Article 62

Mapping Publications in Counseling Journals on African American Family Issues Over the Past 20 Years

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Abstract

For this literature review study, the researchers critically assessed and evaluated publications in counseling journals on Black family issues over the past 20 years. Criteria for selection included articles that were published during or after 1992, were peer reviewed, were conducted in the United States, and that focused exclusively on Black/African American client populations. A total of 126 articles, both conceptual and empirical, were identified. Reported are frequencies of articles related to Black family clinical issues, such as, the number of articles published in American Counseling Association (ACA) journals versus non-ACA journals, and a preliminary presentation of trends over the past two decades. Of significance, few articles were published in ACA journals. Based upon the preliminary findings of this study, the researchers recommend that the ACA

leadership consider taking steps to promote research about African American client populations by offering mini-grants to create incentives and offer special opportunities to disseminate research in this area through special issues of journals.

Despite significant gains in the political field, intermittent growth in the business sector, and minor successes in education, African Americans continue to experience social and cultural marginalization as well as institutional bias within the United States (Rodney, 2008; Sue, 2004; West, 2002; West-Olatunji, Baker & Brooks, 2006). In particular, sociopolitical influences on many African Americans have fueled interferences in familial processes and structures (Murry, Smith, & Hill, 2001), the increase in health disparities (Ponterotto, Utsey, & Pedersen, 2006), and disproportionality in educational achievement (Townsend, 2000). Conducting and publishing culturally competent research on African American families as client populations is vital to facilitating culturally competent case conceptualization, diagnosis, and treatment. Further, research by counselor educators on marginalized client populations, such as African American families, can aid in ameliorating the effects of institutional bias. A grounded theory approach (Creswell, 2008) allowed the researchers to seek out and conceptualize the latent themes and relationships between those themes within the dataset. By completing a wide computerized search of the literature about African American client issues, the investigators gathered valuable information on the course of research about African American families as client populations. Reported are frequencies on clinical issues explored and articles published in American Counseling Association (ACA) journals versus non-ACA journals, as well as a presentation of publication trends on this topic over the past two decades. Based upon the preliminary findings of this study, from the frequencies alone, the researchers offer recommendations regarding future research that would articulate the salient themes in research on Black family issues as well as expand the scope of a systematic literature review to include other clinical areas of interest related to Black clients.

Background

Scholars have suggested that poverty and disenfranchisement are outcomes of pervasive and systemic microaggressions enacted on members of impoverished African American communities (Azibo, Jackson, & Slater, 2004). Without whole scale institutional power and social access, African Americans, as a group, continue to experience a cycle of socio-cultural exploitation that threatens the psyche of African Americans (Sue & Sue, 2008).

Status of African Americans in the U.S.
Familial Processes and Structures. Without taking into account the systems of social inequality that put African Americans at greater risk, there has been the tendency for counselors to conceptualize African American familial relationships poorly (Sue, 2004). Major issues in African American intimate partner interactions include: (1) the paucity of available African American men with stable work histories (Yeh, 1999), (2)

issues in occupational and educational attainment (Helg, 2000), and (3) negative sexual stereotypes of both African American men and women (Collins, 2004). Murry and colleagues (2001) found that the perception of racial discrimination can amplify the everyday stress of African American mothers, compromising their ability to cope, harming their couple relationships, and damaging their parenting skills. Additionally, secondary effects of institutional bias on African American families can include familial conflict (Patterson 2002) and poor or inconsistent discipline (Dishion & Andrews, 1995). Despite these historical and pervasive obstacles, African American families have been resilient and have devised creative solutions to keeping their families together, achieving educational and economic gains, and demonstrating empowerment at the community level (West-Olatunji, Sanders, Mehta & Behar-Horenstein, 2010). Studies on African American families and resilience suggest that characteristics such as spirituality, collectivism, and flexible family role definitions have served them well (Boyd-Franklin, 2006).

