). The two levels combined create what is known as the emotional brain (Servan-Schreiber, 2004; van der Kolk, 2014). The emotional brain formulates decisions about danger or enjoyable opportunities which activates a response like fight-or-flight (van der Kolk, 2014). The final part of the brain, to be discussed, is the frontal lobe that provides humans with the ability to plan, reflect, imagine, and make future predictions (van der Kolk, 2014). The frontal lobe is critical for humans to foster healthy connections with others due to its correlation with language, empathy, and imitation (van der Kolk, 2014; Rizzolatti & Craighero, 2004; Decety & Jackson, 2004).

If a person experiences a traumatic event the brain can be cued to dissociate, experience flashbacks, have emotional reactions to triggers, and depersonalize (APA 2013; van der Kolk, 2014). Dissociation refers to when an individual experiences a decreased sense of awareness of his or her surroundings, experiences derealization and/or depersonalization (Mahoney & Benight, 2019; Zoellner et al., 2003). Derealization is

when an individual feels as if the world is no longer real whereas depersonalization is when an individual feels disconnected from oneself (Mahoney & Benight, 2019).

Many individuals experience dissociation on a normative level without the experience of trauma by daydreaming or being in a trance-like state (Omno van der Hart et al., 2004; Mahoney & Benight, 2019). When the brain dissociates, especially for an individual with a trauma experience, it is the brain's way of coping or protecting itself, which can decrease anxiety, compartmentalize events and experiences, as well as foster a sense of numbness to feeling (Terr, 1991; Eisen & Lynn, 2001; Mahoney & Benight, 2019). However, constantly dissociating could disturb the emotional and cognitive processing of the traumatic experience (Griffin et al., 1997; Edner-Priemer et al., 2009); Mahoney & Benight, 2019).

Overall, the brain is essential to human functioning and manages its roles to meet the needs of a person and survive (van der Kolk, 2014). The major levels within the brain include the reptilian brain, mammalian brain, emotional brain, and the frontal lobe (Servan-Schreiber, 2004; van der Kolk, 2014). When a person experiences trauma there is a possibility that the brain would implement flashbacks, dissociate, depersonalize, foster derealization, and prompt emotional responses to triggers (APA, 2013; van der Kolk, 2014). These physical responses are due to an imprint of the past and a shift in the brain's ability to perceive threats (van der Kolk, 2014).

Recognition of Trauma

This section contains information related to when the mental health field began to recognize trauma as a mental health issue. The trauma diagnoses are included as well as related diagnoses, and physical impacts of trauma. Information from sex trafficking

research related to physical and mental health consequences is included to highlight those specific experiences from sex trafficked victims as well.

The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) first recognized trauma in 1980 with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Goodman, 2015). The DSM-5 is a widely accepted and utilized tool for providing diagnostic criteria for all counselors to utilize in relation to the experience of trauma and with other mental health diagnoses (APA, 2013). The trauma specific diagnoses include: reactive attachment disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder, disinhibited social engagement disorder, acute stress disorder, adjustment disorder, other specified trauma- and stressor-related disorder, and unspecified trauma related disorder (APA, 2013). The DSM-5 considers the event of trauma to be diagnoseable for PTSD or acute stress disorder as,

“Exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence in one (or more) of the following ways: 1) directly experiencing the traumatic event(s), 2) witnessing, in person, the event(s) as it occurred to others, 3) Learning that the traumatic event(s) occurred to a close family member or close friend. In cases of actual or threatened death of a family member or friend, the event(s) must have been violent or accidental, 4) Experiencing repeated or extreme exposure to aversive details of the traumatic event(s) (e.g., first responders collecting human remains; police officers repeatedly exposed to details of child abuse)”

(APA, 2013, p. 271). Trauma can also produce a range of other psychological effects and disorders like agoraphobia, depression, anxiety disorders, and borderline personality disorder (Sanderson, 2013). Aside from mental health diagnoses, trauma has been related

to physical health issues as well including: cardiovascular disease, diabetes, gastrointestinal disease, cancer, and chronic pain (Kendall-Tackett, 2009).

Previously mentioned studies recorded the prevalence of mental health and physical health consequences of being sex trafficked (Zimmerman et al., 2008; Lederer & Wetzel, 2014; Kiss et al., 2015; McClain & Garrity, 2011). Lederer and Wetzel (2014) had 104 of the 106 respondents report at least one psychological issue from when they were being trafficked; however, on average, there were more than a dozen psychological issues reported per participant. Of the 104 participants, 88.7% reported depression, 76.4% reported anxiety, 68% reported flashbacks, 54.7% reported PTSD, 41.5% attempted suicide, and 82.1% reported feelings of shame (Lederer & Wetzel, 2014). Another study with a sample of 288 sex trafficked women from Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam provided mental health related data as well (Kiss et al., 2015). Of the 288 women who participated, 66.6% reported depression, 48.1% reported anxiety, 43.9% reported PTSD, and 6.3% had attempted suicide in the past month (Kiss et al., 2015). A study emphasizing physical health issues had 192 previously sex trafficked women found that within the past 2 weeks: 82% reported headaches, 69% reported back pain, 59% reported pelvic pain, and 58% had gynecological infections (Zimmerman et al., 2008). Of the 192 participants, 63% reported more than 10 concurrent physical health issues after leaving their sex trafficking situation (Zimmerman et al., 2008). Another study of 106 sex trafficking survivors discovered that 91.5% reported having a neurological side effect, 82.1% indicated they were having struggling to remember things, 70% reported having a physical injury and frequently specified it was to either the face or head, 67.9% had

cardiovascular issues, 61.3% specified gastrointestinal issues, and 54.3% reported dental problems (Lederer & Wetzel, 2014).

It is now recognized that two-thirds of the population experiences a traumatic event in their lifetime (Galea, Nandi, & Vlahov, 2005; Goodman, 2015). However, each survivor of trauma reacts differently and uniquely depending on their age, the rate of trauma exposure, or the extent of the trauma (Sanderson, 2013). Counselors now have the tools to diagnose and treatment trauma by utilizing a variety of treatment modalities like Trauma-Forced Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT) and Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) (APA, 2013; The National Institute of Clinical Excellence, 2005; Solomon et al., 2009; Kiessling, 2019).

Trauma Treatment Modalities

This section emphasized two evidenced-based modalities intended to be used by clinicians treating trauma. It also included information about creative and mindfulness practices some clinicians implement for trauma treatment as well. It is important to note there is little to no information about these practices being used in a therapeutic setting with a client who was a sex trafficked victim.

Two identified evidenced-based modalities that treat trauma are TF-CBT and EMDR. The National Institute of Clinical Excellence (2005), noted that TF-CBT was the treatment of choice when counseling individuals who have experienced trauma and/or suffer from PTSD. The practice is in collaboration with Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), which focuses on changing cognitions and behaviors (Lowe & Murray, 2014). TF-CBT emphasizes psychoeducation, homework assignments, relaxation techniques and trainings, exposure and cognitive restructuring as therapeutic interventions (Beck & Coffey,

2005). The exposure to the traumatic memory is argued by researchers as the most impactful component of TF-CBT (Forbes, et al., 2007).

It was noted in *The Professional Counselor* in 2017 that there has been a lack of testing TF-CBT with the sex trafficked population (Litam, 2017). Since then a case study on a female minor in TF-CBT therapy has been presented as a beneficial treatment modality for addressing the needs of being sex trafficked by her family and labor trafficked (Márquez, Deblinger, & Dovi, 2019). Despite this case study, there is a need for further research studies to investigate the use of TF-CBT as a modality for sex trafficked individuals (Litam, 2017).

EMDR utilizes bilateral stimulation (a rapid left-to-right motion) to activate the hippocampus to desensitize a negative core belief (Shapiro, 1995; Kiessling, 2019). EMDR targets these negative core beliefs that are created through lived experiences (Kiessling, 2019). The negative core belief can be related to the client, the client's beliefs about the world, or the client's beliefs about other individuals (Kiessling, 2019). After the negative core belief is desensitized, an adaptive belief is created and implanted to replace it (Kiessling, 2019). For example, a negative core belief could be 'I am not good enough' while the adaptive belief is 'I am good enough.' Like TF-CBT, EMDR is an effective treatment modality for individuals who have experienced trauma, have been diagnosed with PTSD, or have been diagnosed with other diagnoses (Shapiro, 1995; Solomon et al., 2009; Kiessling, 2019).

An online or face-to-face training to certify clinicians in counseling sex trafficked victims is the Certified Clinical Trauma Specialist-Sex-Trafficking and Exploitation (CCTS-S) certificate (Rhoton, 2020). It is unclear when the training was originally

released, but according to their training website it was most recently updated in February of 2020 (Rhoton, 2020). The learning goals/objectives for the training include: “participants will learn about the sex trafficking trade, participants will learn about the people who engage in trafficking, participants will gain an understanding of the trafficking customers, participants will learn about the victims of trafficking, participants will acquire knowledge of trauma and how to effectively treat it, and participants will explore special issues related to working with trafficking victims” (Rhoton, 2020). The researcher for this study completed the certificate program online and the presenters frequently noted the importance of being trained in EMDR to better assist the sex trafficked population. There is no current research documenting the use of EMDR with sex trafficked victims, like TF-CBT there is a need to provide clinicians with this information.

Alternative therapeutic techniques to treating trauma include mindfulness and creative interventions (Litam, 2017). Mindfulness interventions a counselor may implement are body scans, prompting an individual focus on the present, or imagining a safe space and then returning to the present (Litam, 2017; Rothschild, 2000; Goodman & Calderon, 2012). These interventions promote a sense of connection to the body, can decrease arousal symptoms, and create a sense of safety (Litam, 2017; Rothschild, 2000; Goodman & Calderon, 2012). It was discovered in resiliency research that flexibility, humor, and creativity are instrumental in improving clients’ prosocial behaviors, self-esteem, and sense of hope (Litam, 2017; Johnson, Lahad, & Gray, 2009; Lahad, 2000; Raynor, 2002). Utilizing creative interventions in session can also promote the externalization of emotions, reframe notions, and promote a deeper level of

understanding (Litam, 2017; Bradley, Whiting, Hendricks, Parr, & Jones, 2008).

Counselors can choose to integrate creative mediums in their clinical practice with sex trafficked clients to promote a sense of openness while still providing structure (Litam, 2017). The implementation of creative techniques and mindfulness, like TF-CBT and EMDR, has not been researched specifically for the sex trafficked population (Litam, 2017).

Despite these suggestions a modality has not been specifically developed or tailored to address the needs of sex trafficked individuals (Litam, 2017; Jordan et al., 2013). The commonly suggested modalities for counseling individuals of sex trafficking were originally developed to treat domestic violence and PTSD (Litam, 2017; Jordan et al., 2013). Neither TF-CBT, EMDR, creative interventions, or mindfulness have been researched to provide counselors with documentation of benefits, improvement, maintained improvement over an extended period of time, or limitations (Litam, 2017).

The therapeutic drive to need a modality targeting a specific population with one commonality stems from the widely adhered to medical model. The medical model has roots in psychiatry and medicine and originated from a “problem orientation” and focuses on a presenting issue(s) (Perry, 2017; Armentrout, 1993). The primary focus is to treat the symptoms of an individual rather than address underlying concerns (Armentrout, 1993). The medical model promotes the ability for professionals to pathologize clients and ignores client strengths (Perry, 2017). Whereas a wellness model stems from a strength-based ideology emphasizing how there is nothing innately wrong with an individual (Armentrout, 1993). The client is also conceptualized as a whole person – mind, body and spirit (Armentrout, 1993). Innately the wellness model ceases to

pathologize clients and the Rogerian framework of the core characteristics and relationship shines through. This holistic perspective is important for healing and therapy.

Overall, there are two identified evidence-based practices, TF-CBT and EMDR, that have been suggested mental health professionals use for counseling victims of sex trafficking (Rhoton, 2020; Márquez, Deblinger, & Dovi, 2019; Litam, 2017). There have been creative and mindfulness techniques mentioned in the literature as strategies to work with sex trafficked victims as well (Litam, 2017). However, aside from a case study utilizing TF-CBT there has not been further literature substantiating these modalities and techniques for this population (Márquez, Deblinger, & Dovi, 2019; Litam, 2017)

Sex Trafficking and the System

Sex trafficking and the system highlighted the professionals in various settings that interact with individuals who are being actively sex trafficked. Information was provided about how these professionals are taught to identify victims of sex trafficking as well as present resources available to sex trafficked victims.

Countless victims currently being sex trafficked interact with people and professionals outside of their sex trafficking situation (Polaris, 2014; Baldwin et al., 2011). Individuals in a professional capacity that victims can potentially interact with include but are not limited to law enforcement, social workers, nurses, and doctors (Polaris, 2014; Baldwin et al., 2011). There were 292 participants who reported opportunities for victim assistance to The National Human Trafficking Resource Center and BeFree Textline (Polaris, 2014). Of those 292, 26.7% reported an interaction with law enforcement, 10.6% reported an interaction with a healthcare provider, and 4.7% reported an interaction with the child welfare system (Polaris, 2014). If these

professionals are interacting with victims of sex trafficking then they need to have the awareness and knowledge to be able to identify victims and intervene (Polaris, 2014; McClain & Garrity, 2011; Baldwin et al., 2011).

Identifying Sex Trafficking Victims

Identifying sex trafficking victims is an instrumental component to assisting those who are currently being sex trafficked (Polaris, 2014; McClain & Garrity, 2011; Baldwin et al., 2011). As previously mentioned, there are suggestions to note specific physical and mental health symptoms to identify a victim of sex trafficking (McClain & Garrity, 2011; Deshpande & Nour, 2013; Coppola & Cantwell, 2016). Here is an incomplete list of all of the physical and mental health symptoms to note as an indicator that an individual has been trafficked: STDS/STIS, HIV/AIDS, vaginal or rectal injuries, bruises, scarring, dental issues, malnutrition, an unwanted pregnancy, feelings of shame, depression, anxiety, PTSD, and suicidal thoughts (McClain & Garrity, 2011; Deshpande & Nour, 2013; Coppola & Cantwell, 2016). A recommendation for healthcare providers from sex trafficking victims was, “They suggest that health professionals observe patients’ body language and other visual cues, use common sense, and approach patients sensitively” (Baldwin, et al., 2011, p. 44). Body language, affect, and attitude were suggested to convey sex trafficking victim status to the healthcare provider (Baldwin et al., 2011).

Aside from observational cues for professionals to examine, there have been questions created specifically for identifying whether an individual is being sex trafficked (Coppola & Cantwell, 2016; Deshpande & Nour, 2013). These questions should be asked specifically when alone with a potential victim as to obtain a more genuine and accurate

answer (Coppola & Cantwell, 2016; Deshpande & Nour, 2013). Some of the questions to consider asking are as follows:

“Is it safe for you to talk to me right now?”

Can you leave your work or job situation if you want?

What are your living conditions like?

Do you have to ask permission to go to sleep or to the bathroom?

Are you allowed to communicate with your family and friends?

Have you ever been physically assaulted, verbally abused, or emotionally abused by your employer or member of your household?”

(Coppola & Cantwell, 2016, p. 197; Deshpande & Nour, 2013, p. 26). It has been recommended that creating a pocket-card with screening and action protocol information can serve as a reminder for healthcare professionals (Stokolsa, Showalter, Melnick, & Rothman, 2017). Utilizing these observational cues, asking questions, and finding creative mediums to remember to be aware, can help healthcare and other professionals identify victims of sex trafficking and can then connect them with available resources.

Resources Available

Programs across the U.S. providing services for this population are ideally meeting the basic needs of victims (i.e., food and shelter), have implemented case management, made counseling available that is preferably trauma-informed, and have available resources for healthcare, life skills training, and education (Clawson & Grace, 2007; Stokolsa, Dawson, Williams-Oni, & Rothman, 2017). There are few opportunities for individuals to find residential facilities providing these services to victims of sex trafficking (Clawson & Grace, 2007). The recommended time of stay for individuals in residential facilities is 18

months, so there is an adequate amount of time to build trust, deliver trauma-informed therapy, and begin the process of rebuilding (Clawson & Grace, 2007). Either residential or not, facilities need to sustain a secure location to establish safety for sex trafficking victims and employees (Clawson & Grace, 2007).

The challenges of maintaining an organization to benefit the sex trafficked victim community are threefold (Davy, 2015). The first challenge is the lack of resources, which means the organization cannot manage the amount of clientele they have accrued and cannot provide them with the necessary services (Davy, 2015). Two examples of crucial and deficient external resources are affordable housing and healthcare (Davy, 2015). Another issue for organizations is acquiring and maintaining funding for eligible sex trafficking victims to utilize (Davy, 2015). The last issue is in regards to training and the inability to retain a well-trained trauma-informed staff capable of identifying and supporting victims of sex trafficking (Davy, 2015).

The federal government has resources such as HHS Services Grants, the National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC), and the Office for Victims of Crime available to victims of sex trafficking (Resource & Restore, 2012). The HHS Services Grants provides case management to foreign and potential victims to assist them in becoming certified (Resource & Restore, 2012). The NHTRC operates a hotline number for human trafficking that seeks to improve the response rate of protecting victims and has a comprehensive list of resources to provide to victims (Resource & Restore, 2012). The Office for Victims of Crime can provide services such as medical, mental health, legal advice, and advocacy (Resource & Restore, 2012). Aside from federal assistance

and resources, states have their own organizations and resource guides available for this population as well (Resource & Restore, 2012).

Overall, the ideal organization for sex trafficking victims would be safe, trauma-informed, meet their basic needs, implement case management, and provide additional resources like counseling, healthcare, life skills classes, and education (Clawson & Grace, 2007; Stokolsa, Dawson, Williams-Oni, & Rothman, 2017). There are challenges to this type of organization due to housing, finances, healthcare issues, as well as retaining trauma-informed employees (Davy, 2015). Despite these challenges, there are federal and state organizations across the U.S. providing services to sex trafficked victims (Resource & Restore, 2012).

Relational Experiences and the Need for Relationships

The relational experiences of sex trafficked women were the targeted topic for the study, so it is important to emphasize the importance of relationships in general. For example, relationships promote happiness, trust, love, intimacy, care, sexual gratification, and emotional support (Hazan & Shaver, 1994; Reis & Shaver, 1988; van Deurzen, 2013). There is a lack of literature on adult female victims of sex trafficking and the relationships they have experienced. However, there were a small amount of research articles published about minors and relationships with an emphasis on having a relationship with a resilient adult and the reunification process (Chisolm-Straker et al., 2018; Twigg, 2017).

In general, homeless youth and sex trafficked youth share common experiences due to homelessness being a risk factor for sex trafficking (Chisolm-Straker, Sze, Einbond, White, & Stoklosa, 2018; Kaestle, 2012; Polaris, 2014). A study dedicated to

analyzing risk factors and supportive figure(s) for young adults who were sex trafficked began their venture through a homeless shelter to gather participants (Chisolm-Straker et al., 2018). The researchers were able to interview 344 individuals and of those participants 21 had been previously sex trafficked and 17 had been sex and labor trafficked (Chisolm-Straker et al., 2018). After interviewing all of the participants, the presence of a supportive adult was a significant protective factor for youth to avoid sex trafficking (Chisolm-Straker et al., 2018). This protective factor could be connected to existing literature suggesting a supportive adult can foster resiliency in youth (Chisolm-Straker et al., 2018; Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2015; Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, 2011).

Another aspect of relationships, identified as a potentially immediate need when appropriate, was familial reunification for minors (Twigg, 2017). Reunification can cause victims of sex trafficking to feel shame and resentment towards their families for not understanding them or their situation (Twigg, 2017). Families in these situations can experience a financial burden from sudden medical costs and an unawareness of how to appropriately manage the trauma and mental health of their victimized family member (Twigg, 2017). Therefore, a framework for reunification and a supportive process provided by professionals can foster an easier reunion between the sex trafficked victim and their family (Twigg, 2017).

