

Miccio-Fonseca, L. C. (2019, Spring). The Zeitgeist of the era, sociological and anthropological variables, and risk assessment of sexually abusive individuals. *Perspectives: Quarterly Newsletter of the California Coalition on Sexual Offending*, 1, 7-8, 14.

***The Zeitgeist of the Era, Sociological and Anthropological Variables, and
Risk Assessment of Sexually Abusive Individuals***

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Designing risk assessment tools and/or doing risk assessments with youth or adults must include sensitivity and attention to the Zeitgeist of the times; that is, the impact of sociological and anthropological influences and variables. Ignoring these potent cultural elements is a recipe for lowering accuracy in determining the individual's risk level, and miscalculating the "protective factors". However, thus far, there are no definitive studies that have demonstrated unequivocally whether protective factors mitigate risk for sexually abusive behaviors in youth at all (Klein, Rettenberger, Yoon, Kohler, Breken, 2015).

There is very limited etiological understanding of the protective factors that *specifically mediate* risk for *sexually* abusive behaviors. Astutely, Hanson and Morton-Bourgon (2005) make the point that risk factors that initiate sexual offending may not be the same as risk factors associated with persistence of sexual offending. The author has proposed a *dichotomy* of protective factors, "that is, protective factors are internal and external and must be considered and incorporated in risk assessment tools and risk assessments" (Miccio-Fonseca, 2018, p. 8). The variable *intimacy* is paramount, having both non-sexual and sexual aspects, and interconnected within a constellation of protective factors, both internal and external (Miccio-Fonseca, 2019). Conversely, intimacy deficits are interconnected within a constellation of risk factors (Miccio-Fonseca, 2014).

When assessing risk and/or protective factors, one must consider the social-anthropological cultural trends of the individual's age cohort. This is particularly true of interpersonal relationships, more specifically romantic and/or intimate relationships, are considered as "protective and dynamic factors" when assessing risk for sexually abusive behaviors. Implementing risk measures *without* such considerations can adversely impact the overall assessment of risk for an individual as it relates to sexually abusive behaviors.

Contemporary survey data by the Pew Research Center indicate that compared to previous generations, Millennials (ages 22-37) in 2018, are living at home with their parents for a longer length of time, are postponing, or foregoing marriage, and are slower forming their own households (Bialik & Fry, 2019). This change is perhaps a ramification from the economic down turn adversely impacting economical mobility. Millennials are more educated and ethnically diverse than prior generations (Fry & Parker, 2019). Millennials also bring about more blending races, cultures, values, traditions, and rituals than ever before in American history. Such socio-anthropological cultural variables must be incorporated into risk assessment tools, being sensitive to all genders and the applicable age cohort.

The Pew Research Center data indicate that 46% of Millennials are married, a precipitous drop from the 83% of Silent Generation (born 1928-1945) who were married in 1968 (Bialik & Fry, 2019). The number of individuals getting married has steadily dropped for each succeeding generation. The trend may speak to a new paradigm emerging related to family, parenting, and the like. By the time Millennials reach 40-50 years of age a growing number will never get married. There has been a significant social-cultural shift towards marrying later in life. The typical American woman in 1968 was first married at age 21 versus for today's women the age has climbed to 28 years. The typical American man in 1968 was first wed at 23; today it's age 30 (Bialik & Fry). The delay in making such serious commitment is apt to be approached by more mature individuals.

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Love and marriage are viewed significantly different today, then in previous times. For example, Cohn (2013) in reporting data from the 2010 Pew Research survey stated, “about half of or more [of those surveyed], think there is no difference between being married, or single, in the ease of having a fulfilling sex life, being financially secure, finding happiness, getting ahead in a career or having social status.” Such cultural perceptual changes in marriage, relationships, and sexuality, are factors to be considered when identifying a variable to function as a “protective variable” when considering assessments of sexually abusive individuals. A “protective variable”, whether it is considered for adults or minors, must be applicable to the individual’s *particular generational cohort*. Ignoring this, is diluting the accuracy of the risk assessment and may have adverse consequences.

Being in a long-term relationship, being married, or living with a romantic partner is often purported to be “a protective variable” and may be deemed “positive” if the professional completing the assessment is from a different generational cohort. However, this variable may not be applicable in 2019 to individuals who are Millennials (ages 22-37 in 2018). Millennials are more ethnically and racially diverse than older adults and on track to become the most educated in U.S. history. A Pew Research Center report documented they are less religious, less likely to have enlisted in military service (Taylor & Keeter, 2010). Millennials welcome communicating with others, implementing a variety of means of communication (i.e., 75% of Millennials created a social networking site; 1 in 5 posted a video of themselves online). Millennials’ penchant for self-expression can be seen in other ways. Almost 40% have a tattoo; 1 in 4 have a piercing in some place on their body other than an ear lobe (Taylor & Keeter).