Health Disparities. In spite of advocacy efforts by healthcare professionals, African Americans continue to struggle with acute health disparities. Counselors make contact with these clients when African American youth and adults seek resolution of associated symptoms of emotional and psychological distress. Specifically, for African Americans, the death rate due to heart disease (321.3 per 100,000 persons) is higher than that for Whites (245.6), Latinos/Hispanics (188.4), American Indian/Alaska Natives (178.9), and Asian/Pacific Islanders (137.4; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2008). It should be noted that poverty does not fully account for the differences between cultural groups (Franks, Muenning, Lubetkin, & Jia, 2006). Further, African Americans fare worse in the U.S. than others of African descent in continental Africa and the Caribbean (Read & Emerson, 2005).

Educational Achievement. African American students are overrepresented in mentally retarded, learning disabled, and emotionally disturbed categories and underrepresented in gifted programs (The Civil Rights Project, 2003; U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], Office of Special Education Programs [OSEP], 2002). This may be due to classroom and societal factors, such as teachers' attitudes and high stakes assessments (West-Olatunji et al., 2006). These students also experience high rates of school suspension, corporal punishment, and other behavioral referrals. Such disciplinary actions undermine African American students' self-esteem and can lead to underachievement and even dropping-out altogether (Steele & Aronson, 1995; Townsend, 2000).

Yet, African Americans continue to display resilience in the face of historical and pervasive oppression. Moreover, African American communities and families have offered a model of empowerment that has subsequently been borrowed by other marginalized groups globally (West-Olatunji & Conwill, 2010). It was within this context that African-centered theorists have conceptualized a wellness framework that was founded upon the ethos of African American people.

Counseling & African Americans

In general, African American cultural values and worldviews are predicated upon philosophical assumptions based in African values. This notion of African-centeredness proposes that studies devoted to African American life must have African-centered

values at the center of inquiry, distinct from mainstream or Eurocentric values. African-centered cultural values emphasize: interdependency, spirituality, affect-oriented knowledge generation, and interpersonal relationships (Belgrave & Allison, 2006). Historically, counselors have assessed and treated African Americans using a Eurocentric framework emanating from a focus on scientific inquiry that placed European worldviews superior to those of other people (Holdstock, 2000). Out of this philosophy emerged a framework of psychological disease for culturally marginalized communities situated within a Eurocentric value system.

Emergence of Multicultural Counseling. In counseling and psychology, there are essentially three major waves of scholarship that focus on the advancement of research about African American client populations (Gordon, 1995). The first wave, prior to the 1960s, was sporadic and generally did not represent multicultural counseling concepts. During the second wave (from the 1960s through the 1980s), there was the emergence of Black psychology (Jones, 1992; West-Olatunji & Conwill, 2010). The third wave has focused on culture-centered counseling theory or, specifically, African-centered counseling. While there has been a proliferation of research published about African American clients, a review is necessary that clarifies the current status of research by counselor educators in counseling journals. The purpose of this study was to identify trends in counseling research that focused on African American family issues and have been published in the past 20 years. By identifying these trends, the researchers intended to gather valuable information about the course of research about African American family client populations and where future studies can be directed. The researchers ask the question, "What is the extant literature on African American family issues within counseling journals over the past two decades?"

Methods

Systematic literature reviews provide an exhaustive summary of literature relevant to a research question and are intended to provide a critical assessment and evaluation of all research studies that address a particular issue (Brereton, Kitchenham, Budgen, Turner, & Khalil, 2007). As such, the researchers used an organized method of locating, assembling, and evaluating the body of literature on Black client issues in counseling journals using a set of specific criteria. Systematic literature reviews are mostly found in the medical discipline but are also employed in the social sciences, such as education and psychology. Typically, to identify the emergent themes in the data set, a grounded theory approach guides the investigation (Creswell, 2008). This approach allows the researchers to explore, identify, and conceptualize (a) latent themes within the data, and (b) relationships between those themes.