Despite these studies expanding research on sex trafficking there is still a lack of relational experiences for victims of sex trafficking. However, victims of sex trafficking still have an innate need to have social connections and interactions (Jonason et al., 2008). These connections can provide an individual with emotional support, care, sexual

gratification, trust, intimacy, love, and happiness (Hazan & Shaver, 1994; Reis & Shaver, 1988; van Deurzen, 2013). Having supportive connections in one's personal life has been found to decrease an individual's mortality risk and promote a healthy lifestyle (Sarason, Sarason, & Gurung, 1997). Being able to foster those connections appears as a protective factor against stress and health issues such as disease in general as well as the severity and recovery process, heart disease, pregnancy complications, anxiety, depression (Sarason et al., 1997). An individual in a social relationship would ideally experience a healthy one, with the ability to pursue personal interests, the choice to have the relationship, each person's needs being met, and both parties being treasured for their true selves (Barrett, 1997). A strategy in maintaining healthy relationships is the utilization of healthy boundary setting when necessary (Barrett, 1997).

If this need is not met then serious consequences on an individual's psyche can occur such as anxiety, depression, grief, and loneliness (Jonason et al., 2008; Bowlby, 1988; Perlman & Peplau, 1984; Hazan & Shaver, 1994; Leary, 1990; Baumeister & Tice, 1990). Individuals who do not have access to social connections can recreate this experience through "social snacking" such as talking to oneself or watching television (Jonason et al., 2008). Self-talk has been positively correlated in the literature with a decrease in anxiety (Conroy & Metzler, 2004; Gould, Eklund, & Jackson, 1993; Page, Sime, & Cordell, 1999), an increase in goal attainment (Green, Hall, & Erickson, 1995; Hardy, Gammage, & Hall, 2001; Johnson, Hrycaiko, Johnson, & Halas, 2004), an enhancement of self-knowledge and awareness (Schneider, 2002), a decrease in depression and an increase in self-efficacy (Philpot & Bamburg, 1996; Philpot, Holliman, & Madonna, 1995). Self-talk is often utilized when healing from social maladjustment

(Calvete & Cardenoso, 2002; Jonason et al., 2008). Aside from self-talk, individuals who watch more television often report higher satisfaction levels in their social lives because viewing television creates a “parasocial” relationship, which people commonly consider as a real relationship (Kanazawa, 2002; Jonason et al., 2008). Another strategy for connection is through a process of anthropomorphism or assigning non-humans with human-likeness (Epley et al., 2008). Anthropomorphism can be the application of human-like qualities and having social interactions with a pet to decrease loneliness (Jonason et al., 2008; Epley et al., 2008).

In conclusion, relationships are critical to human functioning and have an impact on the mental and physical wellbeing of all individuals (Jonason et al., 2008; Bowlby, 1988; Perlman & Peplau, 1984; Hazan & Shaver, 1994; Leary, 1990; Baumeister & Tice, 1990). Those who do not obtain these necessary connections seek to remedy this through other modes or mediums (Jonason et al., 2008). If not effective then their overall wellbeing could be impacted. However, for individuals whom the alternative strategies work for or they have created and maintained healthy relationships benefit from the protective factors and positive qualities from a healthy relationship. Lastly, minors with a supportive adult in their lives are innately provided with a protective factor against sex trafficking (Chisolm-Straker et al., 2018).

Summary

Sex trafficking occurs when an individual experiences force, fraud, or coercion to perform sexual acts so another person can financially benefit (Raphael et al., 2017). Sex trafficking differs from prostitution because of the term “consent” insinuating that an individual in prostitution does so willingly, whereas a sex trafficking victim does not

(Baker, 2015; Farley, 2006). Despite sex trafficking being illegal in all U.S. states, there are still 10 counties in the state of Nevada where prostitution remains legal (Thomson Reuters, 2019; Rindels, 2018). However, aside from those 10 counties, prostitution and sex trafficking are illegal and have specific federal and state laws to promote awareness, preventions, and protections to victims (Deshpande & Nour, 2013; Atkinson, Curnin, & Hanson, 2016; Polaris, 2019). These laws do not totally prevent sex trafficking however because the estimates of sex trafficking victims in the U.S. continue to climb (Deshpande & Nour, 2013). Despite the suggestion of increasing victim figures, however, there have been flaws noted in the data collection, lack of empirical data, and overall trustworthiness of the estimates (Edwards & Mika, 2017; Weitzer, 2012; Brunovskis & Surtees, 2010; Zhang, 2009; Tyldum & Brunovskis, 2005).

Through practiced grooming strategies and social media sites, young vulnerable children can become victims of sex trafficking (Williamson & Prior, 2009; Raphael & Ashley, 2008; O'Connor & Healy, 2006; Raphael & Myers-Powell, 2010; Latonero, 2011). Many of these young vulnerable girls are runaways because of some form of abuse or neglect and typically have other risk factors associated like poverty, homelessness, a limited education, lack of family support, mental health issues, learning disabilities, residing in a vulnerable location, substance abuse, being a member of the LGBTQ+ community, or having a parent with substance abuse issues (Clawson, et al., 2009; Jordan et al., 2013; Oram, et al., 2015; Polaris, 2014; Raphael & Myers-Powell, 2010; Ray, 2006). Under the circumstances of sex trafficking there are physical, emotional, and mental health consequences, which include but are not limited to having an STD/STI, neurological issues, physical injuries, gastrointestinal issues, PTSD,

depression, anxiety, and increased suicide attempts (Zimmerman et al., 2008; Kiss et al., 2015; Lederer & Wetzel, 2014). Suggestions have been made in the research on therapeutic modalities and techniques including EMDR, TF-CBT, mindfulness, and creative interventions for mental health providers to use while working with victims of sex trafficking (Rhoton, 2020; Márquez, Deblinger, & Dovi, 2019; Litam, 2017).

With the numerous symptoms and diagnoses related to sex trafficking a medical professional could ideally identify a victim (McClain & Garrity, 2011; Deshpande & Nour, 2013; Coppola & Cantwell, 2016). Medical personnel, however, are not the only professionals who have direct contact with this population; victims of sex trafficking have regular contact with law enforcement and social workers as well (Polaris, 2014; Baldwin et al., 2011). Resources can be distributed to sex trafficking victims; ideally providing safety, case management, life skills training, education, medical assistance, and trauma-informed counseling (Clawson & Grace, 2007; Stokolsa, Dawson, Williams-Oni, & Rothman, 2017).

There is no current research on the relational experiences victims of sex trafficking encounter and yet the basic human need of interaction with other individuals is still present (Jonason, Webster, & Lindsey, 2008). If this need is met, victims of sex trafficking can experience emotional support, care, sexual gratification, trust, intimacy, love, and happiness (Hazan & Shaver, 1994; Reis & Shaver, 1988; van Deurzen, 2013). However, if not met then psychological and health dysfunctions ensue (Jonason et al., 2008; Bowlby, 1988; Perlman & Peplau, 1984; Hazan & Shaver, 1994).

Chapter III: Methodology

The lived relational experiences of sex trafficked women were analyzed with a qualitative methodology. Qualitative research emphasizes the creation of depth and meaning created as well as seeking to answer questions about the “how” or “what” concerning a specific phenomenon (Heiselt, & Sheperis, 2010). As data is collected by qualitative methods, there are no limitations or constraints based on the gathered data, there is essentially no right, wrong, or unviable data (Heiselt & Sheperis, 2010). Qualitative research has philosophical roots in empiricism, which theorizes how human beings gather knowledge from direct experiences through the physical senses (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). The methodology has been utilized within a variety of fields such as social sciences, sociology, psychology, and history (Rossman & Rallis, 2017).

Quantitative methodology would have allowed for more breadth on the topic of sex trafficking and also would have required a larger group of individuals to participate in the study; whereas qualitative methodology created a space for depth and detail from a smaller group of study participants (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Qualitative methodology can be a modality to obtain depth for underdeveloped fields acting as a future precursor to a quantitative study. Therefore, the use of a qualitative methodology was especially appropriate for a topic like sex trafficking, which lacks research and data. Overall, qualitative research, “...represents human beings as whole persons living in dynamic, complex social arrangements” (Rogers, 2000, p. 51).

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is both a philosophy and a methodology (Goulding, 2005). Phenomenology as an approach to qualitative research assumes that the meaning of an

experience will be discovered through reflection and dialogue (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Phenomenology primarily focuses on the participants' perceptions of their experiences and the meaning created from those experiences (Christensen & Brumfield, 2010). Therefore, phenomenological analysis is considered an approach that provides the participant with the opportunity to reflect on their experiences, essentially serving as a study in the essence of consciousness (Grossman, 1984). This principal sets the methodology apart from natural sciences, where objective reality is valued over subjective perceptions (Grossman, 1984). Phenomenology essentially answers the question of, "What is the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experiences of [a particular] phenomenon by an individual or by many individuals?" (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p. 363).

Viable methods for qualitative data collection when utilizing phenomenology include journals, in-depth interviews, and observational notes (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Conducting multiple interviews has been advanced in phenomenological research to promote depth (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Individuals are selected based on a similar experience (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). The phenomenological qualitative approach is appropriate for this study because the goal of the study was to understand the meanings created from the subjective reality of sex trafficking experiences and the lived relational experiences of the victims.

A phenomenological qualitative analysis was also selected because it is congruent to the humanistic-existential lens. Humanistic theories and Existentialism are based in the philosophy and psychology of Phenomenology, where the perspectives of clients are highly valued.

Humanistic-Existential Lens

The lens applied for the secondary analysis was a humanistic-existential one. The lens was selected because sex trafficking occurs within the broader concept of relationships, so an analysis from a relational perspective was important. The humanistic approach primarily concentrates on the client-counselor relationship with an emphasis on the core characteristics of genuineness, empathy, and unconditional positive regard as necessary for an effective therapeutic relationship to promote healing and growth (Rogers, 1961). Genuineness is commonly defined as being authentic or sincere. Within humanistic theory, genuineness is considered to be “dependently real” or “congruent” with oneself while in a relationship with another (Rogers, 1961). Empathy is known to be the ability an individual has to understand another or “put themselves in someone else’s shoes.” Rogers (1961, p. 53), posed a question to himself about empathy when counseling an individual that was, “Can I let myself enter fully into the world of his feelings and meanings and see these as he does?”

The last core characteristic of unconditional positive regard would be considered as the acceptance, care, and support of another without judgment (Rogers, 1961). Rogers (1961) emphasized the ability to accept all facets of an individual without judgment. When a therapist’s attitude is conditional then a client’s growth will lack; therapists need to pursue their own self-acceptance to become congruent and helpful (Rogers, 1961). Rogers (1957) deemed all of these conditions as necessary and sufficient for growth and change. Therefore, the relationship in the therapeutic process is essentially an instrument of change (Rogers, 1961). Rogers even stated in his book that, “If I can provide a certain type of relationship, the other person will discover within himself or herself the capacity

to use that relationship for growth and change, and personal development will occur” (Rogers, 1961, p. 33).

The existentialist approach on relationships requires an individual have a sense of self and others because there is no sense of self without others (van Deurzen & Kenward, 2005). Martin Buber (1970) provided an understanding of the self, based on two relationships, which were the *I/it* and the *I/Thou*. In those relationships, the *I* is the individual and the individual can change into an *it* or *Thou* (Buber, 1970). The *I* can change to an *it* when a person is diminished to an object and therefore the relationship becomes the *I/it* (Buber, 1970). The *it* can refer to world experiences as well as diminished individuals (Buber, 1970). Despite negative pretense of the *I/it* relationship those interactions do have their importance in everyday life, however they can be limiting (Buber, 1970). An *I/Thou* relationship reflects the ability of the relationship to be acknowledged and does not diminish to an *it* (Buber, 1970).

Isolation is a fundamental concept in existential theories and includes interpersonal, intrapersonal, and existential isolation (Yalom & Josselson, 2014). Interpersonal isolation refers to the ability to be isolated from others while intrapersonal isolation is when an individual is isolated from parts of him or herself (Yalom & Josselson, 2014). Whereas existential isolation is when an individual experiences a sense of aloneness in the universe (Yalom & Josselson, 2014). Aloneness and loneliness may appear to be synonymous with one another, however loneliness is due to social, cultural, and geographical influences impacting a lack of relational connection and intimacy (Yalom & Josselson, 2014). The agony due to existential isolation is unsurmountable and based in our own existence it has been referred to as “an unbridgeable gulf between

oneself and others” (Yalom & Josselson, 2014, p. 267). This concept can be experienced as, “...when they recognize the terror of feeling that there may be moments when no one in the world is thinking of them” (Yalom & Josselson, 2014, p. 267). Connection within the *I/Thou* relationship, unconditional positive regard, empathy, and genuineness do not resolve existential isolation and only provide support, thus existential isolation cannot be simply changed by a relationship with a therapist (Yalom & Josselson, 2014).

The concept of meaning is pertinent in existential theory and refers to how all individuals need to find meaning in life (Yalom & Josselson, 2014). However, meaning is not provided to humans and is never absolute (Yalom & Josselson, 2014). The search for meaning is haunting and now more prevalent due to many people having the means to survive (Frankl, 1978). Life provides the potential of meaning and is therefore unconditionally meaningful (Frankl, 1978). Meaning can be created within work, love, suffering, and even death (Frankl, 1978).

Logotherapy is an existential theoretical orientation that means “therapy through meaning” or “healing through meaning” (Frankl, 1978). Logotherapy recognizes neurosis is caused by psychodynamics, learning processes, conditioning, as well as the search for meaning (Frankl, 1978). Frankl (1978) conducted a study with 60 students who prior to the study had at some point attempted suicide while in college. Of the 60 students, 85% stated the reason for attempting suicide was because “life seemed meaningless” (Frankl, 1978, p. 20). Frankl (1978), noted that 93% of the students were suffering from meaninglessness in life despite performing well academically, being socially engaged, and having decent relationships with family members. Meaninglessness has been considered to be like an “existential vacuum”, empty and hollow (Frankl, 1978).

Phenomenology and Existentialism are interrelated due to their emphasis on each human beings' creation of meaning (Frankl, 1978; Yalom & Josselson, 2014; Christensen & Brumfield, 2010). The interrelatedness of the two has been stressed due to an argument about the question of meaning (Grossman, 1984). The question of meaning refers to, "what it is that makes beings as intelligible as beings" (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2018). For the question of meaning to be answered, "...phenomenon through which being becomes accessible to us, namely, our understanding or comprehension of being" has to be examined first (Grossman, 1984, P. 152). Therefore, in order to understand being there has to initially be a comprehension of understanding and to do that there also needs to be an understanding of the being that can understand – human beings (Grossman, 1984).

The humanistic-existential lens was selected because of the emphasis it places on relationships, the core characteristics in healing relationships, existential isolation, and meaning. The research analysis intends to highlight some of these concepts and explore them in detail.

Research Questions

The research question for this study was: 1) What are the lived relational experiences of women who have been involved in sex trafficking? This question will be further explored using the qualitative approach and phenomenological design, which is the most suitable for these research questions because of their emphasis on the participants' perceptions and the meaning created from their experiences. The data collected relevant to the first research question was separated into two parts with part one being focused on answering the initial research question while the second part utilizes a

humanistic-existential lens to analyze the relational data and provide the information with a theoretical framework.

Researcher

In qualitative research it is common as the researcher to provide the reader with some background information about who I am. I am a National Certified Counselor (NCC) in the process of obtaining full counseling licensure in a Western state of the U.S. My skills and experiences include my counseling background and training from a Master's and Doctoral counseling program, being a trauma informed counselor trained in Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), and having a certificate in Sex Trafficking & Sex Industry Exploitation (CCTS-S). I have previous experience in conducting qualitative research and was also employed for a year as a program evaluator for Awaken, the nonprofit where the study took place.

The concept of positionalities in qualitative research is an important concept to consider while reading my background as a researcher. Positionalities is the position the researcher has in relation to the context of the study, which impacts all aspects of the study like the design and dissemination (Rowe, 2014). The researcher is regarded as an insider or outsider to the community being researched; the insider is considered a member of the community while the outsider is a non-member (Rowe, 2014). Before this study was conducted through Awaken, I was employed by them as a program evaluator through a university to assist with evaluating their organization and the many programs it has to offer. During my time employed with Awaken, I was granted access to previously collected data and information, participated in team meetings, and interacted with the employees, interns, and volunteers. I sparsely interacted with women who experienced

sex trafficking themselves – at most a friendly hello in the office area. Despite the minimal interactions with the individuals who were sex trafficked I was still an insider due to my membership in the Awaken community. The insider membership provided the opportunity to facilitate this study by Awaken trusting me with their clientele, granting me access to their sex trafficked community, as well as the dedicated Awaken members marketing the interview opportunities, and providing financial compensation to those who chose to participate. The role of program evaluator and researcher of this study only overlapped in the sense that I had information about the Awaken program as well as knowledge about sex trafficking. I did not have to manage dual relationships with previously established relationships with sex trafficked women and interviewing them in this process due to my sparse interactions. However, upon reflection, I realized that being a part of the Awaken community caused me to have a bias in favor of Awaken and the work they provide their clientele. This was not reflected as an issue for the study due to the broad research question about the relational experiences of sex trafficked women.

Setting

In 2011, Awaken was established as a non-profit for sex trafficking due to a lack of services for this population (Awaken, 2018a). Awaken has a variety of goals and services including: restoration, a drop-in center, prevention, city transformation, and housing (Awaken, 2018c). The restoration goal provides direct services to victims of sex trafficking like mentorship, counseling, transitional housing, transportation, financial aid, legal and medical assistance, and more (Awaken, 2018c). The drop-in center provides a format for individuals who are currently being sex trafficked or who have been previously sex trafficked to obtain access to resources like food, clothing, hygiene

products and receive services like case management, mentoring, and counseling (Awaken, 2018c). The drop-in center being located in an accessible area that is high in sex trafficking is essential for sex trafficking victims to obtain immediate resources. The prevention program offers education and information to youth in the local school system from middle school to college due to the vulnerability of this population (Awaken, 2018c). The community advocacy and social justice to create change for sex trafficking and the victims of sex trafficking is the goal for the city transformation (Awaken, 2018c). Lastly, Awaken (2018d) recently started providing housing for sex trafficked women due to the lack of facilities and the complex needs of sex trafficked victims. The housing provided is rent free for 18-24 months, offers education and job training, includes mental and physical health services, and allows opportunities for spiritual growth (Awaken, 2018d).

The organization provides its clientele and employees with a sense of security by maintaining a safe office building with video cameras, motion detection equipment geared to sound an alarm when someone is approaching the front door area, and constantly locked front doors that are unable to be entered unless a team member of the organization allows. With such a well-established facility in a high area of sex trafficking in the city, the interviews were conducted at the organization. The researcher was provided with a private office space to conduct all of the interviews. To promote confidentiality a sound machine was used outside of the door to mask the interview from being heard by those outside of the room. A sign was also posted on the door to the office space to encourage individuals to not interrupt the interview. Having access to the office

space in the facility promoted safety because of its familiarity to the clientele at Awaken and the already established security.