Millennials live in a digital culture and world. For example, 83% place their cell phone on or right next to their bed while sleeping (Taylor & Keeter, 2010). Basing an assessment of a Millennial young adult on the values and survey data from a previous generational cohort may negatively impact the veracity and decrease the precision of the risk assessment, evidencing the assessor and/or guidelines are not in touch with the *Zeitgeist* of the society at large.

The generational cohort that follows Millennials, (those born after 1996), is known by various names “post Millennials”, “iGeneration and “Homelanders”; the Pew Research Center, officially refers to this generational cohort as Generation Z (ages 6-21 in 2018). This generational cohort is projected to be even more ethnically diverse and even better educated than generations prior. It is a generational cohort born into a completely digitized world impacting *all facets* of the individual’s life.

The Pew Research Center reports the parents of this upcoming new generational cohort, Generation Z, are better educated than past (i.e., almost half [43%] have at least one parent has a bachelor’s degree or beyond) (Fry, & Parker, 2019), This suggests that those in the Generation Z cohort are more likely to be pursuing college and less likely to be in the workforce. This generation is also much less likely to live in a traditional “nuclear” family; the current Pew Research Center data indicated 3 in 10 (31%), ages 6-17 years, live with a single parent, a bit higher than the share of Millennials growing up with a single parent in 2002 (27%).

Generation Z women are more likely to be engaged in school and work than previous generations. A variable contributing to this is that they have less parental responsibilities. Teen births have been decreasing indicating that Generation Z women are likely to be childless. For example, in 2016, 88% of women ages 18-21 years were childless when compared to 79% of Millennials of same age (Fry & Parker, 2019).

One thing is clear, *all assessment tools* must be sensitive to the genders (i.e., male, female, or transgender female, transgender male, non-binary, etc.) and the salient anthropological and sociological variables

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specific to generational cohort of the individual being assessed. This is true when designing *any kind* of assessment measure for sexually abusive youth, whether it is a tool purporting to not measure risk, but “strengths and weaknesses”, a tool measuring a predictive variable, or a tool with scientifically calibrated risk levels. Tools measuring a predictive variable are often tied to “predicting a re-offense”; thus, they are entwined to law enforcement involvement (i.e., an arrest, a charge, an adjudication).

Scientifically constructed tools, with calibrated risk levels according to gender and age, provide a more accurate specific risk assessment. A treatment plan can then be designed, including a monitoring and/or supervising system addressing the risk and protective factors that are in need of attention. These tools are often applicable to both adjudicated *and* non-adjudicated youth, and thus may be more in tandem with the contemporary *Zeitgeist* (Miccio-Fonseca & Rasmussen, 2018).

All measures *must be sensitive* to the *Zeitgeist of the Era*, the sociological and anthropological variables that are tied to various age groups *and* genders, *within* the particular generational cohort being referenced. Neglecting to exercise such considerations undermines the accuracy of the measure and likely raises questions of appropriateness of use and ethical concerns.

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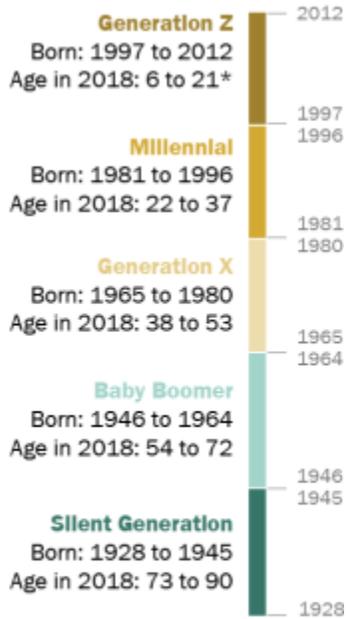
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The generations defined



*No chronological endpoint has been set for this group. For analytical purposes, Generation Z is defined as those ages 6 to 21 in 2018.

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Above graphic was downloaded on April 28, 2019 from:
Bialik K., & Fry, R. (2019). Millennial life: How young adulthood today compares with prior generations. *Pew Research Center, Social & Demographic Trends*. <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/essay/millennial-life-how-young-adulthood-today-compares-with-prior-generations/>