The research team consisted of a multi-collegiate and multi-ethnic team of counselor educators and graduate counseling students. The principal investigator was an African American female faculty member who was assisted primarily by a Eurasian American female master's level counseling student. Other members of the team included an African American male doctoral student, and a White female master's student.
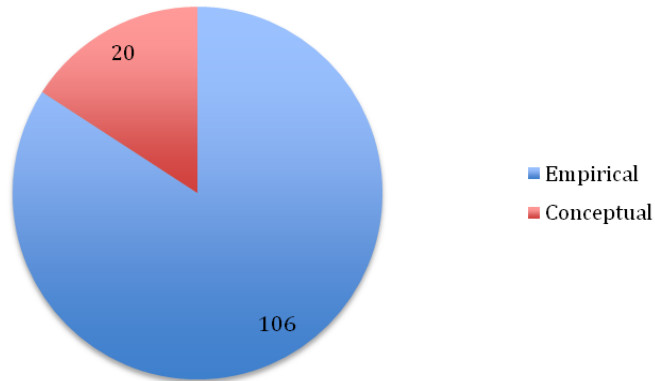
Data Collection

Using a computerized literature database search of specific journals, the researchers identified articles written about client issues specific to the African-American families published in the past 20 years (1992-2012). After consulting with an expert panel, a list of 30 journals was identified to search exclusively. This list was comprised of both American Counseling Association (ACA) journals (n=15) and non-ACA journals (n=15) that had a focus on counseling.

ACA Journals	Non-ACA Journals
Counselor Education and Supervision	Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology
Elementary School Guidance & Counseling,	Journal of Counseling Psychology
Journal of College Student Development	Journal of Family Psychology
Journal of Employment Counseling	Journal of Personality and Social Psychology
The School Counselor	Journal of Black Psychology
The Career Development Quarterly	The Counseling Psychologist
The Family Journal: Counseling & Therapy for Couples/Families	Counseling Psychology Quarterly
Journal of Humanistic Counseling (formerly known as the Journal of Humanistic Education and Development)	American Journal of Orthopsychiatry
Journal of Additions & Offender Counseling	Journal of Negro Education
Journal of Multicultural Counseling & Development	Western Journal of Black Studies
Journal for Specialists in Group Work	Journal of Black Studies
Measurement & Evaluation in Counseling & Development	American Journal of Community Psychology
Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin	Urban Education
Journal of Counseling & Development	Cultural Sociology
Counseling and Values	Journal of Latina/o Psychology

The journals were divided among team members to search independently and then searched within using the host university's Library database system. Electronic searches were conducted using the following databases (in preferential order, based upon availability): EBSCO, Academic Search Premiere, Professional Development Collection, Psychology & Behavioral Sciences, PsychArticles, and SAGE Premiere. The following search terms were employed: *African American, Black American, Black, Afro-Caribbean, Afro-American, Afro-Latino, issues, mental health, counseling, diagnosis, problem behaviors, emotional, development, therapy, psychology, assessment,* and *well-being*. Our primary inclusion criteria were that the articles were published in the identified journals between 1992-2012, (all of which were peer-reviewed), related to client issues (rather than those with a focus on the counselor or on supervision issues), and specific to the African-American population exclusively. Four common themes were identified and then categories were formed that included these themes. The categories included: (1) family dynamics, (2) parenting, (3) mother-daughter relationships, and (4) couples.

Following completion of the second stage of the data analysis, the researchers will disseminate the outcomes of the investigation to include a comprehensive analysis of the four themes found in the data set.
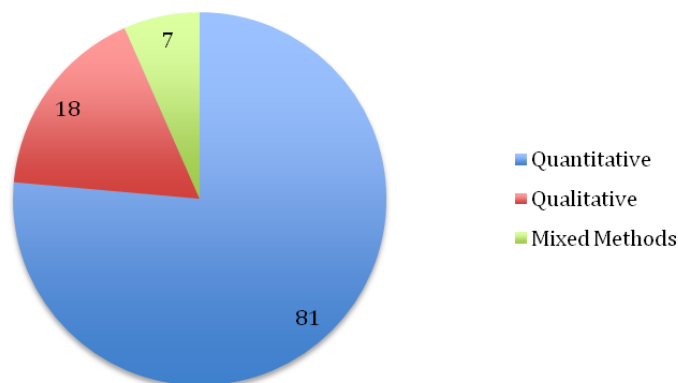

Figure 1. Data Type: Conceptual vs. Empirical.