Participants

Awaken selected participants based on whom they determined would likely want to participate in the interviews and those who would be accessible for a second interview. All of the participants were informed they would not be refused services by Awaken if they chose not to participate and that they had the right to “pass” on any questions asked by the interviewer. Overall, there were ten individuals who participated in the study and all were female, between the ages of 18 and 50, only fluently spoke English, and all were victims of sex trafficking. The other demographic information provided in the participant descriptions is age, sexual orientation, the preferred language used to discuss sex trafficking with terms such as the life or the game, the initial age of exploitation, and the amount of time the person was sex trafficked. Due to concerns about participant anonymity being compromised by the race or ethnicity data, it was withheld from the participant descriptions.

The pseudonyms for the ten participants were: Aiden, Alice, Alyssa, April, Barb, Charity, Ellie, Jen, Juno, and Melissa. Only two of the participants requested the researcher select a pseudonym for them – Juno and Melissa. The majority of the participants selected names that begin with the letter “A” and the researcher decided to honor the names participants selected and not veer them away from a name starting with a certain letter. The only request the researcher asked of the participants when selecting a pseudonym was for them to avoid providing the researcher with a recognizable nickname or street name.

Each participant's demographic information will be described and a table is presented on page 78 that summarizes the participant information. The table is also listed in Appendix D. Aiden was a 26-year old participant who identified her sexual orientation as abstinent. She did not have a preference for the language used to discuss sex trafficking. The participant started being sex trafficked when she was 18-years old and it continued for 7 years. Alice was a 37-year old individual who identified as heterosexual. She identified that "the life" was the most commonly use language to describe sex trafficking, so that was the term utilized during her interviews. The participant expressed being sex trafficked when she was around 21 or 22-years old and she was sex trafficked for 4-5 years.

Alyssa was a 24-year old participant who identified her sexual orientation as heterosexual. She was sex trafficked at 22-years old and was sex trafficked for 2 years. This participant preferred the researcher refer to sex trafficking as "the life." April was a 34-year old heterosexual individual who did not have a preference on the language utilized in the interviews to discuss sex trafficking. This participant started to be sex trafficked when she was 20-years old and was sex trafficked for 10 years. Barb was a 29-year old participant who identified as heterosexual. This participant also did not have a preference on the language used to discuss sex trafficking. Barb initially began being sex trafficked when she was 23-years old and was sex trafficked for about 4-5 years. Charity was a 32-year old heterosexual participant who preferred the researcher refer to sex trafficking as "the life." Charity was initially sex trafficked starting at 19-years old and was sex trafficked for 8 years.

Ellie was a heterosexual participant that was 32-years old. This participant request that the researcher call sex trafficking “alternative lifestyle living”, she was the only participant to identify it as something other than sex trafficking, the life, or the game. This participant started being sex trafficked at 18-years old and was sex trafficked for 13 years. Jen was a 23-year old heterosexual participant. Jen did not have a preference on the language the researcher used during the interview process. Jen identified that she had always been sex trafficked, when asked how old she was when it initially started the participant stated, “...when I was very little, like I don’t remember not...” The participant stated that being sex trafficked was something that occurred off and on for the majority of her life. Juno was a 30-year old participant who identified as pansexual. She did not have a preference on the language to describe sex trafficking. She identified that she started to be sex trafficked when she was 12-years old and it lasted for 15 years. Lastly, Melissa was a 42-year old lesbian participant. Melissa did not have a preference on the sex trafficking language during the interview process. Melissa reported that she started to be sex trafficked when she was 19-years old and was sex trafficked for 6 years.

Table 1: Participant Descriptions

Pseudonym	Age	Sexual Orientation	Preferred Language	Initial Age of Exploitation	Length of Exploitation
Aiden	26	Abstinent	No preference	18-years old	7 years
Alice	37	Heterosexual	The life	21-22 years old	4-5 years
Alyssa	24	Heterosexual	The life	22-years old	2 years
April	34	Heterosexual	No preference	20-years old	10 years
Barb	29	Heterosexual	No preference	23-years old	4-5 years
Charity	32	Heterosexual	The life	19-years old	8 years
Ellie	32	Heterosexual	Alternative lifestyle living	18-years old	13 years
Jen	23	Heterosexual	No preference	“...when I was very little, like I don’t remember not...”	Off and on the majority of her life
Juno	30	Pansexual	No preference	12-years old	15 years
Melissa	42	Lesbian	No preference	19-years old	6 years

These are the descriptions for all 10 participants – Aiden, Alice, Alyssa, April, Barb, Charity, Ellie, Jen, Juno, and Melissa.

Data Collection

Before collecting data, this study was submitted for permission to be conducted through the Institutional Review Board (IRB). After IRB approval, Awaken selected participants and provided them with information about the research study. The researcher and Awaken team members previously agreed upon specific interview dates and times when a private room could be provided to the researcher, so the availability would be provided to interested participants to decide on a date and time to meet. The Awaken team member could then schedule an interview for a specific date and time within the researcher’s availability and update the researcher that an interview had been scheduled.

The data was collected by two in-depth semi-structured interviews; the interview script is provided in Appendix A, the interview questions are provided in Appendix B, and a blank sample of the icebreaker worksheet is in Appendix C. The interview script was read to each participant before the interviews to ensure they understood the study objectives, the reasons the researcher was conducting this study, it asked the participants to be mindful of the researcher being a mandated reporter so not to disclose about wanting to hurt themselves or someone else or child abuse or neglect, that the participant had the right to “pass” on questions, that services would not be refused by Awaken if they chose not participate, the information would be audio recorded and deidentified, and after the participants were provided with all this information then consent to participate was asked. After reading the interview script, the icebreaker was facilitated at the beginning of each of the first interviews. Once the icebreaker was completed and thoroughly discussed the researcher then asked the participant the interview questions.

The data collection began May 28th of 2019 and was completed on September 30th of 2019; transcribing the data was completed by October 1st of 2019 and data analysis was implemented from October 1st of 2019 to January 1st of 2020. For both interviews, all of the participants were individually interviewed in English and in-person for about an hour to an hour and half and upon completion received a \$50 gift card per interview. With permission from the participant each interview was audio recorded and then later transcribed. All participants were asked to provide a pseudonym for their interview transcript and if they did not choose one then a random pseudonym was assigned.

Data Analysis

The primary data analysis was conducted totally apart from any theoretical concept and was focused on capturing the lived experiences. Moustakas (1994) created a process to analyze phenomenological qualitative data, which requires the researcher to consider “Epoch” or the ability to set aside biases, judgments, and preconceived notions. The researcher did this by actively journaling and seeking consultation about the preconceived ideas about sex trafficking in general and the victims of sex trafficking (Moustakas, 1994). The next step was recording and transcribing the interviews while maintaining a journal (Moustakas, 1994). While reviewing the transcriptions, phenomenological reduction was utilized to define any emerging themes (Moustakas, 1994). The process of phenomenological reduction was as follows: organizing the data, identifying categories, coding the data, generating themes, and then interpreting the themes (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). The identified categories are the groups of data that represent a particular variable or segment, which are coded with other similar variables or segments (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Through the inception of the categories, the themes of the data begin to represent themselves through the connections and patterns being created (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). The categories have provided direction for gathering the data, but the themes have identified those patterns and processes that have potential explanations for the data and provide the experiences and information with meaning (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). The categories were discovered by identifying patterns within the data. For example, one major theme in the results section was trauma ridden relationships due to 7 out of 10 participants detailing instances of traumatizing relations during the interview. The trauma ridden relationships section consisted of two subthemes, the first subtheme was the immediate family with 7 out of 10 participants discussing

trauma endured from immediate family members. The second subtheme was previous romantic relationships and pimps with 7 out of 10 of the participants indicating trauma within those relationships. This was an iterative process due to constant revisiting the data and connecting it with new insights (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009).

Table 2 demonstrates the major themes from the first analysis that include trauma ridden relationships, ambivalent relationships, if someone cared, friend or foe, the double edge sword, and trust is difficult. The table also included if a major theme had subthemes, the count/percentage (the number of participants in the study who were considered for this theme), and an exemplary quote per major or subtheme. This table can also be found as Appendix E.

Table 2: Coding for First Analysis: Phenomenology

Major themes		
Subthemes		
Focused codes	Counts/Percentages	Exemplary Quote
Trauma Ridden Relationships		
Immediate Family	7/10 (70%)	“I think so. I assume he got money for it. I don’t know. I know that he was always there when like guys were doing things and he was always the reason why.”
Previous Romantic Relationships and Pimps	7/10 (70%)	“I would come home and he would be like I have some of my guy friends over let’s go in there and I get tied up on the bed, you know.”
Ambivalent Relationships		
Familial Relationships	7/10 (70%)	“It’s hard because I understand why he is lonely and why he is sad and why he always wants to make money. He always says that it is for us. I just feel like I understand where he comes from which makes it hard to hate him.”

Relationships with Johns	7/10 (70%)	“Cute, some of them are nice, cheap, some of them are smelly, dingy, greasy, fat, a groper that wants to be touchy feely and lovey dovey, old, rich, broke, cheap, tight wad.”
If Someone Cared	5/10 (50%)	“Yes, if my mom actually cared or if I went and lived with my dad I don’t think I would be where I am today at all, but it’s not their fault. I just think if I grew up differently things would have been different.”
Friend or Foe	5/10 (50%)	“Friends, I was going to school. I just graduated from high school and was going to (named community college) and then I started hanging around with bad friends and that’s how I got involved in the life.”
The Double Edge Sword		
Helpful	8/10 (80%)	
Mental Health Professionals	5/10 (50%)	“She really understands. She doesn’t try to make it better or anything. She just validates that that’s how I feel and it really sucks. I really like that.”
Law Enforcement	3/10 (30%)	“No, that lady was really concerned and cared. Do you need to talk to me? I told her I’m ok. I’m fine.”
Medical Professionals		“So they were really good to me. They were really good to me.”
Hurtful	4/10 (40%)	
Mental Health Professionals	10/10 (100%)	“It just sucks because I have always been passed from therapist to therapist because nobody can understand and nobody can handle my life.”
Law Enforcement	7/10 (70%)	“Very and I think the police look at us as a criminal and don’t really look at us as someone that needs help. It’s unfortunate. Yeah, it’s rough.”

Medical Professionals	6/10 (60%) 7/10 (70%)	I was never honest about my life. I don't think it would have helped me. In the long run they could have made me come to counseling and got me out of the life sooner, but it's embarrassing, shameful."
Trust is Difficult	9/10 (90%)	"I don't trust anybody."

A secondary analysis was conducted with a humanistic-existential lens. The transcripts were reanalyzed to identify patterns within the data that aligned with the lens. The theoretical concepts and key terminology considered while reanalyzing the data were unconditional positive regard, warmth, empathy, genuineness, congruence, change within a relationship, existential isolation, meaninglessness and meaning, and responsibility (Rogers, 1961; Yalom & Josselson, 2014; Frankl, 1978). These concepts and terminology were considered to be sensitizing concepts that provided the researcher with the theoretical terms and framework when reanalyzing the research (Charmaz, 2006). For example, one major theme in the results section was meaninglessness and meaning due to 8 out of 10 participants detailing instances of either meaninglessness or meaning. The meaninglessness and meaning section consisted of two subthemes, the first subtheme was meaninglessness with 5 out of 10 participants discussing trauma endured from immediate family members. The second subtheme was meaning with 7 out of 10 of the participants indicating meaning created from relationships, hope, and suffering.

Humanistic theories and Existentialism are based in the philosophy and psychology of Phenomenology, where the perspectives of clients are highly valued.

Phenomenology and Existentialism are actually interrelated due to their emphasis on each human beings' creation of meaning (Frankl, 1978; Yalom & Josselson, 2014; Christensen & Brumfield, 2010). Even though phenomenology and the lens complimented one another well and are interrelated, the use of theory provided the research with theoretical depth and prompted the researcher to analyze the data differently. The creation of meaning through experiences and senses within phenomenology is not dependent on a human being making meaning in life like in existentialism.

Table 3: Coding for Second Analysis: Humanistic-Existential Lens

Major themes		
Subthemes		
Focused codes	Counts/Percentages	Exemplary Quote
Unconditional Positive Regard	6/10 (60%)	“Yeah, not judging is a very important part. I feel like all my friends are accepting of all walks of life so I don't feel like I keep anything in my circle that's not.”
Existential Isolation	5/10 (50%)	“When I was in the life I really didn't interact with anyone. I was isolated from all my friends.”
Meaninglessness and Meaning	8/10 (70%)	“I tried to drive the car off the road while my madam was driving and so I just tried to kill us and then I got out of the car.” “It's kind of like my way of proving that I am worth something and all the naysayers, thanks because this is for you. That's kind of for me because I feel like if you can find like positive energy in the people that have used, abused, harassed
Meaninglessness	5/10 (50%)	
Meaning	7/10 (70%)	

		you through all of that (use the middle finger then).”
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Table 3 demonstrates the major themes from the second analysis that include unconditional positive regard, existential isolation, and meaninglessness and meaning. The table also included if a major theme had subthemes, the count/percentage (the number of participants in the study who were considered for this theme), and an exemplary quote per major or subtheme. This table can also be found as Appendix F.

Ethical Considerations

There were ethical considerations to be mindful of such as feelings of discomfort and uneasiness when conducting research on a group of individuals who have experienced a trauma like sex trafficking. Since this is the case, low-income counseling resources were provided to all participants.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research is grounded in the rigor of the data collection process and the adequacy of the results concluded from the data (Morrow, 2005). In order to preserve trustworthiness and credibility of the data and themes from the data a few strategies were conducted for assurance. The first strategy used was triangulation, which the researcher used multiple data sources at multiple points in time to create a holistic image of the experience (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). For this study, the researcher used two semi-structured interviews with participants as data sources across all interviews. The second strategy was for the researcher to complete repeated reviews of the data to ensure its credibility.

Limitations

There are a few limitations to this study to consider. The first limitation is the concern for having individuals who have been sex trafficked discussing potentially uncomfortable topics, which might cause them to experience some uneasiness and remind them of negative or traumatic experiences. Taking this into consideration, there is no guarantee these women would provide genuine information and might contribute information they believe the researcher would like to hear. A lack of genuineness with the researcher could be due to a variety of reasons such as a general distrust of other people, a fear of being misunderstood, or a sense of not being ready to share any personal information about themselves. These women were being provided compensation with gift cards for participating in the two interviews, so this could have impacted the group to participate for the gift card rather than an interest in having their voices heard.

However, techniques to facilitate trust were used like rapport building before the interview by inquiring about how the participants were doing on that particular day, if they had plans for the weekend, and some small talk about the weather. Once the participant was settled in for the interview then the purpose of the study was explained as well as the potential benefits of the study. The ideology behind this tactic was to spark interest in the participant and promote genuine responses. During the beginning of the interview, an icebreaker was used to ease the participant into sharing more about herself and her journey. Lastly, each participant was asked if she was doing okay after both interviews, but the intention is that it would promote comfort and trust in the second interview. An advantage to include in this section would be the gender piece and how the

interviewer was female as well as all of the participants and had this not been the case it could have potentially altered the data collected.

Another limitation was that member checking was not conducted with the participants after both interviews were transcribed. The researcher did not have access to or the means to provide a third gift card to the participants for another meeting to review the transcripts. There were also pressing concerns about this population being transient. Two of the participants reported in their first interview that they both were moving out-of-state. This allowed for the researcher time to wait a month to re-interview them, but it had not granted enough time to transcribe the data and set another meeting time with them. Another issue was the participants access to transportation and some interviews were cancelled due to an inability for the participant to travel to Awaken. These issues were why member checking was not completed.

Chapter IV: Results

The data analysis process, as described in the prior chapter, was conducted in two stages. First the data was analyzed through a phenomenological lens without influence from research or theory. The focus of the first analysis was to understand the lived relational experiences of the participants. The research question driving the first analysis was, what are the lived relational experiences of sex trafficked women?

Through a phenomenological reduction process themes reflecting the relational experiences of sex trafficked women were discovered. The second analysis was conducted through a humanistic-existential theoretical lens to reexamine the relational experiences of sex trafficked women. The research question addressed by the second analysis was also, what are the lived relational experiences of sex trafficked women?

Phenomenological Analysis of Relational Experiences of Sex Trafficked Women

Through the first analysis 6 themes were discovered. The themes described in the section about the relational experiences of sex trafficked women were: (a) Trauma Ridden Relationships, (b) Ambivalent Relationships, (c) If Someone Cared, (d) Friend or Foe, (e) The Double Edge Sword, (f) and Trust is Difficult.

Trauma Ridden Relationships

It was revealed during the data analysis that a number of participants experienced relationships riddled with trauma. For the purposes of this theme, *trauma* is defined as a profoundly distressing experience that includes either physical harm, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, or neglect. The traumatizer or victimizer in these trauma-ridden relationships varied in terms of the nature of their relationship with the participant. Two

broad classification of roles included immediate family members and previous romantic partners and/or pimps.

Immediate Family. The data in this theme elaborates the traumatic relationships the participants had with immediate family members. Jen was a participant who when asked when she had initially started being sex trafficked she responded, "...when I was very little, like I don't remember not..." Jen reported that her father sex trafficked her and she assumes it was to receive money, but she is unsure. She just knows that he is the reason why these sexual activities occurred to her. Jen stated, "I think so. I assume he got money for it. I don't know. I know that he was always there when like guys were doing things and he was always the reason why." Jen expressed how her father was in the room when she was sex trafficked as a child: "When I was younger, he was always in the room when things were happening and so I kind of felt like he was protecting me" and "When I was younger he would talk during it and stop things if they... I don't know how he based it off of what, but..." Jen reported who her father sold her to as well. "He was a sheriff. I don't know where the other guys came from that group. I know a couple of them had badges and I assumed they were cops. I don't know. I thought it was always mostly friends." Although her father was her sex trafficker, he did not like Jen's physical appearance as described by her, "He liked me more than all the other kids except that like he didn't like how I looked supposedly." Jen reported that her father would have preferred she looked more like her sister. "Well, he wanted me to be a nice person and to be prettier. He always told me I should look like my sister and I just don't. She has more of his build than I do."

Jen identified hating her mother more than her father because she knew her father was sex trafficking her and was compliant. Jen states:

“Yeah she’s hard because I hate her more than dad honestly because she is compliant. She knew. I assume she knew about all of it. Maybe, she doesn’t know about all of it. When I moved out of the house and told her why I was moving out of the house and it had a lot to do with dad and I was very not good at covering up why I was leaving and I don’t know I just ended up telling her about some of the things that happened and mom ended up crying and ‘I told him not to do that anymore and I thought he wasn’t.’ Basically, you knew and you talked to him about it, which was probably scary, but then you did nothing when it didn’t change. Maybe she didn’t know it didn’t change, but then later on when it started happening when I was older when I was on the fence about going to Vegas. She was like, ‘you have to come to Vegas with us’ and when I started resisting not doing the things that dad and the other guys wanted me to do, mom was like, ‘dad knows best. Do what dad says. He’s just trying to protect you,’ stupid things like that. She was always making excuses for him.”

Jen identified that her mother was the only person in her life with the knowledge about what was happening that could have protected her. Jen explained, “Yeah, well she is the one person in my life who could have done something and she didn’t.”

Ellie discussed her immediate family from the perspective of her childhood and described her relationship with her stepfather, who inappropriately touched her. To understand the context of the upcoming quote, it is important to note that Ellie’s mother

married her biological father's twin brother. She explained her relationship with her stepfather and how it impacts her protectiveness as a mother when she stated:

“My mom's husband - that she married my dad's twin brother - and he used to give me these really weird massages...and I mean they were just weird and like I'm so afraid of getting into a relationship with another man that's not their dad because I don't want anything to happen to my kids.”

She also described how these massages impacted how she viewed herself, “If I didn't have a step dad who was my dad's twin brother giving me weird ass fucking massages that I would have never felt I was only worth sex and something like that.”

Juno described her relationship with her father as one he was often physically absent from, “My dad was not ever there. He was more like the financial and even when he was physically at home he wasn't there. He was always out, or he was in his room. If we disrupted him we'd get in trouble.” When he was present Juno described how he had her watch pornography to learn to talk to older men to assist him with catching pedophiles. Juno described it as,

“He was like, ‘that's it you need to help us catch him and you're not doing it right.’ He says, ‘we'll watch these porn videos, this is how you talk to them, this is this, you do what you do, you say if you need to we'll put you in a room by yourself, if you need to do to what he's saying to keep him motivated do it you need to get him caught’ and so...”

Juno identified that she did what her father asked and how it impacted her when she stated,

“I was bait. I can say that now without batting an eye. I was. I had to [starts to cry] I had to learn. [A few seconds pass in silence.] So I would do what the teacher told me to do to keep him on long enough and I’d watch these movies and look at these girls. Everything went downhill from there.”

Quotes from Jen, Ellie, and Juno provide the theme with data surrounding the traumatic relationships they experienced with immediate family members.

Previous Romantic Relationships and Pimps. Similar to the previous section, this segment includes data supporting the theme of traumatic relationships experienced by the participants primarily through relationships with previous romantic partners and pimp. Aiden discussed a previous romantic relationship and how her partner was physically violent towards her. Aiden stated,

“The first time I remember I jumped out of the bathroom window because he was going to kill me. He kept pushing my head under water. I don’t remember where he went, but he went out of the room completely. So I jumped out of the bathroom window because I was scared and I know he can out run me. I didn’t think he could jump out of the bathroom, but he could. I took off running and I got to the fence. I got between the fence. I got through the hole of another the fence and I went and slammed on the window of a car that was driving by because the door was locked and it happened to be an undercover cop or off duty cop. He called his buddies and they took my statement. They have him sitting down because he was chasing me. They have him sitting down right next to me as I am writing my stupid statement out. I was scared for my life as it was. They let me go and five

minutes later they let him go and he got to come get me, fucked up. There wasn't enough evidence for them to do anything about it."

Aiden also identified her previous romantic partner as a pimp she'd had who was interested in the money she had made. Aiden stated,

"The third time I was kidnapped and both of my eyes were swelled shut so I couldn't see and 3 days later one of my eyes started to open and he was like, "Where's your fucking money, where's your fucking money?" I left it at the Z it's in the office at the Z. I swear I have it, but I didn't have no money. I swore I had it because he was going to kill me and so when my eyes started to open he was like, "We need to go fucking pay rent. You need to go get your fucking money." He's not allowed on the Z property. He walked with me to the property line. You can see where the office door is and so I walked up to the office and I knocked on the door and I took off running to Johnny's house."

These quotes provided by Aiden display the physical abuse in a trauma ridden relationship with a previous romantic relationship and pimp. Alice had previously been in a romantic relationship with a pimp and her drug connect. Alice expressed how she felt safer when she was working as stated here,

"It is, but it's like I think the only reason I felt safer at The View was because my boyfriend wasn't there because he was physically abusing me a lot, a lot. I felt more safe there because he wasn't there. I knew that if I was there I wasn't in trouble. I was doing what I was supposed to be doing. I felt like he couldn't yell at me if I didn't make enough money. I was doing what I was supposed to be doing, but if I was home with him I was never doing enough and I was never really

afraid of the police arresting me and that never happened thank god. I was more afraid of him.”

Alice repeated, “He hit me if I wasn’t doing what I was supposed to be doing.” Despite the physical abuse Alice stated, “I felt like I loved mine a lot. I still don’t hate him. I hate the things he did, but I don’t hate him.”

Ellie discusses how the pimp she has had the longest is her husband as she states, “I’ve had pimps, but they were more like relational, boyfriends. I just believed that they were relational. The person I was with the longest is now my husband.” There are times when Ellie questions whether their marriage was to protect her husband as stated by her, “There is times where I feel like he was a pimp and married me so that the spousal immunity clause would be in effect so if I catch a case out of state and then I wouldn’t have to testify against him and he wouldn’t catch a pimp and a pandering case.” Ellie described her husband as, “He’s not necessarily the most healthy person.” She also identified that he could be physically abusive when she stated, “He’s been in prison for the last two and a half years and he was pretty abusive and now that it’s not in my face like this (puts hand up against her face) and it’s from a distance I can see an unhealthy connection there. It’s just a process.” Ellie reported that she has been doing counseling on her relationship with him and still struggles as stated here, “There’s so many trauma bonds and unhealthy bonds that it’s taken me a really long time in therapy to just, kind of, identify all those and I’m working on a disconnection where I still like am in love like with the thought of him and that family thing cuz we’ve been together 11 years this July...”

The quotes provided from Ellie demonstrate the trauma in a relationship with a previous partner and pimp through the unhealthy connections, the potential of using her for immunity, and the physical abuse.

Juno reported that she had an ex-husband who would force her to have sex with her friends. Juno stated, “You know I lost friends cuz he was like go have sex with this person and that was like a friend I knew since I was like in kindergarten and then the minute you have sex with him it was just done. Dead.” Juno also was forced to have sex with her ex-husbands friends as well when she stated, “I would come home and he would be like I have some of my guy friends over let’s go in there and I get tied up on the bed, you know” and “I’d come home and he’s like, ‘Hey some of my buddies are inside the room playing video games.’ ‘Come inside the room.’ ‘I am like I want to go eat something’ and he says, ‘No, come in.’ ‘I am like alright.’” Juno stated that if she fought back this would be what her ex-husband would do to her,

“You know when you are a fighter and you fight him the first time, the guy gets mad and he storms out cause he didn’t get anything then you have to deal with daddy being pissed off and when they leave he has his way with you. He ties you up. He hits you, chokes you and you can’t go anywhere and you can’t scream because your mouth is gagged. You lay there for hours tied up. You can’t go anywhere. If he’s really pissed off and you have to go to the bathroom you piss on yourself and then he gets mad because you pissed the bed. You just lay there and take it because you learn after the first if you are dumb enough like me second, third time the punishment gets worse and worse. After the third time of being tied up choked and gagged and you are fighting for air and you feel like you

can't breath and bruises everywhere and you're are tied up and you don't know how long because the curtains are so dark on the windows. You get a knock on the door and your mom is like, 'Are you ok, are you ok?' 'I came to visit.' You can't answer."

The carefully selected participants whose quotes were provided in this section all demonstrate the traumatic relationships they have had with a previous romantic partner and/or pimp.

Ambivalent Relationships

The theme of ambivalent relationships is demonstrated by data from the participants and the relationships they have with their immediate families and Johns. This theme was organized in two sections categorized by the relationship.

Familial Relationships. Jen, provided data to emphasize the previous theme of Trauma Ridden Relationships, demonstrated ambivalence while discussing her father. Jen previously discussed her father sex trafficking her. Despite trafficking her, Jen likes to consider that he did not mean to sex traffic her. Jen stated, "I liked to think that he didn't actually mean too, such a lie." Jen reported that she struggles to hate her father and presented some empathy or understanding for him and his actions. Jen described it as,

"It's hard because I understand why he is lonely and why he is sad and why he always wants to make money. He always says that it is for us. I just feel like I understand where he comes from which makes it hard to hate him."

Jen also expresses how she understands how her father became the way he is. Jen reported,

“In a way I kind of feel like I know how dad got to where he is at and what he had to lose in order to come that way and it sucks. It is going to be really hard for him to change.”

Jen further mentioned some similarities the two have as well. Jen described,

“He and I liked the same things. He was music major. I played so many different instruments. He and I did a lot of woodworking and went on bike rides together and we did outdoor things.”

April identified that she loves and hates her mother while completing the interviews.

April stated,

“Definitely does but I love you and hate you thing and I can’t internalize or look at the things that she does never will get an apology. That was the hardest part to accept and taking a long time to even get to where I am at now and for a while there I wasn’t speaking to her and she’ll chalk it up to literally in her words ‘Well, we are both bitches.’ And so we had a tantrum and so we didn’t talk for a while which lead to what happen, but, ah, yeah, but she is kind of trying to build a relationship with me. She says things like ‘Oh, you were really good then.’ And I am like ‘yeah, uh-huh.’”

April also discussed the struggle of wanting to love her mother and not be burned by her at the same time. April described this predicament as, “She’s, it’s difficult because she is my mother and I want to love her but on the other hand I know if I get to close she is just going to burn me so it’s kind of I can tell when I am not wanted a little bit.” April’s mother is not the only family member in her immediate family that she struggles having contradictory feelings for; April reported that due to her brother’s substance abuse she

struggles to maintain a relationship him. In regards to her brother, April stated, “He’s struggling, but I love him but he’s kind of just, there is some uhm, boundaries there.” April expressed how she has been watching him self-destruct over the years by saying, “It has just been kind of watching him self-destruct over the years. I love him and I want to be there for him and I have been there for him.” Even though April feels guilty when not answering her brother’s call she does so anyway to maintain healthy boundaries with him. April reported this by sharing, “Yeah, sometimes he calls and I don’t answer. I feel so guilty but he just sucks, so, yeah.”

Similar to April, Melissa struggles with her relationship between her mother and brother as well. She too has a brother who struggles with substance abuse issues. Melissa indicated that she loves her mother by expressing, “We don’t really have a close relationship, but I love my mom and I guess I am closest with her.” Despite Melissa’s love for her, she shared in multiple statements that her mother was not a nurturing or supportive individual. Melissa stated, “She is not really a nurturing type of mother” as well as, “My mom was more like Hitler [giggles]. She did the best she could. She just wasn’t a nurturing mom” and, “She is not a very supportive and nurturing type of mother.” When Melissa told her mother that she was in the life this is how she responded, “At the time, no, she knew afterwards and she kept saying, ‘I should have known better. What was I thinking?’ that type of thing.” Melissa described their communication as though her mother did not listen to her often and would yell at her. Melissa stated, “Anytime I would talk to her about stuff she would get angry and yell and not listen or talk to me like a mom or teach me.” Melissa believes that her mother loves

her as mentioned here, “Even though I messed up, she still loves me as her daughter. I love and respect that about her.”

Melissa, like April, sets boundaries with her brother despite loving him. Melissa reported, “I love him, but I have to kind of keep him at a distance I guess.” Melissa shared that the two are no longer close when she said, “My brother, he is on heroin right now, a walking hot mess. I am not very close with him anymore. It breaks my heart.” Melissa struggled with substance use herself while she was sex trafficked. She stated, “I never did heroin, but I did other drugs.” Her own history of substance use impacts her relationship with her brother because he sometimes offers substances to her for her to use with him. Melissa shared,

“He has offered to get me meth a few times and I got this for you. You don’t give a meth addict meth after they have been clean and sober for so long and that is another reason why he is one the outside circle. I have to keep him far away because that is a temptation. It is a hard one to say no to.”

Melissa fears one day he will overdose and die from his substance use and worries how this will hurt her. Melissa stated,

“I am scared to get the phone call that he has OD’d. I don’t know, I guess I have kind of isolated myself from him because I am more scared of that happening and it is going to hurt, but I see what it is doing to my mom and I don’t want that being done to me.”

Similarly, to Melissa and April, both Charity and Ellie have immediate family members who struggle with substance abuse. However, unlike Melissa and April, Charity and

Ellie's family members are their mothers. Charity described her mother and their relationship like this,

“I obviously not like mean, my mom was a crack whore, ya know what I mean? Yeah, so she died like 10 years ago, but she wasn't very involved in my life and then when she was it was like when she was not on drugs and then she'd get back on.”

Charity expressed how their relationship was always okay and not okay when she stated, “She was cool when she was cool, but when she wasn't she wasn't.” Charity discussed having mixed feelings about the grieving process related to her mother's death as mentioned here, “I'm mad and upset and still haven't got over my mom dying even though it's 10 years later.” Charity described how she called her mother while she was in jail, but she did not answer due to her own priorities. Charity stated, “I did call my mom, but I couldn't get a hold of her because she is on crack and is prostituting too. I couldn't get a hold of her and then I got out.” Charity shared more about the feelings she felt towards her mother and her death by expressing,

“I am going to cry. [She begins to cry while talking.] I got out after 2 weeks because I couldn't get a hold of my mom or my dad. I get out and I am only out for 2 days and then my mom's dies on the couch. I waited in jail for 2 weeks and I am only home for 2 days and my mom dies. The worse part was we were mad. I was mad at her and stuff like that. She knew I was in jail. I got out and she was crying and coughing so hard my grandmother took her to the hospital and stuff. Literally, like 2 days later, my mom died and I didn't get to say things that I needed to say or whatever.”

At her mother's funeral Charity discovered that her mother had other children with other men. Charity explained it as,

“My mom had other kids after me and my brother and I am the oldest thinking it's just me and my brother this whole time and there is kids after us that we didn't find out about until the funeral. That was hurtful, that was horrible and my grandma too.”

After her mother's death, Charity was given the apartment to live in. Charity reported, “My mom dies and I get the apartment to myself and I can have friends over and I can do what I really want to do and have my own apartment at 19.” Her next thought was concern about finances and she stated, “But then what am I going to do without her. I don't have that much money, just stuff like that.”

Ellie described her mother as, “My mom is in her addiction a huge alcoholic, a huge drinker.” She expressed a need for distance like Melissa and April when she stated, “My mom, I love her to death, she is still in her addiction though so she's kind of a little more distant, but I love her to death.” Ellie expressed how her mother tends to tell her, ‘I told you so’ when she mentioned, “She'll show up when shit hits the fan and then be like ‘I told you so’ or hold it against us for the rest of our life kind of ‘remember when I did this?’ (sigh).” Ellie also expressed how when her children were being abused by a roommate that her mother opted to believe the roommate instead of her. Ellie stated,

“My mom didn't believe me. I finally made it to her house to try and tell her she's like you are just on drugs. I wasn't on drugs and she took me right back to the house and believed these people over me.”

Despite Ellie feeling mixed emotions about her mother she reported, “I don’t want to be like my mom. I don’t want to be that person my kids are like fuck her. I just don’t.”

The data for this theme represents the ambivalence the participants experience with immediate family members.

Relationships with Johns. This section of the theme explores the relationships the participants had with the Johns they interacted while being sex trafficked. While reviewing the data there was an anticipated emphasis on the disgust or disdain the women experienced towards this group. However, there were also other feelings aside from disgust that women felt for some of the Johns, which was unexpected and an interesting component of the relationships to highlight. This theme yet again explores the complicated relationships and emotions these women experience while being sex trafficked.

Charity described the Johns as, “Like what cute, broke, nasty, dirty, white...” Charity also referred to them as, “Cute, some of them are nice, cheap, some of them are smelly, dingy, greasy, fat, a groper that wants to be touchy feely and lovey dovey, old, rich, broke, cheap, tight wad.” Similarly, Melissa emphasized how the Johns were dirty and disgusting. Melissa stated, “Dirty, disgusting, I did get to meet some really nice men, but the majority of them were just...” Jen was in alignment with Melissa and Charity by reporting, “They’re just gross. When I was younger I didn’t really know what I would describe them as because they were just people. As I got older the end stuff, Vegas was really bad. They are scary, gross.”

Jen discussed being physically harmed by a John as well when she explained, “One of the guys cut me a lot and so the guy, there was a couple of guys in between, they

didn't care." Juno elaborated on the experience of having sexual relations with a John by sharing,

"You know they would be touching the shoulder and he would just be kind of like, he has all these grimy hands all over you. One starts to take your shirt off. You get pushed on the bed and you just blank everything out cause you know if you fight it's going to happen anyway. You learn to lay there and take it. Don't fight it. You fight it, it makes it worse. It's gross and grimy."

Melissa expressed how while she was having sexual relations with Johns that she wanted to leave her body and escape. Melissa stated, "There is always that out of body experience where you just kind of want to leave your body and not be there."

An important aspect to note is that for many of the represented participants in this section they discuss regulars vs. non-regulars. When a participant is referring to a regular in this context she is discussing a John who regularly purchased services. There was no information provided on how many times a John had to visit a participant before he or she became a regular.

Barb described having a feeling that felt like compassion or empathy, which was something other than disgust or fear was conflicting. Barb stated,

"I would say conflicting because they were the kindest people to me for the most part. Not all of them were. I always had my guard up at first. The ones who were regulars, some of them were really nice guys and that doesn't change what they were doing was not ok, but I know some of them were genuinely looking for a connection just like beyond physical. I know that they were looking for a connection. It was really conflicting. It's still even hard now to think about how I

was friend with them and how I could depend on them and to think about it now it is really weird. In the end, they were paying me money for intimacy. It's a weird thing."

Barb believed she could also let her guard down when she was in the presence of a regular. Barb reported,

"When I had a regular I could let my guard down a little bit because from past experiences that taught me that this person is more easy to be around like I know that they are going to give all of my money. I know not to worry about something crazy happening. I still had my guard up, but just let down a little bit."

Charity expressed a sense of trust could be formed when working for a regular. Charity described it as, "Yeah like a trust, you can trust me. I can trust you." Melissa expressed it as if there was a friendship forming between herself and a regular client. Melissa referred to it as,

"It's like with any relationship. You meet a person; a stranger and you just click. Oh, this is a good friendship. You just have a friendship or build a relationship, but you do have the business side but at the same time you open up to them and they open up to you."

Melissa provided a specific example of a time where she experienced a friendship like relationship with a John. Melissa explained it as,

"I remember I had this regular. He became a good friend. He would always buy me stuff, jewelry. On Valentine's Day I got a Pandora bracelet. He was a really good, perverted old man. I really enjoyed his company. It was sad to find out that he died. I totally broke down. He was good to me. We fought like a couple

sometimes. He was an older man. He was easy to talk to. He had that life experience that I didn't. He had totally open doors for women and take women out to eat. It was a good relationship.”

Alyssa expressed a similar experience when she discussed how one of the Johns she had met with while being sex trafficked would visit her when she went to jail. Alyssa stated, “Yeah, I cared for him. He took care of me when I was in jail, every time I was in jail. He visited me when I was in jail.”

Barb and Ellie seemed to take these friendships even further by having empathy for a John or many Johns. Ellie stated, “That was something new for me. I normally didn't empathize with my clients.” Barb also shared,

“I think it is more empathy. It's like where are you at in life where this is like it? How far did you come? I know everybody starts off as a baby when we don't have any grip or anything, so what lead you here? Even like back then I was very empathic, which is weird, strange.”

It seems as though Melissa and Barb were able to consider what the life of a John might be like for him to pursue what he is doing. Melissa reported,

“At the end of the day they are a client seeking some kind of companionship or sex. You get to realize that no matter what career or title you have or how much money you have that people are lacking that connection or lacking something that they need to go searching for it and pay someone for it.”

Barb also expressed,

“I feel bad for them. You don’t have to do this. This is really bad; it is really bad what they are doing. It is really sad also girls like me think or worth to where we do that. It’s a bunch of dysfunction all in one place.”

Overall, the women who were highlighted in this section had a sense of ambivalence towards the Johns from when they were being sex trafficked. It seems as though many participants came to care for, trust, empathize with, and have compassion for some of the Johns they encountered while being sex trafficked.

If Someone Cared

This theme elaborates the participants descriptions of how they believe if an individual had cared about them then they might not have been sex trafficked. Some of the participants related it to having a family member to care or if they had been raised by different parents while others would have gladly welcomed any caring individual into their life.

Aiden expressed how if someone had cared about her she would not have been sex trafficked. Aiden stated, “I think if somebody would have cared and showed me that they cared and continued to care about me I wouldn’t have gone down that path.” Aiden wonders what her life had been like if her family had been different, but despite these thoughts she does not blame her parents for what happened to her. Aiden expressed,

“Yes, if my mom actually cared or if I went and lived with my dad I don’t think I would be where I am today at all, but it’s not their fault. I just think if I grew up differently things would have been different.”