Data Analysis

All 126 articles were divided and coded separately among the research team members. The following information was coded in Microsoft Excel: data type (qualitative, quantitative, mixed, conceptual); client population (children, adolescents, K-12, college students, adults, older adults, families, community); publication date (four groupings of publication dates in intervals of 5 years); ACA or non-ACA journal; and if the journal was indexed or not.
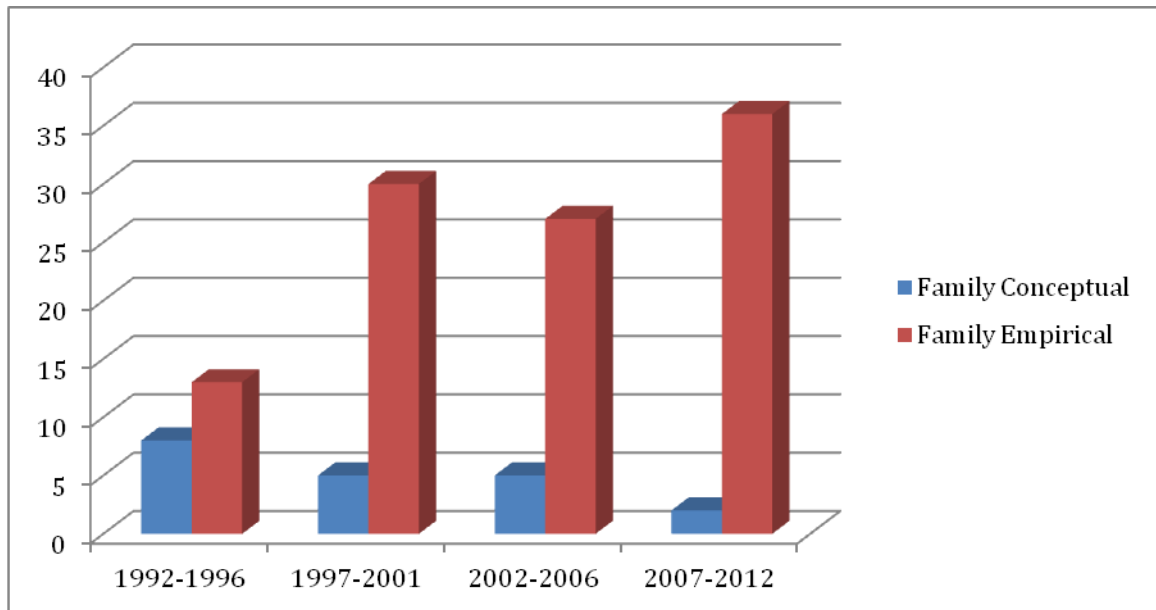
Index status was determined using the ISI Web of Knowledge℠ Journal Citation Reports®. This resource provides the impact factor of each journal that was used to determine the index status of the journal. It was noted that just because a journal was not identified as indexed using this resource does not mean that it is not indexed somewhere else. However, after consulting with several librarians, this was chosen as the best resource to use for our purposes. Queries were completed within Microsoft Excel to identify any trends.

Figure 2. Research Paradigm.