Melissa has reflected on her family upbringing and what she would have preferred to receive from her parents. Melissa stated, “It would have been nice to have two (parents),

but at least one that was there that would check in on you and be supportive, to be able to communicate would help a lot.” Charity has had a similar thought about her mother as well as her addiction when she expressed,

“Yeah, if I never did drugs or my mom stayed clean and my dad didn’t cheat. I use to think that, but no. It was never gonna work even me thinking that. Why would I think that? It never has and it never will.”

April wishes that when she told her mother that she was being sex trafficked that she would have responded differently to her. April wishes her mother would have said,

“Ok, let’s go back. You want to do what? You are worth so much more than that and now you don’t like this job. How about we look for a different job? How about, you know anything. Let’s serve tables and keep going to school, keep trucking.”

April questions whether or not her mother could have appropriately even responded to her due to her mother’s mental health issues. April expressed, “My mom didn’t really raise me and she didn’t really care. Maybe my mother although I think about it, I don’t think I would have taken it seriously because of her mental health issues.” April voiced, like the other participants, how having healthy parents would have made an impact on her life for the better. April stated, “Absolutely, I think healthy parents are essential. It’s just that we don’t all get them. Yeah, that would make a world of difference.”

Barb addressed while she was being sex trafficked she wanted someone to tell her that she is worth more than what was happening to her. Barb voiced,

“If I had someone step in and be like you are worth a lot more than what you are doing then it might have been different, but it would take a lot of convincing to change that kind of mindset.”

April disclosed how she yearned for someone to articulate feelings of anger with her and being sex trafficked and that she would have made some changes. April communicated, “He would have been pissed (laugh), which I needed. You know I needed someone to be pissed but no one was pissed, so.” She also mentioned, “Yes, I think if someone was mad enough then I probably wouldn’t have stayed.” The expression of feelings of anger would have impacted April as well as if someone had said something to her in a supportive manner as well. April shared that she would have liked someone to tell her, “I would rather you not do that.” She disclosed how this could be done when stating, “A guiding hand as opposed to like oh my god you are going to do what. You know what I mean.” Overall, April voiced how maybe if someone in her life had cared that her story might be different, but she also cannot be sure of that either. April stated, “Maybe somebody, if somebody would have stepped up. I don’t know.”

The women expressed how they wished an individual whether family, friend, or anyone would have cared for them. Some participants even wondered what their lives would have been like had they been raised in homes with healthy parents.

Friend or Foe

This theme of friend or foe is demonstrated by data from the participants and the experience of having someone they considered a friend identified as the individual who recruited them for sex trafficking.

Aiden discussed becoming with sex trafficking was a survival technique she learned from a friend of hers. Aiden stated, “When I left I was hanging out with someone who was in the life and pretty much from there I started. It was like a survival thing. It was the only way I knew how to support myself.” Like Aiden, Melissa shared that she had a few friends who were being sex trafficked while she was going to school. Melissa communicated, “Friends, I was going to school. I just graduated from high school and was going to (named community college) and then I started hanging around with bad friends and that’s how I got involved in the life.” April expressed how a roommate, who appeared to always have money, she was living with at the time got her involved in sex trafficking. April voiced,

“She’s probably my best roommate that I had. She started dancing and she would come home with all this money and I would think oh my god what are you doing? Do I need to alert your family you know kind of thing? She’s like I am sorry I go to work and make all this money. Long story short she ended up getting me to dance.”

Similarly, Alyssa experienced a friend who recruited her into sex trafficking. Alyssa reported,

“The girl that started me and taught me how to do it was one of my good friends and he was beating her up really bad and breaking her ribs and punching her. So I didn’t like that and so I fuckin left.”

Alyssa did not seem happy with the way her friend’s pimp was treating her friend. While Alyssa was being sex trafficked with her friend she disclosed that her friend taught her how to function while being sex trafficked. Alyssa explained it as, “How to talk to the

guys, what to do when you are on the date, what positions to do, to get the money first, most of my dates only last 5 minutes so it was fine.” Alyssa’s friend recently reached out to the participant by adding her on a social media site. Alyssa stated, “Mhm, yeah she just added me on Facebook. She is clean as well now.”

Overall, the participants emphasized how a friend or friends recruited them into sex trafficking.

The Double Edge Sword

The theme of the double edge sword will elaborate on the relationships the participants had with professionals in the mental health field, the medical field, and law enforcement while being sex trafficked or afterwards. This theme will be divided into two parts: 1) the professional engaged in the relationship with the participant was helpful, 2) the professional engaged in the relationship with the participant was hurtful. The theme will also be organized by the field of the professional being discussed.

Helpful. This theme will begin with the participants demonstrating experiences within professional relationships where the professional was deemed helpful. Being helpful is referring to an individual who is trustworthy or has potential to be trusted and provided decent services.

Mental Health Professionals. Mental health professionals represented include any individual providing a client with therapy services. Due to the variety of experiences the participants had with mental health services this section will discuss the participants experience with counseling or their counselor in general and information related to group counseling experiences.

April described her counselor in a mixture of positive ways. April shared, “She is really awesome.” “I feel like I am sitting there really talking to a friend and she is great at remembering stuff.” Alyssa equivocally to April described her counselor as, “She is honest. She is kind, caring, has a big heart, as well, “Because she is sarcastic and blunt.” “She says what’s on her mind all the time. It’s funny.” Aiden experiences her counselor as understanding when she expressed, “She really understands. She doesn’t try to make it better or anything. She just validates that that’s how I feel and it really sucks. I really like that.” Similar to the other participants, Melissa had stated how her counselor is easy to talk to and understands her. Melissa voiced, “I am going to counseling and it is nice to have a community or a support place you can go and feel like they understand.” Melissa also shared, “He is easy to talk too. He has helped a lot.”

Trust appeared to be an important component in a relationship with a therapist. April discussed how trust with her counselor took some time to build. April stated,

“I remember the first couple of times you are terrified because you don’t know what to expect or anything. You are still in the mindset that this person is going to judge me and how do I talk around that point. But I think being with the same therapist, counselor, whatever you want to call it is the important because get to know you and you get to know them and you build a good solid friendship/relationship whatever. There is trust there and it just takes a while.”

Melissa shared some of the same feelings about trusting her counselor. Melissa mentioned, “It took a while. I think I was so desperate for help and feeling better I think I was just like here help me.” Barb discussed how she feels like she can trust her counselor. Barb communicated,

“It’s professional, but like I can trust her. I kind of relate to her on a human level. I mean it’s not completely professional. She’s easy to talk to, but then again how can a relationship with a counselor be completely professional. It’s not like somebody at the DMV. I don’t know how you would describe it. It’s not like a co-worker or something.”

April highlighted the importance of a therapist being nonjudgmental as well. April stated,

“Well, there is moments when you tell them something that you don’t think you are ever going to tell them and they just kind of oh ok, well, so how do you feel, what can we do about this, or they start talking about there is no active like oh my god you did that.”

April also stated,

“I think the biggest thing with that is knowing that you are going to be shocked and having a good face to hide it, but also I think that if you are wanting to be a therapist of any kind you already have the heart needed and I think that you know you are walking into a situation where you can’t pass judgment.”

A few of the participants described what counseling has done for them as well. Barb believes therapy has assisted her with functioning in what she considers a “normal” world. Barb shared it as, “It has been helpful having a therapist help me walk in the normal world.” April believes therapy has helped her learn to set boundaries with others. April described it as, “Therapy has been essential for me because I don’t think I would have been able to put boundaries up without it because if you are around sick people you don’t know.” Alyssa synthesized it as, “Just that counseling makes a better me.”

Aside from individual counseling, group counseling was discussed as well. Barb considered it to be a validating experience for other sex trafficking victims and provides them with the platform to connect with others like them. Barb expressed,

“I think it’s really validating for girls to come together and connect outside of that and to realize we are not competing. This is a chance for us to have a relationship, a healthy relationship because it is so needed.”

Melissa discussed a similar experience of not feeling alone while doing group therapy work. Melissa stated,

“It is nice to know you are not alone in your feelings and the crazy shit you have done and that you are not the only one that believed a guy who said he loved you in order to get you to sell your body for him. It’s nice to know you are not alone.”

Melissa overall enjoyed group therapy work. Melissa reported, “I really enjoyed the group where you got to talk with all the other girls, hear their stories and how they are struggling with life today. That helped a lot. I enjoyed that.”

The data in this section represents the relationships these women have had with mental health providers after being sex trafficked. The quotes demonstrate the helpfulness of the counselors to the participants.

Law Enforcement. The participants in this section demonstrate the helpfulness of law enforcement officers from their experiences with them while they were being sex trafficking. Barb discussed a female police officer who she experienced as kinder to her than others. Barb stated, “She was much more compassionate I think and passionate about her job in general. She was very kind to me compared to the other people.”

Similar to Barb's experience, Charity also discussed a female police officer she interacted with while she was being sex trafficked. Charity described her as concerned and caring when she explained, "No, that lady was really concerned and cared. Do you need to talk to me? I told her I'm ok. I'm fine." Charity described how the officer inquired more about who was doing this to her. Charity voiced, "They asked me if I was ok and who's making me do this and all those kind of questions." Unlike the other two participants, Juno discussed a male police officer she experienced trust with. Juno stated, "I had that feeling this is the one cop I could trust and if I started to stiff up he would back away instead of standing there like most cops do because you get stiff the cop will stay standing there."

The three participants represented in this section were the only participants to acknowledge police officers who behaved helpfully to them while they were being sex trafficked.

Medical Professionals. The section of medical professionals is organized to represent the nurses discussed in the data and then doctors. All of the information collected for this theme informs the audience about the experience the participants had with nurses and doctors after being sex trafficked.

Charity communicated her experiences working with a few nurses who assisted her when her health declined. In the upcoming quote, as well, Charity discussed trusting the nurses she interacted with and how they connected her with Awaken. Charity shared,

“Because the nurses said to call. I did what they...you know I trust the nurses they come into my room to check my vitals to make sure I’m okay so I don’t think they’d send me anywhere weird or crazy.”

Charity described the nurses as being good to her when she expressed, “So they were really good to me. They were really good to me.” Charity emphasized being thankful for them as well. Charity voiced her gratitude when she said, “I’m so thankful for them too. I say Awaken, but Patricia and Megan, them too. You never know who you can meet. I’m grateful, so grateful.”

Melissa discussed a relationship she had with a doctor since being out of her sex trafficking situation. Melissa reported, “I guess he talks to you and he listens to you and so if you have something you need to take care of he makes it easier for you to talk to him.” Melissa disclosed that at one point after being sex trafficked that she attempted suicide and her doctor was upset and concerned for her. Melissa stated, “He was really upset after I attempted suicide because it completely blindsided him as well and I had to spend 3 days in inpatient.” Juno had discovered a doctor she prefers to visit with when she needs to schedule with a physician. Juno described doing as much as she can to keep said physician as well. Juno expressed,

“It’s very hard to find one and when you do, you’ll do anything medically wise and insurance wise to make sure you always keep that doctor because it is so hard to find someone that is like that that we can trust because women are like you are a woman get over it and it’s just painful.”

Juno went into detail about this doctor being important to her due to his actions when providing her with a vaginal examination. Juno detailed it as, “That’s the kind of

doctor us girls need, you know, just like a husband. Someone who takes their time and is willing to work with you.”

This section of the theme demonstrates the experiences of sex trafficked women and the helpfulness of medical professionals they encounter after being sex trafficked.

Hurtful. This theme will begin with the participants demonstrating experiences within professional relationships where the professional was deemed hurtful. Being helpful would mean the individual is trustworthy or has potential to be trusted and provides decent services. Hurtfulness would then be described as untrustworthiness and did not provide adequate services. Like the previous section, this will be organized by the field of the professional including: 1) mental health professionals, 2) law enforcement, 3) medical professionals.

Mental Health Professionals. The mental health professionals represented in this section include any individual providing a client with therapy services. Due to the variety of experiences the participants have had with mental health services, this section will discuss the participants experience with counseling or their counselor in general and information related to group counseling experiences.

Charity explained how she withholds information from her counselor when she voiced, “There are things I won’t tell her or don’t talk about it. I am not going to make up a fib or make up a better story to make it sound better. I am not going to tell you.” Charity communicated a concern that he therapist was judging her. Charity stated, “No, but she says she doesn’t but in her mind I think she really does (judges her). I have told her enough stories.” Charity discussed a desire to not focus on her past while she is doing therapy as well. Charity expressed,

“I don’t want to go back to when I was 7 or 10 because all those things will build up. I have been through that with recovering by writing letters, doing my steps. I have done that. I am sure it’s not the same thing as deeper, but I can’t do it.”

Comparably to Charity, Alyssa would prefer not to focus on her past in therapy either. Alyssa communicated, “I don’t want to work on my trauma. I want it to stay where it’s at. It’s fine.”

In relation to trust, Jen described an issue with her therapist due to mandated reporting. Mental health therapists are mandated reporters for child abuse and neglect and vulnerable adult abuse or neglect. Jen’s familial history with sex trafficking caused her therapist to call and report an incident Jen had shared with her. Jen discussed the situation by saying,

“They said they are going to have to report things. I am not about that at all. I thought they wouldn’t have to report it because I have already reported it and it has already gone through the legal whatever, but therapists are therapists.”

Jen related this need for her story to be reported as to why therapists often refer her to another therapist. Jen stated, “It just sucks because I have always been passed from therapist to therapist because nobody can understand and nobody can handle my life.” Since this tends to be the situation Jen faces, she is in a place where she does not want to pursue building a relationship with a new therapist. Jen described it as, “I don’t know, doing the whole process over again sounds sucky.” Jen also expressed a sense of not feeling heard even when she was visiting with her therapist. Jen communicated, “I quit seeing my one on one therapist Laura because she wasn’t listening to me. I didn’t feel heard with her and I didn’t trust her way of keeping track of things.”

Unlike the helpful section, some of the participants found group therapy to be triggering and grueling. Melissa described it as, “The first couple of times it happened you are sitting there listening to someone and you just start balling or you are tensing up or something.” Melissa also considered it be depressing when she reported, “At some point it does get to be a little depressing.” April was being triggered by a girl in a group she attended presenting with a need to compete with other participants and herself. April voiced it as, “I do remember one girl, she was new and she felt like she needed to fill up all the quiet and I felt like she felt like she needed to compete.”

Aiden presented the topic of the difficulty of trust while doing group therapy.

Aiden stated,

“I think it is harder to do group therapy than it is to do individual therapy because you have to be able to trust everybody in the room to keep it in confidence and not bring it up and that’s hard to do with people that you don’t trust.”

Aiden also highlighted the importance of dynamics related to the furniture in the room. Aiden commented on how, “I don’t like having my back to the door. I don’t like having my back to the clock so I just can’t sit anywhere until I feel I am alright.” Aiden discussed issues related to sitting in a circle as well by saying, “We have to sit in a circle. I hate doing therapy in a circle and we have to meditate and I just don’t enjoy that.”

The participants in this section expressed the hurtful relationships they have encountered with mental health professionals after being sex trafficked.

Law Enforcement. The participants in this section demonstrate the hurtfulness of law enforcement officers from their experiences with them while they were being sex

trafficked. The data collected presents information related to participants feeling a sense of disinterest by police officers when they were seeking their assistance. Aiden had called the police to report an abusive boyfriend and described the length of time it took for them to arrive. Aiden reported, "I had called the cops and he had called the cops 4 hours later and...4 hours later the cops showed up, 4 hours." Ellie attempted to report an incident where her roommates were abusing her children, but the police officers seemed more interested in her husband. Ellie stated,

"I tried to file a police report, but they are more interested in talking to me about my husband and I am not here to talk about my husband. I am here to talk about this person that was abusing my kids and you guys aren't interested in that. I am not talking to you anymore. It took a lot for me to go talk to the police about this and you guys aren't even interested in that."

Like Aiden and Ellie, Jen experienced a sense of disinterest from police officers while trying to report an incident that had occurred. Jen discussed visiting a police station to report her father for sex trafficking her, but was informed she had reported it in the wrong county so there was nothing he could do. Jen communicated,

"He was like I reported everything about dad. I reported about a bunch of different, like when Jake would come into my house. I reported about him without giving the name. I don't why I think I was scared and about a different guy. He was like I can't really do anything because it's in (county name) and I am (county name) and basically blah, blah, blah. He's dumb and useless."

The police officer proceeded to tell Jen not to lie to him. Jen reported,

“He was super rude. He was like you don’t have to lie to me. You can lie to your pastor, but don’t lie to me. I was like what do you think I am lying about. Anyway, I didn’t ask him that. It probably would have helped if I had. That made everything feel invalid and he didn’t believe me and nobody is going to protect me.”

Some of the participants related this sense of disinterest they experienced while being sex trafficked to the notions police officers have about sex trafficking victims. The participants described how they think they were believed to be less than or criminals. Melissa voiced, “Very and I think the police look at us as a criminal and don’t really look at us as someone that needs help. It’s unfortunate. Yeah, it’s rough.” Melissa also stated, “Like you are a criminal, you broke the law. You are disgusting.” Similarly to Melissa, Juno expressed, “...they look down on you. They don’t see you as an equal. They don’t see you as a human. They just see you as a troublemaker. They see you as trauma.” Considering how police officers might be uninterested in assisting sex trafficked women because they are less than creates a lack of trust these women have in law enforcement. Juno described her lack of trust in them as, “It’s still in the back of my head when you see a cop you get stiff. You don’t trust them as far as you can throw an elephant.”

Other negative experiences interactions to be highlighted in this section include: Barb being caught in a sting, Jen being sex trafficked to police officers, Aiden’s abuse case being handled by the police, and inappropriate sexual comments said to Ellie. Barb was caught in a sting operation while she was being sex trafficked and described it as,

“I feel like they had a victim advocate because I feel like when I got busted in a sting, which only happened one time I just was like so dejected. They could tell. They could read my body language. Are you ok? I was like don’t talk to me? You are going to arrest me. I don’t want to talk to you about anything because you don’t know what it is safe to say to law enforcement. Yeah and then they take us a separate room with 2 or 1 law enforcement and a victim advocate but I am not sure and of course ask you questions do you have a pimp? Of course nobody who was just pulled out and kind of assaulted like that is going to tell you the truth about that because they don’t want to implicate anyone they actually know and see on a regular basis. They put you in the room with a bunch of other girls and then they like restrain you, I don’t know if it was with handcuffs or if it zip ties but they restrain you and march you in a line to a cop bin and take you to jail.”

Barb referred to experience in the sting as, “It was a miserable experience.”

Jen, as mentioned in a previous section, was purchased by police officers while being sex trafficked by her father. Jen was told by an officer who purchased her that no one would believe her if she ever reported the information to anyone. Jen stated, “Well like the ones that I was younger, that sheriff, the guy who was my friend’s dad said no one is going to believe you if you like tell people.”

Aiden referenced another incident where the police had witnessed the same abusive boyfriend mentioned earlier chasing her and the officers opted to approach them. Aiden voiced what happened after they approached them as,

“They have him sitting down right next to me as I am writing my stupid statement out I was scared for my life as it was. They let me go and five minutes later they let him go and he got to come get me, fucked up. There wasn’t enough evidence for them to do anything about it.”

The abuse situation appears to have been mishandled by the police officers who did not opt to separate the two individuals. Instead having the abuse victim, Aiden, remain next to her abusive boyfriend who they had witnessed chasing her.

Ellie had encounters with law enforcement while she was being sex trafficked. Ellie shared how one officer complimented her on her makeup when she voiced, “They would tell me how pretty my makeup was.” Ellie also stated, “Yeah, there was a female cop that came in and told me how pretty my makeup was. I was like fuck off.” These comments are sexualized and inappropriate to be expressed by an individual in a position of power.

Jen expressed, “Cops are stupid. Cops don’t do anything.” Aiden also shared, “I hate cops.” Overall, the participants documented the hurtfulness of police officers while they were being sex trafficked.

Medical Professionals. The section of medical professionals is organized to represent a general experience of the medical field and then more specific information related to doctors, hospital staff, and Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs). The data presented in this theme emphasizes the experiences of hurt the participants had while they were being sex trafficked.

April, Ellie, and Melissa elaborate on their encounters with medical professionals while they were being sex trafficked in a general sense. All three highlighted how

they thought they were being perceived and the sense of judgement and shame they felt while interacting with them. April questioned how she was being perceived while receiving a pelvic examination. April shared,

“At this point they said that I had a pap that came up with it but they wanted to wait. She was like I would just recommend limiting your sexual partners and using protection and at that point I had been with my now ex for like 3 years. They had a good enough relationship with me to know my body, so I don’t know.”

April described her situation as though she was being judged by the medical professionals. April voiced, “You know there’s that judgment.” April had an inkling that her doctor knew she lied on her work history and stated, “I think she probably knew that I was dancing or in that kind of work even though I just put that I was a student.” April also stated, “There was so much judgment there.”

Similar to how April lied on her work history, Melissa did not feel like she could be entirely honest with medical professionals she sought out for services. Melissa explained, “I was never honest about my life. I don’t think it would have helped me. In the long run they could have made me come to counseling and got me out of the life sooner, but it’s embarrassing, shameful.” Ellie also experienced a sense of shame, especially while medical professionals inquired about her health. Ellie shared, “The first couple times when they asking a bunch of questions and you are being honest its super embarrassing. Like some people have no shame. I felt ashamed.”

April expressed an urge to not return to a medical provider again after her experiences while being sex trafficked. April communicated,

“You don’t get the healthcare as a woman that you need because of that and I was thinking in my mind imagine another woman coming in here and she was married and had children or something and being talked to like that. You don’t want to go back.”

April expressed how she thought the quality of care she received could be impacted by what she communicated to medical professionals. April reported, “I need to be really careful about what I say and that can affect your quality of care.”

Charity and Juno were the two participants who specifically referred to doctors when discussing the medical profession. Juno emphasized her thoughts on how doctors do not care about victims of sex trafficking. Juno expressed, “So doctors to me are basically almost the same as cops. I will avoid a doctor as much as possible if I can.”

Juno also stated,

“They don’t care. They don’t understand. It’s a kind; it’s almost to the point that you don’t want to tell anyone because you feel like you will be ostracized. You feel like well you are use to pain, like it doesn’t make anything better. It makes us not trust anyone ever. Doctor, cop, doesn’t matter.”

Finally, Juno shared, “They just don’t give a shit.” Charity elaborated on her lack of trust with doctors. Charity mentioned, “No I don’t trust them, they were just there to tell me how to take care of myself and not to do stuff, don’t do drugs again and stuff like that.”

Charity divulged there was no connection with the physician at the Acute Neurology Rapid Access Clinics (HOT Clinic) either. Charity stated, “My primary care physician at the Hot Clinic, I hate the Hot Clinic. Oh my god, they get on my nerves. There is no connection.”

Ellie and Barb specifically referred to the hospital staff after visiting while they were being sex trafficked. Ellie divulged a situation where she had been raped and sought out assistance from an emergency room setting. Ellie experienced the individuals in the setting as not taking her seriously. Ellie reported,

“When I got raped out in LA, I had to go to the emergency room and they gave me some pills just in case I got an STD or something like that. You have to get rape kits done. Nobody takes you seriously because you are prostitute but they still have to perform the job.”

Barb referred to them as being overworked. Barb communicated,

“It was also like they seemed overworked. They seemed like they were just doing their job. Again, I have compassion for them and I know that it is hard because they run into this kind of thing all the time.”

Barb was brought to the hospital by EMTs after she attempted to kill herself while being sex trafficked. Barb did not think the EMTs treated her kindly when she needed someone to be compassionate and empathetic to her situation. Barb stated,

“The ambulance came and they weren’t very sensitive either. I just needed someone to have compassion on me, but I wasn’t going to be able to find it. I understand they see a lot of crazy people and it must be hard for them to feel that same compassion. They are just like oh this is another one.”

The data represents the experiences of sex trafficked women who have had experiences of hurt with medical professionals.

Trust is Difficult

This theme represents the participants experience with trust and how the majority of them struggle with trusting others. Trust can be defined as the belief an individual is reliable or has the ability to be so. This theme will not include information about trusting professional fields and instead will target personal relationships. The theme of The Double Edge Sword was specifically created to target the relationship sex trafficked women had with professional fields while being sex trafficked or afterwards.

The participants seemed split on whether or not they truly trusted an individual in their life. Jen expressed that she did not trust anyone entirely not even herself. Jen shared, “I wouldn’t say I fully trust anyone because I really don’t at all. No, myself, no not myself, no, nobody.” The researcher inquired how Jen could know it was safe to trust the researcher and she responded that she trusted other people. Jen expressed, “I trust her and I trust the other people more than I trust you. I trust other people when they tell me to trust people.”

Aiden also does not experience trust with anyone. Aiden shared, “I don’t trust anybody.” Aiden related trusting others to knowing you are going to be disappointed and experience pain. Aiden reflected, “I feel likes it a burden to have to trust someone you know you are going to get hurt. You are just better off doing it alone.” It seems as though Aiden has encountered some of this pain from being hurt for trusting someone when she voiced, “Hard, very hard because I put my faith into people and then I get let down so I try not to put my faith into people and then I am always guarded.”

April identified a feeling of fear in trusting others. April stated, “So for me it’s trying to breakout a lot and trust people and build relationships with people it is just

really hard and I am very terrified.” April expressed how she believes learning to trust someone will take time. April communicated, “I think trust is earned over time. It just takes time. It’s listening and not being too pushy. It’s listening and not necessarily judging.” April divulged that she would like to create friendships with others, but struggles to do so because of her issues with trust. April shared, “I would like friends, but the trust part is hard for me.”

Juno reflected on the difficulty of trusting anyone and the impact it can have on one’s romantic relationships. Juno stated,

“You feel like well you are used to pain, like it doesn’t make anything better. It makes us not trust anyone ever. Doctor, cop, doesn’t matter. It makes it even harder for us to find a person that we can love and trust as an equal partner and when you do it is still kind of hard.”

Juno even suggested that once you find a romantic partner one can love that it still can create difficulties.

The participants in presented in this theme explore the complications and struggles of trusting another individual.

Humanistic-Existential Lens

The key research question for this study as reflected in the study protocol was centered on the concept of understanding the relationships and relational patterns of the participants. The primary analysis was conducted through a phenomenological lens, revealing the lived relational experiences of participants apart from any theoretical or research underpinnings. Following the primary analysis the data was reanalyzed utilizing a humanistic-existential lens. The results of this analysis revealed three themes: (a)

Unconditional Positive Regard, (b) Existential Isolation, and (c) Meaninglessness and Meaning.

Unconditional Positive Regard

This theme will be organized from the general description of acceptance to participants describing who in their life has accepted them after being sex trafficked. The theme, Unconditional Positive Regard, reflects the theoretical definition of the construct from Carl Rogers (1961), who defined it as the acceptance, care, and support of another individual without judgement. Rogers (1961, p.54), posed the following questions to himself when counseling a client, “Can I receive him as he is? Can I communicate this attitude? Or can I only receive him conditionally, acceptant of some aspects of his feelings and silently or openly disapproving of other aspects?” As a clinician maintaining a conditional stance with a client creates the inability for the client to change and grow (Rogers, 1961). Similarly, unconditional positive regard, which might also be thought of as non-judgmentalness or acceptance, in relationships between children and their parents and in a wide variety of other realms is important for individuals to thrive. The term, unconditional positive regard was not directly referenced by participants, which was to be expected since it is a theoretical term. However, the foundational meaning of unconditional positive regard was expressed with terms such as acceptance, support, and nonjudgement.

Melissa explained the importance of acceptance to her and how necessary it is when interacting with other individuals. Melissa voiced, “I don’t like being anywhere where I don’t feel comfortable or accepted. It is important for me. If you don’t feel safe or comfortable somewhere you need to go find your tribe.” Ellie described

acceptance as the assisting factor in her willingness to participate in social engagements with others. Ellie articulated,

“I think being accepted with everything that has happened like my story and what’s going on now is important because I don’t want to feel judged. I don’t want to feel like oh she’s a prostitute let’s not talk to her because that’s not what I am doing now. Yes, it part of my story and what happened. I think it’s important to feel accepted just so I can feel comfortable going through things. I don’t want to show up and be awkward than I would start to isolate. I want to show up and feel accepted so I can participate and give it a shot.”

Aiden believed acceptance is an important ingredient in having trust with another. Aiden stated, “Acceptance is a big thing you have to have acceptance before trust.” Aiden shared about her father knowing she was sex trafficked and that he accepted her despite it. Aiden described, “Yeah and I openly and honestly told him what I was doing before and so he just accepts the fact of that’s what I did.” Like Aiden, Alyssa discussed the acceptance she had felt in her relationship with her father as well. Alyssa communicated, “I told him and that is about it. He really doesn’t want to talk about it or anything but he was one that never gave up on me when I was in the life.” Alyssa also voiced, “He’s the only one that kept doing that and never gave up on me.”

Alyssa referred to her feelings of acceptance with two different case managers from Awaken as well. One case manager Alyssa voiced, “She actually cares. She genuinely cares. She knows what we have been through and doesn’t judge us.” In reference to another case manager Alyssa stated, “It’s easy talk to her because she

doesn't judge. She just listens and tries to give her best feedback, which is great sometimes."

Jen referred to feelings of acceptance by a church group she attended while in high school. From Jen's journey as a sex trafficking survivor this would have been in the midst of her being sex trafficked. Jen explained how the individuals in the group accepted her for exactly who she was and did not try to change her. Jen expressed, "They (church group) don't hate me, like they were ok that I was sarcastic and they wanted me to be around and they like accepted me I guess for who I was and they didn't try to change it."

Alice cited feelings of acceptance from her friends. Alice stated, "Yeah, not judging is a very important part. I feel like all my friends are accepting of all walks of life so I don't feel like I keep anything in my circle that's not." Alice also explained how she feels acceptance from her husband who is aware of her history of being sex trafficked. Alice shared, "He loves me and he does not care." Similar to Alice, Melissa expressed feeling like she was accepted by a romantic partner she was involved with. Melissa described it as, "She knows about my past and has accepted me for me. I just love that about her even more."

As previously mentioned, unconditional positive regards creates the space for an individual to grow and heal (Rogers, 1961); with said space these individuals could have been provided with opportunities to grow and heal from their circumstances through relationships. Despite this space to grow, there was overlap between participants from this theme and the theme of trust is difficult from the first analysis. The overlapping participants were Jen and Aiden.

Originally in humanistic theory, trustworthiness was considered an influential component in therapy (Rogers, 1961). The ideology of trustworthiness in a professional setting was for the clinician to be consistent with appointments and maintain confidentiality (Rogers, 1961). However, experiencing non-accepting feelings towards clients fostered a sense of untrustworthiness (Rogers, 1961). Therefore, the term of congruence was developed referring to the awareness and reflection of one's own emotions to create an integrated person who is perceived as dependable (Rogers, 1961). Since congruence supersedes trustworthiness it is probable that Jen and Aiden are still experiencing growth and healing through the relationships they experience unconditional positive regard with. Overall, the data within this theme reflects unconditional positive regard.

Existential Isolation

The experience of existential isolation appeared as a pattern within the data. Existential isolation refers to when an individual experiences a sense of aloneness within the universe (Yalom & Josselson, 2014). It is crucial to note that aloneness and loneliness may appear to be synonymous with one another, however loneliness is related to social, cultural, and geographical influences causing relational disconnect (Yalom & Josselson, 2014). The concept has been referred to as “an unbridgeable gulf between oneself and others” and causes distress (Yalom & Josselson, 2014, p. 267). The best examples to describe this concept is, “...when they recognize the terror of feeling that there may be moments when no one in the world is thinking of them. Or walking alone on a deserted beach in another country, one may be struck with a dreadful thought: ‘Right at this moment, no one knows where I am’” (Yalom & Josselson, 2014, p. 267).

It seemed as though the participants often felt aloneness while in the life and were disconnected from others or had disconnected themselves from other individuals. During this time April stated, “So, my brother was struggling even then and my mom and that shit. You know, that’s why I didn’t have anyone I felt like I could talk too that seriously.” April also shared, “I didn’t really have much of a support system.” Like April, Barb discussed rarely seeing her loved ones. Barb reported, “I hardly saw my friends and family. I was pretty much separated.”

While being sex trafficked, Ellie also felt alone and angry. Ellie reported, “Alone. I was pissed.” Ellie expressed how people in her life were distant due to her substance use, for being in the life, and because they feared they would receive news that she had died. Ellie stated,

“Yeah, it’s new and all these people and stuff like that were really distant when I was using, and in my addiction, and in alternative lifestyle living because they were scared they were going to get a phone call that I was dead. So instead of being around they just kept their distance because to see me I was like the walking death...”

Even though Ellie originally discussed her feelings of anger at these individuals she also shared how she understands why they were distant while she was in the life now. Ellie expressed, “Yeah, I was super pissed. Like ‘where were you guys when I needed you?’ ...but I get it now.” Unlike Ellie, Charity detached herself from others while in the life because she did not want others to see her in her addiction. Charity stated, “I was like trying to stay away cuz I don’t want them to see me high or I didn’t have time cuz I’ve got stuff to do.” Charity expressed how she isolated herself by saying,

“All the time. But that was me doing the isolation. Like I just want to stay in my room and I don’t want to go to family events or functions or nothing. I just want to be over here in the corner.”

Parallel to Charity, Melissa hid her experiences while being sex trafficked from her loved ones, but she articulated that it was rooted in a fear of being judged. Melissa stated,

“Scary and at the same time safe. I have always been a social person. I have always been around people and everything, but when you are doing something you know you are not supposed to be doing you kind of hid that from people so they don’t judge you. It was rough. I didn’t like it. I still find to this day that I have a hard time speaking sometimes with people because I just shut that part down and I really didn’t have to carry intelligent conversations. I am afraid to talk sometimes still.”

Melissa identified with being primarily alone while being sex trafficked by expressing, “Not very connected, I tended to isolate” as well as “When I was in the life I really didn’t interact with anyone. I was isolated from all my friends.” Melissa mentioned the desperate need to connect during this time and her internal struggle with not having that social connection. Melissa expressed,

“I just remember being in so much pain and I was desperate to feel better to understand or get some kind of idea of connection with people because I had isolated myself so bad I was losing it. I really needed some kind of connect or support or community.”

The participants within this theme demonstrated the experience of existential isolation and how it is described as, “an unbridgeable gulf between oneself and others” (Yalom &

Josselson, 2014, p. 267). Melissa, Charity, Ellie, April, and Barb were immersed in aloneness while being sex trafficked. This immersion caused distress that was most commonly demonstrated by expressions and feelings of anger. Connections with individuals can create a buffer to existential isolation even if the connection is an unhealthy or unsatisfying one (Yalom & Josselson, 2014). There were participants from this theme who overlapped with previous themes. Ellie is a participant who was recognized in this theme as well as the theme of Trauma Ridden Relationships. Other participants who overlapped with this theme and the theme of Ambivalent Relationships were April, Melissa, Charity, and Ellie. These four participants could have maintained relationships with trauma bonds or uncertainty to provide themselves with a buffer to their own aloneness. Similar to unhealthy relationships, there was overlap within this theme and the theme of unconditional positive regard between Ellie and Melissa. These two have relationships where unconditional positive regard occurs and still struggle with a sense of aloneness due to existential isolation. Even deep feelings of connection cannot change existential isolation (Yalom & Josselson, 2014). These women demonstrated a pattern of existential isolation within their statements.

Meaninglessness and Meaning

The ongoing struggle to find meaning may lead individuals into therapy, though it may be conceptualized by the individual as depression or anxiety (Frankl, 1978; Yalom & Josselson, 2014). Meaning (a coherence in one's life) and purpose (an intention or aim in life) are of critical importance for good mental health (Frankl, 1978). The search for meaning or the creation of meaning is essential, but across various life stages it is a natural part of existence to struggle with questions such as, "Who cares?" and "What

difference does it make?” (Frankl, 1978; Yalom & Josselson, 2014). This section will represent expressions of meaninglessness and meaning from the data. Even though the section is divided into two parts, meaning and meaninglessness are deeply intertwined, though not as opposites. Even in the lives of individuals who have a meaning system, meaninglessness can emerge (Frankl, 1978).

Experiences of meaninglessness were cited throughout the data where participants disclosed information related to pain, depressive periods, and suicide attempts. A few examples include self-reflective moments, where the participant is questioning what kept them alive and moving forward with her life. April stated, “I honestly think of those moments through my 20s of really dark, dark spots and think how did I get through those times? What kept me going? I don’t know. I mean I really don’t know.” Like April, Melissa also referred to the darkness in her life. Melissa expressed, “I don’t know, just trying to not be a dark cloud that I felt like.” When Melissa became sober and encountered this darkness in her life she attempted suicide. Melissa reported, “I quit everything cold turkey and ended up trying to commit suicide. I just told my mom when I was using I was suicidal.” Melissa went into detail about her suicide attempt when she said,

“I want to say in December I went to inpatient because I was struggling with depression and anxiety really bad. I didn’t want to kill myself. I never said I wanted to kill myself, but I said that I wished I would go to sleep and not wake up. Life is just too fucking hard. They fucking put me on a hold and I had to be escorted by an ambulance to the hospital and wait for a stupid psychiatrist to release me. That was just another traumatic experience so now I know better.

Don't ever talk about it, just don't talk about it. If you are feeling that way talk to your counselor, but don't talk to anybody else about it."

Jen reflected on how she had considered suicide. Jen explained it as, "Yes, I'm depressed and yes I was suicidal for a very long time." Similarly to Melissa and Jen, Juno attempted to kill herself as well. Juno stated,

"I became suicidal and tried killing myself, cutting myself, popping pills, all sorts of stuff. They sent me to the mental institution...they kept me they almost kept me and the mental institution told them that if they kept me for 2 months or longer that they'd have to send me to a home and so I didn't want to do that I was like hell no so I played their games and told them what I had to so I could get out and then they put me on a medical watch and she had to stay with me."

Barb planned to kill herself as well by driving a car off of the road while her madam was in the car. Barb voiced, "I tried to drive the car off the road while my madam was driving and so I just tried to kill us and then I got out of the car." Barb detailed the desperation she felt with the urge to kill herself when she stated, "I was screaming running and I was calling her the devil. Somebody called the ambulance. If there was a way to mentally kill myself I was trying to do it." When prompted to describe the reason for trying to kill herself Barb expressed a sense of worthlessness and being an overall failure. Barb shared, "Oh, I thought I was worthless and I would never amount to anything and that life sucked and why bother was my mindset. I firmly believe I was a failure at everything and that was bad too." Like Barb, Jen was prompted to describe more about the underpinnings of her suicidality. Jen stated,

“I just don’t really feel like I have as much value as other people so it doesn’t matter what I want that’s a lot of it. At times its like it doesn’t matter what you want do what everybody else wants that’s devaluing my opinion on things and stuff.”

These women experienced darkness, pain, depressive periods, and suicidal ideation and attempts. April shared that these are not experiences she would wish on another individual. April explained it as,

“I think you go through hell and back and I won’t wish what I’ve been through my depression when I was at my lowest on anyone and I just want to be there for people. I don’t know how to express that but I just think that you know pain, you know loneliness, you know isolation, you know all of that and you don’t want someone to go through that...”

The participants were haunted with a lack of meaning in their lives and vocalized experiences with darkness, depression, and an urge to commit suicide. The experiences of darkness and depression correlate with the notion of the “existential vacuum”, symbolizing a sense of emptiness or hollowness (Frankl, 1978). The quotes referenced above captivate this sense of emptiness, especially those referring to the participant’s suicide attempt(s). Suicide attempts have been previously discussed by Frankl (1978), who screened 60 college students after attempting suicide. Of those 60 students, 85% attributed their suicide attempt with the expression of “life seemed meaningless” (Frankl, 1978). The majority of the college students attempted suicide despite doing well academically and having social and familial connections (Frankl, 1978). Of the 10 women who participated in this study, 3 openly disclosed suicide attempts – Barb,

Melissa, and Juno – while another, Jen, disclosed suicidal ideation. Barb, Melissa, Juno, and Jen each have her own journey to share and may have been previously represented in prior themes from the first analysis of Trauma Ridden Relationships, Ambivalent Relationships, If Someone Cared, Friend or Foe, The Double Edge Sword, and Trust is Difficult. These women were not likely connected with others or attending and doing well in college; their lives were instead hollow and filled with despair and meaninglessness.

It is important to note the intended focus of this study was about the participants relational experiences and yet a lack of meaning while being sex trafficked seeped into the data. There were potentially more participants who experienced hollowness, suicidal ideation, and had attempted suicide but it was not discovered due to the focus of the study. Overall, this section and data represent these moments of meaninglessness.

Meaning. Participants disclosed information related to meaninglessness as well as meaning in their lives. Meaning was discovered through relationships, religion, and survival. Ellie discussed how having her daughters has provided her with a fear of generational repetition and given her the purpose of breaking the sex trafficking cycle for herself and her children. Ellie stated,

“I’m just trying to break the chains and the cycles and do something different because I’m so afraid that they’re going to grow up and be like lil’ prostitutes or like be involved in the same life or have a husband in prison who...it’s like I don’t want that for them. I am trying to come to terms with if I don’t want that for them then why is that okay for me? And so I’m like trying and working on redefining my values and my non-negotiables and stuff.”

Ellie also stated,

“I think I am so afraid of my kids repeating the same cycle and growing up to be prostitutes that it scares the shit out of me. Like, I know I have gotta change and I don’t want anyone else raising them because there are so many horror stories of girls getting molested and stuff like they have a better chance with me than with anybody and as long as I stay on the right path then their chances increase.”

April experienced meaning through relationships as well. April discussed how loving others has improved her feelings towards herself. April referred to it as,

“My boyfriend would say that I give too much and that I am too nice but it makes me feel good and if a person can accept it or they try to, I don’t know, take advantage they are totally mistaken and they usually get upset. It’s how I set my boundaries. Loving people just makes me feel better. I am just in around about way bringing it back. People in my shape are women that I might meet in the future, strong women that maybe inspires or that are just smart or pushy.”

Aside from love, April referenced the gratification by proving other individuals that she was capable of escaping the life and achieving accomplishments. April stated,

“It’s kind of like my way of proving that I am worth something and all the naysayers, thanks because this is for you. That’s kind of for me because I feel like if you can find like positive energy in the people that have used, abused, harassed you through all of that (use the middle finger then).”

April reflected on how she feels about her life now by expressing, “I love my life at this point. I am poor, but happy.” Other participants experienced meaning through the support received after exiting the life. Charity voiced it as,

“They keep believing in me. Give me hope, you can do it. I believe in you, yes, yes, yes instead of no, no you can’t, no you won’t. These people believe in me and they want to see me grow and be happy too. That encourages me a lot. I want to prove to them you know like I owe them my life (crying and inaudible).”

Alice experienced support from others upon leaving sex trafficking. Alice stated, “I feel like I have broken a lot of those stereotypes and I feel like it was because a lot of people helped me, inspired me, and mentored me.”

The relational experiences that provided these women with meaning was powerful and not the only place meaning has been created in their lives. One woman referenced her religion as a source of meaning and hope for her. Barb described it as,

“I am a Christian person and that has been extremely instrumental in me believing that god has something more for me than what I was doing at the time. This has definitely kept me going and my life is been completely different.”

Another source of meaning was survival. Alice referred to herself as, “Oh god, I feel like I am a never tap out person in all arenas of life because of pride.” Alice also stated,

“There is a part of me because just how my life as been always. Suck it up, push through it, you’ll get through it, it’s ok, don’t whine, don’t complain, just get through it and you will be fine in the end. It’s going to be hard, grit your teeth and bare it. You will make it through. To me that’s my truth, I know I will be ok in the end.”

Charity discussed a need to always keep going. Charity expressed,

“I just want to keep going. I just want to know what the future has for me. I don’t want to die or when I take my meds. I don’t care if I get them or not. I don’t want

to die. Really I just want to go see where I can go or what it would be like or what I would be like those big dreams. It keeps me going. I know I have a purpose. Everything happens for a reason.”

Some participants did not refer to relationships, religion, or survival as reasons for meaning and instead referred to having hope as enough to keep going. Jen voiced, “Now what keeps me going is hope.” Barb also stated, “Yeah, hope makes the difference. Just having a little bit of hope makes the difference.” Aiden referred to hope in a fear of its absence. Aiden proclaimed,

“I just don’t want to continue to do something that I know it isn’t good for me like drugs. I don’t want to relapse and be a drug addict again. I don’t want to have no hope for myself. I just want to be ok with myself and who I am and what I am doing.”

In existential theory, finding meaning is a fundamental process for all human beings to ascertain (Yalom & Josselson, 2014). Even though meaning is essential, it is not necessarily provided causing each person to search and foster meaning for his or her own life (Yalom & Josselson, 2014). Since more individuals have the means to survive there are more people constantly searching for meaning (Frankl, 1978). Life provides the potential for the creation of meaning and thus is unconditionally meaningful (Frankl, 1978). Frankl (1978) referred to meaning being created through love, work, suffering, and death. Frankl (1978, p. 42) emphasized how meaning can be discovered through suffering by stating, “...we come across people who in spite of failure have arrived at a sense of fulfillment and even happiness, because they have found meaning even in suffering.”

The participants above cited how meaning for them stemmed from relationships, religion, and survival. The participants did not specifically reference death or work as influences to provide them with meaning. However, within the quotes about relationships, there is a strong sense of love towards others whether is it family, a support system, or other women in a similar position. The women also referenced survival from their experiences whether it was sex trafficking or trauma as a means to meaning. Each participant from this study had a different narrative that and may have been represented in themes from the first analysis of Trauma Ridden Relationships, Ambivalent Relationships, If Someone Cared, Friend or Foe, The Double Edge Sword, and Trust is Difficult. Regardless of their story, each woman in this study experienced suffering. Frankl (1978, p. 43) would refer to the quotes in this section about the creation of meaning through survival as ‘a document of humanness.’ This section and data represents meaning.

Chapter V: Discussion, Recommendations, and Conclusions

The relational experiences of sex trafficked woman have not been fully explored in previous sex trafficking literature. In this study, sex trafficked women were prompted with semi-structured questions to elicit responses related to their relational experiences before, during, and after being sex trafficked. Through the process of phenomenological methodology and an axillary humanistic-existential lens, codes, patterns, and themes were identified within the data. The first analysis identified 6 themes including: (a) Trauma Ridden Relationships, (b) Ambivalent Relationships, (c) If Someone Cared, (d) Friend or Foe, (e) The Double Edge Sword, (f) and Trust is Difficult. The secondary analysis identified 3 themes including: (a) Unconditional Positive Regard, (b) Existential Isolation, and (c) Meaninglessness and Meaning.

The purpose of the Discussion section is to link the results from the study with preexisting literature and discuss the interpretation of the data from the study. Following the Discussion section are Recommendations and Conclusions.

Discussion

The Discussion has been organized to highlight specific categories in the following order trauma and mental health and the impact of relationships. The impact of relationships will further explore sex trafficking recruitment and a supportive adult vs. existential isolation.

Trauma and Mental Health

The results for this study emphasized experiences of trauma within relationships, which predominately appeared within the theme of Trauma Ridden Relationships. For the purposes of the theme, trauma was defined as a profoundly distressing experience that

includes either physical harm, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, or neglect. The traumatizer or victimizer in these trauma-ridden relationships varied in terms of the nature of their relationship with the participant. Two broad classifications of roles included immediate family members and previous romantic partners and/or pimps. It was obvious through the data presented in this theme alone, that experiences with trauma were a customary part of sex trafficking.

As indicated in Chapter 2, understanding the roles of the brain, the recognition of trauma, the comprehension of trauma from the DSM-5, and trauma-informed modalities are crucial when counseling an individual with a history of trauma. A powerful finding from the study, illustrated across more than one theme, was the uniqueness of how each participant has her own experience(s) with trauma and has somewhat drastic varying needs. The data presented experiences from 10 participants with various demographics, childhoods, relationships, educational levels, romantic experiences, and length of time being sex trafficked, and who sex trafficked them. One of the participants, Charity, even stated in her first interview, “Everybody’s story is different. Everybody’s story is different for sure. Wherever they came from, you know what I mean? Sex trafficking is sex trafficking.”

Of the 10 participants, 5 women were represented in the theme of Trauma Ridden Relationships. Those 5 women were Jen, Ellie, Juno, Alice, and Aiden. Despite the representation of 5 women in the theme, trauma was a habitual part of sex trafficking and seemed to be normalized as well. Normalization refers to when an experience(s) is common and almost what is to be expected. There were statements in the Trauma Ridden Relationships theme and other themes that were expressed matter-of-factly, as if the

experience was normal. Jen, for example, who was sex trafficked by her father and felt a sense of ambivalence towards him shared her story calmly and unemotionally. Whereas other participants like, Charity and Juno cried during parts of their interview while discussing their family. This sense of normalization could stem from the brain responding to repeated trauma and attempting to make sense of it. As previously mentioned, examples of how the brain can respond to trauma is by dissociating, derealization, depersonalization, emotional reactions due to triggers and the creation of flashbacks (APA 2013; van der Kolk, 2014).

The represented women and the women not represented in the theme of trauma ridden relationships could have experiences with trauma diagnoses, other psychological issues, and physical health consequences. These women could experience cognitive and emotional processing issues as well as an altered sense in their ability to perceive threats. There were 3 openly disclosed suicide attempts in the results by Barb, Melissa, and Juno; while another, Jen, disclosed suicidal ideation. Aiden, Alice, and Ellie were participants that did not disclose historical suicidal ideation or suicide attempts and yet they were 3 out of the 5 women represented in the Trauma Ridden Relationships theme. The 2 women that overlapped with the Trauma Ridden Relationships theme and the suicide attempts and ideation were Juno and Jen. The participants attempted suicides correlated with the literature from Lederer and Wetzel (2014), citing of their 104 sex trafficked participants 20.5% attempted suicide. The suicide attempts also correlated with another study in Asia, surveying 288 sex trafficked women and of those participants 6.3% attempted suicide in the past month (Kiss et al., 2015).

Aside from participants mentioning suicidal ideation or attempts there were other participants who in the data specifically reported depression and anxiety. Melissa, April and Jen directly cited experiences of depression whereas Melissa also cited anxiety too. This correlates with previous research, more specifically two research articles. The first article indicated that of 104 sex trafficked participants that 88.7% reported depression and 76.4% reported anxiety after being sex trafficked (Lederer & Wetzel, 2014). The second article indicated that out of 288 sex trafficked participants 66.6% reported depression and 48.1% reported anxiety (Kiss et al., 2015).

There were 7 participants represented in The Double Edge Sword theme as having attended therapy before – April, Aiden, Alyssa, Barb, Charity, Jen, and Melissa. These women emphasized the importance of the therapeutic relationship, trust, empathy, nonjudgement, and active listening within the counselor-client relationship. Unknowingly, these women described the counselor-client relationship within a humanistic theoretical orientation. The counselor-client relationship could be considered an especially important aspect of the therapeutic process for this group due to other relational experiences described in the data that have been considered to be traumatic or ambivalent. With the types of relationships of the counselor and client described by the participants as well as their experiences with family, romantic partners, and other professionals in mind, a strategy for providing therapeutic services would be to utilize a humanistic theoretical orientation as the relational foundation for therapy.

Another strategy for a clinician counseling the sex trafficked population would be to become trauma-informed, if not already. Being trauma-informed, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA, 2014) includes

the four 'R's – realizes, recognizes, responds, and resists re-traumatization. SAMHSA (2014, p. 9) stated being trauma-informed is when,

“A program, organization, or system that is trauma-informed realizes the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery; recognize the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system; and responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices, and seeks to actively resist re-traumatization.”

SAMHSA (2014) also indicated 6 principles of being trauma-informed as: providing a safe space, decision making transparency, peer, family, or other trauma survivors support, collaboration in treatment, offering choices in treatment and empowering an individual to make decisions for her or himself, and veering from biases and addressing cultural, historical, and gender issues.

It is important to note that the sex trafficking clientele could potentially not fit all of the diagnostic criteria for a trauma diagnosis and yet still have experiences with trauma. Of the 10 participants from the study, 7 indicated traumatic relationships with either their immediate family or previous romantic partners or pimps. This leaves 3 participants from each subtheme of trauma ridden relationships that did not indicate a traumatic relationship. With the consideration of the 7 who indicated a traumatic relationship, which is more than half of the participants, it would be important for a counselor to be trauma-informed. This notion around diagnoses leads into another therapeutic strategy of utilizing a strength-based approach in therapy. The strength-based approach would view each sex trafficking victim in therapy as a human being rather than

who this person is based on a diagnosis. It would emphasize uniqueness and highlight positive experiences, patterns, strengths, and skillsets. This approach would consider the participants from this study as survivors rather than victims.

With the influence of individual uniqueness, trauma, and the suggestions provided from the participants, counselors are encouraged to be trauma-informed, build and strengthen the therapeutic relationship by being empathetic, warm, genuine, provide unconditional positive regard, use humor [when appropriate], and emphasize a strength-based approach.

In conclusion, this section emphasized the uniqueness of every sex trafficked woman who participated in this study as well as the normalization of trauma, and experiences with mental health. The data from suicide attempts and ideation as well as depression and anxiety were correlated with preexisting literature in the sex trafficking field. The participants were also acknowledged for their description of the client-counselor relationship and their description was considered a suggestion for future mental health providers.

The Impact of Relationships

This section will explore two general notions about the recruitment of sex trafficking victim and a supportive adult vs. existential isolation. The two will be correlated to previous research in the sex trafficking field. This section will also discuss the significant information about relationships.

Sex Trafficking Recruitment

This section will discuss the results of the study in light of previous research related to sex trafficking recruitment and how often an individual has a personal

connection to someone who involves them in sex trafficking. The research is tied to the data from the theme of Friend or Foe.

The results for this study demonstrated in the theme of Friend or Foe how common the experience of becoming involved with sex trafficking was due to an established personal connection and how that connection facilitated the participant becoming sex trafficked. Previous research states how sex trafficking victims are commonly approached by someone they know to join sex trafficking (Williamson & Prior, 2009; Raphael & Ashley, 2008). A study analyzing 100 women, who identified themselves as providing sexual acts for compensation and having a pimp, were inquired about how they came to be sex trafficked (Raphael & Ashley, 2008). Of those 100 participants, 68% were recruited into domestic sex trafficking; 23% indicated a boyfriend recruited them, 19% specified a friend, 12% reported a pimp, and 10% described a family member recruited them in sex trafficking (Raphael & Ashley, 2008).

Of the 10 participants from this study, 4 of those were represented in the theme of Friend or Foe and specifically indicated a friend connected them to sex trafficking. The 4 participants were Aiden, Melissa, April and Alyssa. Aiden and Alyssa reported that they each had a friend who they learned how to function and live within the sex trafficking culture and lifestyle from. Alyssa elaborated on what she meant by learning from said friend and indicated that her friend taught her how to go on dates, what sexual positions to do, and how to accept payment. Of the 4 participants, Alyssa was the only one to mention the current status of the friendship with the friend who started her in sex trafficking. Alyssa disclosed how her friend had recently added her on social media and is also sober now as well.

Overall, previous research of being recruited for sex trafficking by a person one was familiar with has been documented in the research. This section draws a parallel to previous research due to the 4 participants from the study who indicated a similar experience. There is not enough data from this study to substantiate previous recruitment research.

A Supportive Adult vs. Existential Isolation

This section discusses the issue found in the data set about how supportive adult in the lives of the victims often having acted as a protective factor against sex trafficking. The findings from the study on this particular point are consistent with the findings of Chisolm-Straker et al., 2018. This concept is linked to the theme of If Someone Cared which was presented in the results chapter.

In reviewing the participants associated with each of the themes in the results section the researcher found an overlap of participants from the theme of If Someone Cared with a theme from the secondary analysis of Existential Isolation. The realization of the overlapping concepts between supportive adult and existential isolation cannot fully be explained, as the protocol questions for the study did not delve into this issue. However, some discussion of possible connections between these themes is warranted.

It is important to note, that research from other studies indicated poverty, running away, homelessness, a limited education, a lack of family support, living in a vulnerable location, abuse and neglect were all risk factors associated with sex trafficking (Clawson et al., 2009; Jordan et al., 2013; Oram et al., 2015; Sprang, & Cole, 2018; Kaestle, 2012; Polaris, 2014). The intent of this study was not to further delve into the risk factors associated with sex trafficking. However, Jen, April, Melissa, Charity, and Ellie indicated

experiences where there was a lack of family support while Aiden, Alice, Ellie, Jen and Juno cited being physically, sexually, or psychologically abused by a family member or romantic interest.

While analyzing risk factors and supportive figure(s) for young homeless adults, researchers interviewed 344 individuals and of those participants 21 had been previously sex trafficked and 17 had been sex and labor trafficked (Chisolm-Straker et al., 2018). After the interviews were conducted, the presence of a supportive adult was a significant protective factor for youth to avoid sex trafficking (Chisolm-Straker et al., 2018). This protective factor is potentially connected to existing literature suggesting a supportive adult can foster resiliency in youth (Chisolm-Straker et al., 2018; Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2015; Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, 2011). There was an additional qualitative study that collected data through interviews from 13 minors who experienced sex trafficking to explore the role of interpersonal relationships in their lives (O'Brien, 2018). The study indicated that survivors experience interpersonal relationships as providers of protection and enhancers for resiliency (O'Brien, 2018). Overall, there are multiple indicators of the importance of relationships to act as protective factors from sex trafficking and to promote resiliency in youth (O'Brien, 2018; Chisolm-Straker et al., 2018; Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2015; Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, 2011).

The theme of If Someone Cared came into fruition due to the participants describing how they believed if an individual had cared about them then they might not have been sex trafficked. Some of the participants expressed wishes of having a family member care about them, what it would have been like if other parents raised

them, and some would have gladly welcomed any caring individual into their life. There were 5 participants represented in this theme out of the overall 10 including: Aiden, Charity, Melissa, April, and Barb. These women had an urge to have a relationship with someone who cared for them before and while they were being sex trafficked. This could indicate a need to have a supportive person in their lives. A supportive adult could have potentially protected them from certain experiences or from sex trafficking entirely.

The ideal general characteristics of a supportive adult could include empathy, genuineness, and unconditional positive regard. These qualities stem from humanistic theory to promote growth, healing, and personal development while the relationship acts as the instrument for change (Rogers, 1961). If someone encounters and fosters a relationship with an individual such as this then there is the potential for growth, healing, and personal development. This healing could mend previously damaged psychological faculties like trust (Herman, 1997).

However, 4 out of the 5 participants represented in this theme were also represented in the secondary analysis theme of Existential Isolation. Existential isolation refers to the experience of aloneness in the universe (Yalom & Josselson, 2014). When one experiences existential isolation, it is insurmountably agonizing (Yalom & Josselson, 2014). It feels as though there is an, “an unbridgeable gulf between oneself and others” (Yalom & Josselson, 2014, p. 267). Even if a person builds a connection with unconditional positive regard, empathy, and genuineness it does not resolve existential isolation and can only provide support (Yalom & Josselson, 2014). Therefore, existential isolation cannot be simply changed by a relationship (Yalom & Josselson, 2014). If the 4 participants were experiencing existential isolation prior to being sex trafficked then a

supportive adult permeating the characteristics from humanistic theory could not mitigate the aloneness and instead only offer support. However, if existential isolation did not begin until after the 4 women were becoming sex trafficked then there is potential the supportive adult could have created change, growth, and personal development within those relationships. There is not specific information to document when those participants began to experience existential isolation.

Significant Information about Relationships

This section emphasized the information obtained from the data about the relational experiences of sex trafficked women and how it benefits the future formation of personal and professional relationships due to insider knowledge.

In general, the themes from this data emphasized trauma in personal relationships, ambivalence within relationships, hurt and helpfulness from professionals, and a sense of distrust in others. These themes provide an outsider with insider knowledge about potential relational experiences and underlying themes a sex trafficked victim has encountered. By having this understanding then on a personal and a professional level this information can be used to assist with building relationships.

On a personal level, an individual connecting and fostering a relationship with someone who had been sex trafficked can view the data from this study and have a better understanding of what this person's experienced within relationships. The personal relationships that could benefit from this material are family members, friends, and romantic relationships. By using it, a deeper level of understanding and empathy could be formulated with trauma responses, a sense of distrust, and ambivalence. Having an

insider perspective could grant individuals from a personal relationship with patience and understanding while connecting with a victim of sex trafficking.

On a professional level, the information provided could assist with relationship building to provide a better service or experience to sex trafficking victims. The professional relationships that could benefit from this material include: mental health, medical health, law enforcement. The insider perspective on the relational experiences of sex trafficked victims emphasized distrust, ambivalence, trauma, and how hurtful prior relationships with professionals had been. A professional could develop a relationship with this insider knowledge with patience and understanding that the professional might not immediately be trusted or safe. The majority of participants had experienced a traumatic relationship, so using this information to promote practicing in a trauma-informed manner. Professionals can improve upon being nonjudgmental when interacting with a sex trafficked victim due to the underlying notion of shame when the participants had discussed how hurtful professionals had been. The emphasis on patience, understanding, being trauma-informed, and nonjudgmental could influence the relationship being fostered with a sex trafficked woman.

Overall, the data provided information about the innerworkings of sex trafficked women and their relational experiences as well as underlying themes. Personal relationships and professionals can both utilize this information to foster connections with sex trafficked women.

Recommendations

Sex trafficking research is still a growing area of study. The published research tends to primarily focus on sociodemographic information about the characteristics or

risk factors related to becoming a victim of sex trafficking, the physical and mental health consequences of being trafficked, the recruitment process, key identifying information for professionals, attempts at accurately estimating the number of individuals being sex trafficked, and largely focuses on the female experience of sex trafficking. This section will suggest 2 future research ideas for the sex trafficking field and 2 research ideas related to therapy and sex trafficking.

Future research could include information related to the male experience of being sex trafficked – prevalence, specific risk factors or protective factors, demographic information, the recruitment process, physical and mental health consequences, and identifying information for professionals. Another potential research area would be to further explore the relational experiences of the individual who typically connects a victim to sex trafficking. The data from previous research and from this study indicates that sex trafficking victims are commonly introduced into sex trafficking by an individual they know. This could be explored in depth to analyze how many victims a person might recruit into sex trafficking, if there is a conscious awareness of recruitment, and examining specific indicators of someone who is more likely to recruit others.

Future research for counselors could be to explore the suggestions made by sex trafficked victims from this study and have mental health providers be trauma-informed, build and strengthen the therapeutic relationship by being empathetic, warm, genuine, provide unconditional positive regard, use humor [when appropriate], and emphasize a strength-based approach. The therapeutic client-counselor relationship could initially be analyzed at a qualitative level in a case study for depth. Then later on with a quantitative methodology by incorporating more clients and counselors for breadth. These two studies

would emphasize the experiences within the client-counselor relationship and if it could promote growth and healing.

Four studies were suggested in this section – 2 for the sex trafficking field and 2 studies related to therapy for sex trafficking victims.

Conclusions

Generalizing the results of one qualitative study to the larger population of women who have experienced sex trafficking is not warranted. However, the current study offers depth of understanding of the relational experiences of a small number of sex trafficked women, which makes a valuable contribution to the literature. At the time of this study, many aspects of sex trafficking had been studied, but no published research focusing on the relational experiences had been fully explored in the sex trafficking literature. This study specifically sought to explore the relational experiences and was. As the literature was sparse, qualitative phenomenology was utilized to code and themes were identified: (a) Trauma Ridden Relationships, (b) Ambivalent Relationships, (c) If Someone Cared, (d) Friend or Foe, (e) The Double Edge Sword, (f) and Trust is Difficult. A secondary analysis was conducted utilizing a humanistic-existential lens. The themes from the lens analysis were: (a) Unconditional Positive Regard, (b) Existential Isolation, (c) and Meaninglessness and Meaning. This research adds to the literature in sex trafficking by providing information about the women's relational experiences with different types of relationships like romantically, familial, friendly, with other individuals from the sex trafficking lifestyle, and with professionals.

One conclusion from this study was that there was an undeniable uniqueness amongst the women who participated. In essence, each woman was unique based on her

demographics, educational level, relationships, childhood, as well as experiences related to being sex trafficked like the length of time being sex trafficked and who sex trafficked her. No two stories or quotes in the results were the same. Each woman had a voice with her own story and this takeaway cannot be emphasized enough.

A second conclusion is how jumbled the relational history was of sex trafficked women. The study documented supportive relationships, untrustworthy or unsafe relationships, and other relationships that were a mixture between supportive, untrustworthy, and unsafe. This combination of supportive and troubled relationships could stem from a problematic attachment base inherited in childhood due to familial relationships. The attachment base would continue to influence an individual into adulthood, like the participants. One cannot assume that all of the participants had a problematic attachment base, but one could hypothesize that due to their current assortment of supportive vs. troubled relationships that some of them do and it is actively impacting them and their relationships as adults.

A third conclusion was the underlying presence of shame in the data. The majority of women expressed a sense of feeling ashamed whether in an individual sense, within a relationship or perceived to occur within a relationship. Shame was previously mentioned as a mental health consequence of being sex trafficked and this research substantiates that experience (Lederer & Wetzel, 2014; McClain & Garrity, 2011). The feeling of shame is an agonizing and formidable experience, especially when frequently occurring. Constantly feeling ashamed could impact an individual's physical health, mental health, and relationships.

A fourth conclusion from the study is that relationships with a supportive adult are critical to the well-being (and perhaps prevention) of sex trafficking. Our finding is aligned with research that relationships serve as a protective factor against sex trafficking in youth (O'Brien, 2018; Chisolm-Straker et al., 2018; Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2015; Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, 2011). If this relationship is not fostered before sex trafficking then it does not create a protective factor against it. However, if a relationship with a supportive adult is fostered during or after being sex trafficked it could promote healing and growth.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Table 1. Interview Introduction and Consent Information

Interview SECTION	INTERVIEW SCRIPT
Greeting and Introduction	<p>Good morning/afternoon,</p> <p>Thank you very much for agreeing to be interviewed in this study. I appreciate it very much.</p> <p>I would like to take just a minute to review the key points of the study's information sheet and see if you have any questions before we begin the interview.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The purpose of this study is to examine the relational experiences of sex trafficked women. • You were selected because of your history as a sex trafficked individual. • Your name and association with the research project will be kept confidential. Because of the small number of interviewees, there is a risk that individuals may be able to identify you from the context of your comments. However I will work to refrain from including any potentially identifiable information in the manuscript, and we will always keep the names of the research participants, like you, private. • For the purposes of this research, I ask that you do not tell me about any illegal activities, child abuse or neglect, and if you are going to kill yourself or someone else. • Your participation is totally voluntary and you will not be refused services by Awaken if you choose not to participate. You may cease to participate at any time and have the right to "pass" on any questions I ask. • As a thank you for participating, you will be provided with a \$50 gift card for each interview. • If you agree, I will turn on a tape and will tape the entire interview. The tapes will be transcribed verbatim. To be absolutely certain we understood your responses, we will review the transcript for clarity, and we will schedule a follow-up

	<p>session after both interviews to discuss the transcripts. After that, the tape will be erased and your name will not be connected to your interview.</p> <p>If you have any questions about the study, you can contact the study Principal Investigator, Dr. Brenda Freeman, at (775) 682-9353. You may have questions about your rights as someone in this study. If you have questions, you can call the University of Nevada, Reno Institutions Review Board at (775) 327-2368.</p>
<p>Permission to start the interview</p>	<p>Do you understand that your participation is voluntary and would you still like to participate? <i>{IF YES, CONTINUE INTERVIEW. IF PARTICIPANT SAYS NO, DISCONTINUE INTERVIEW}</i></p> <p>Do you have any questions before we begin? After the interview if you would like to change or clarify any of your responses, please call me at (602) 373-3729.</p>
<p>Interview Close Out Interview Portion</p>	<p>{Turn on the tape recorder.}</p> <p>See Protocol for interview questions.</p> <p>We have just a few minutes left, and I want to give you the chance to adjust or clarify any of your responses. Is there anything you stated earlier that you would like to delete or any questions where you would like to add more depth or information to your response?</p>
<p>Gift Card and Thank You</p>	<p>Thank you so much for participating in the interview today. I appreciate your participation and willingness to share a part of your story with me. You may recall we offered a \$50 gift card for your participation in this interview? [Gives participant the gift card for the interview.]</p>

Appendix B

Interview Questions

Demographics:

Age	Race/Ethnicity	Gender Identity	Languages Spoken
Sexual Orientation	Initial Age of Exploitation	Span of Exploitation	

Icebreaker:

Here is a diagram of circles within circles. In the smallest circle in the very center, please write the initials of those whom you are closest to. In the circle outside the smallest circle, write the initials for those you are close to but not as close. Continue to do so in each of the following circles within the outside being the initials of people who you are least closest to. Outside of the circles then list the initials of individuals who you are close to, but have passed away.

Interview Questions for Research Question 1:

1. In your day-to-day life, who do you interact with on a regular basis?
2. Before you were trafficked, who did you interact with on a regular basis?
3. Who did you interact with regularly while being trafficked?
4. Who do you want to interact with more regularly?
5. Who do you have the most meaningful interactions with? Why?
6. Who do you feel most comfortable speaking to?

Interview Questions for Research Question 2:

7. How did you get connected with Awaken?
8. What words would you use to Describe Awaken?
9. Please tell me about your relationships with Awaken staff?

10. Can you remember a specific interaction or experience with any Awaken staff member? It can be something that happened recently or in the most distant past. If so, will you share the story with me?

Interview Question for Research Question 3:

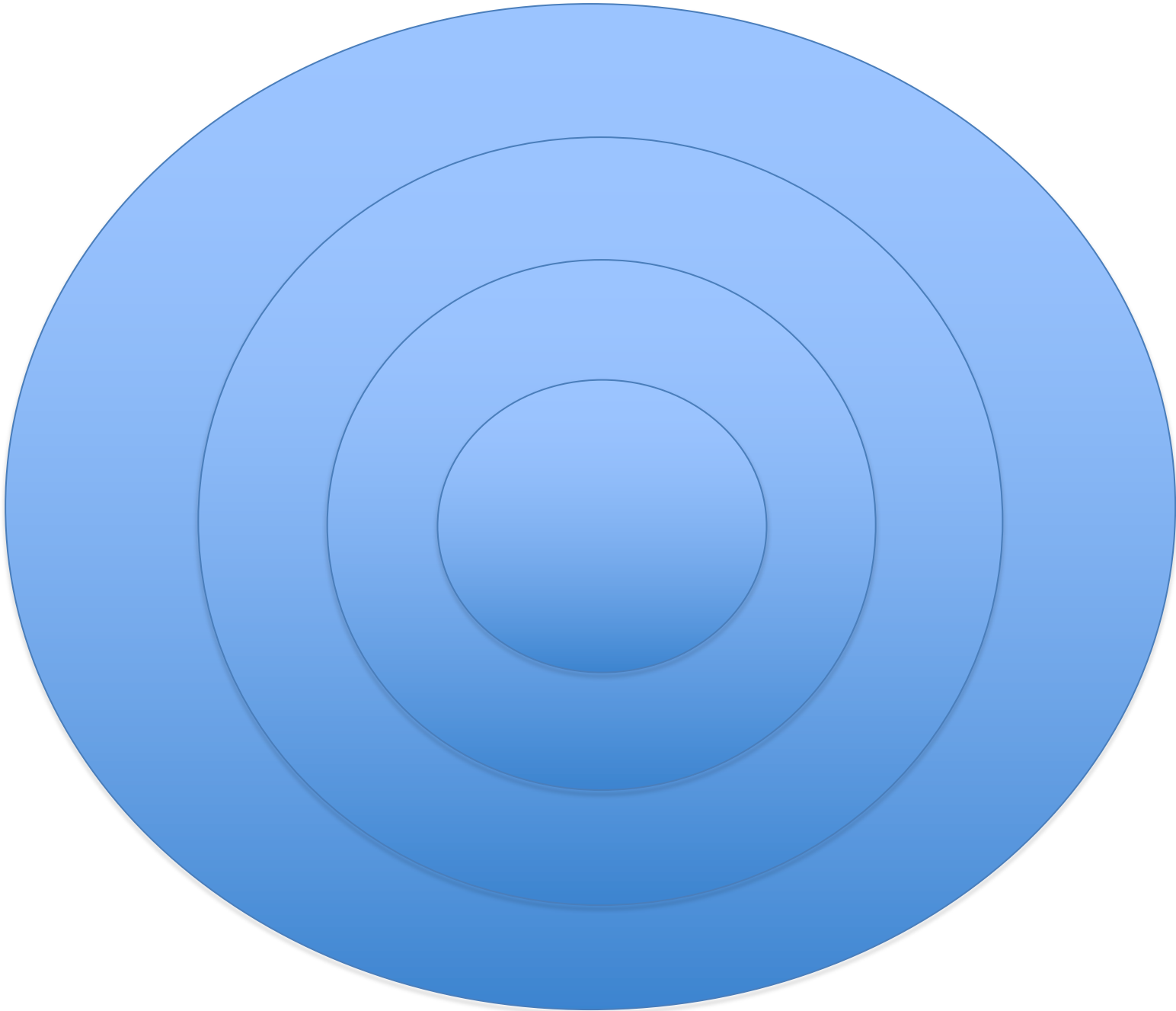
11. What other agencies have you reached out to?

12. Are there services you would like to have, but have not been able to connect with?

13. What help, if any, do you need that you are not receiving?

Appendix C

Icebreaker



Appendix D

Participant's Description Table

Table 1: Participant Descriptions

Pseudonym	Age	Sexual Orientation	Preferred Language	Initial Age of Exploitation	Length of Exploitation
Aiden	26	Abstinent	No preference	18-years old	7 years
Alice	37	Heterosexual	The life	21-22 years old	4-5 years
Alyssa	24	Heterosexual	The life	22-years old	2 years
April	34	Heterosexual	No preference	20-years old	10 years
Barb	29	Heterosexual	No preference	23-years old	4-5 years
Charity	32	Heterosexual	The life	19-years old	8 years
Ellie	32	Heterosexual	Alternative lifestyle living	18-years old	13 years
Jen	23	Heterosexual	No preference	“...when I was very little, like I don't remember not...”	Off and on the majority of her life
Juno	30	Pansexual	No preference	12-years old	15 years
Melissa	42	Lesbian	No preference	19-years old	6 years

Appendix E

Primary Data Analysis Coding Table

Table 2: Coding for First Analysis: Phenomenology

Major themes		
Subthemes		
Focused codes	Counts/Percentages	Exemplary Quote
Trauma Ridden Relationships		
Immediate Family	7/10 (70%)	“I think so. I assume he got money for it. I don’t know. I know that he was always there when like guys were doing things and he was always the reason why.”
Previous Romantic Relationships and Pimps	7/10 (70%)	“I would come home and he would be like I have some of my guy friends over let’s go in there and I get tied up on the bed, you know.”
Ambivalent Relationships		
Familial Relationships	7/10 (70%)	“It’s hard because I understand why he is lonely and why he is sad and why he always wants to make money. He always says that it is for us. I just feel like I understand where he comes from which makes it hard to hate him.”
Relationships with Johns	7/10 (70%)	“Cute, some of them are nice, cheap, some of them are smelly, dingy, greasy, fat, a groper that wants to be touchy feely and lovey dovey, old, rich, broke, cheap, tight wad.”
If Someone Cared	5/10 (50%)	“Yes, if my mom actually cared or if I went and lived with my dad I don’t think I would be where I am today at all, but it’s not their fault. I just think if I grew up differently things would have been different.”
Friend or Foe	5/10 (50%)	“Friends, I was going to school. I just graduated from high school and was going to (named community college) and then I started hanging around with bad

		friends and that's how I got involved in the life."
The Double Edge Sword		
Helpful	8/10 (80%)	
Mental Health Professionals	5/10 (50%)	"She really understands. She doesn't try to make it better or anything. She just validates that that's how I feel and it really sucks. I really like that."
Law Enforcement	3/10 (30%)	"No, that lady was really concerned and cared. Do you need to talk to me? I told her I'm ok. I'm fine."
Medical Professionals		"So they were really good to me. They were really good to me."
Hurtful	4/10 (40%)	
Mental Health Professionals	10/10 (100%)	"It just sucks because I have always been passed from therapist to therapist because nobody can understand and nobody can handle my life."
Law Enforcement	7/10 (70%)	"Very and I think the police look at us as a criminal and don't really look at us as someone that needs help. It's unfortunate. Yeah, it's rough."
Medical Professionals	6/10 (60%)	I was never honest about my life. I don't think it would have helped me. In the long run they could have made me come to counseling and got me out of the life sooner, but it's embarrassing, shameful."
	7/10 (70%)	
Trust is Difficult	9/10 (90%)	"I don't trust anybody."

Appendix F

Secondary Data Analysis Coding Table

<i>Table 3: Coding for Second Analysis: Humanistic-Existential Lens</i>		
Major themes		
Subthemes		
Focused codes	Counts/Percentages	Exemplary Quote
Unconditional Positive Regard	6/10 (60%)	“Yeah, not judging is a very important part. I feel like all my friends are accepting of all walks of life so I don’t feel like I keep anything in my circle that’s not.”
Existential Isolation	5/10 (50%)	“When I was in the life I really didn’t interact with anyone. I was isolated from all my friends.”
Meaninglessness and Meaning		
Meaninglessness	5/10 (50%)	“I tried to drive the car off the road while my madam was driving and so I just tried to kill us and then I got out of the car.”
Meaning	7/10 (70%)	“It’s kind of like my way of proving that I am worth something and all the naysayers, thanks because this is for you. That’s kind of for me because I feel like if you can find like positive energy in the people that have used, abused, harassed you through all of that (use the middle finger then).”