Preliminary Findings

As a preliminary step in reporting the findings of the systematic literature review, the researchers report the frequencies of the findings. It is anticipated that continuous exploration of the data set will ultimately reveal a more complex understanding of the core themes found in each of the four categories identified. Simple frequencies are reported for data type, type of article, methodology used, and publication rates over the 20-year span. For data type, 16% were conceptual (n=20) and 84% were empirical (n=106; See Figure 1). For the empirical articles, a large majority was quantitative (n=81). A smaller number used qualitative (n=18) or mixed (n=7) methods (See Figure 2). Publication rates were the lowest the first five years, 1992-1996 (n=20), then increased by approximately 75% in the next five years 1997-2001 (n=35). The publication rates remained steady in the 5-year period 2002-2006 (n=32) and between 2007-2012 (n=38; See Figure 3). Finally, 94% of the empirical articles were not published in American Counseling Association journals (n=118), leaving only 6% of the articles found published within ACA journals (n=7; See Figure 4).
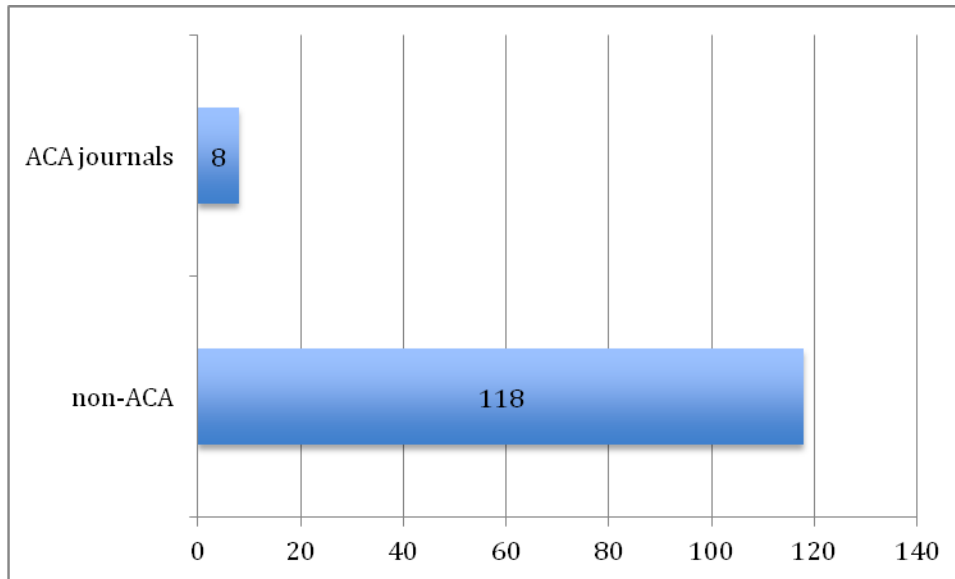

Figure 3. Publication Rates: Empirical vs. Conceptual Articles Over the 20-year Period.

Discussion

The data collected from the articles across the designated 20 year time span cover the time period that is considered the third wave of emergence of multicultural counseling, where the scope of research and counseling work has broadened to a culture-centered perspective. In this current research, the authors have identified prevalent themes in journal publications that correlate with what are understood to be modern day challenges for African American families. The identified themes of family dynamics, parenting, mother-daughter relationships, and couples can be associated with or fall under the umbrella of the issues presented under the subheadings of familial processes and

structures, health disparities, and educational achievement. Thus, the articles that were found reflect a similar understanding of trends in African American family issues as has been observed independently by scholars in the counseling community.

Figure 4. ACA vs. non-ACA Journals.

As stated previously, there is a paucity of African American men with stable employment histories, and mothers continue to experience increased daily stress due to racial discrimination. The themes of parenting, family dynamics, mother-daughter relationships, and couples may be correlated with or a result of these issues in familial processes and structure. Similarly, the issues described under educational achievement (such as diminished self-esteem in African American students, over representation in learning disability, and under representation in gifted programs) can be related to the themes of family dynamics and parenting as academic stress can increase pervasive stress levels that carry over to the home and family.

While the themes that have originated from the articles included in this study are broad, there seems to be a consensus in the counseling community that certain issues in family processes and structures remain persistent for African Americans. While the counseling community has vastly expanded its scope and efforts in multicultural counseling, these initial findings may be a call to counselors to stay engaged with African American families and continue to explore the issues of the African American community in a refined and focused way. The data from this study indicate that a majority of the research located used quantitative methodology. The counseling community may also consider, given the community oriented nature of African American familial issues, that research efforts could benefit from qualitative and community based methods such as action research.

There has been an expansion of research on African American family issues over the past 20 years with the bulk of the studies being empirical using a quantitative research paradigm. Moreover, very little of this research is being disseminated in ACA journals. Within ACA journals, there appears to be a shift toward broadening the multicultural lens to include LGBTQ, biracial, and international issues that may account for the low

numbers of articles over the past 20 years (Singh & Shelton, 2011; Smith, Ng, Brinson, & Mityagin, 2008).

Based upon the preliminary outcomes of this study, we recommend that the leadership in ACA prioritize and encourage, through targeted programming, research conducted about on African American families. In particular, this would include facilitating special issues in ACA journals that focus on African American families, developing podcasts to disseminate research in this area, and creating a strand of conference presentations at the annual convention. Future research to advance knowledge about clinical issues among Black families is warranted. Counselor educators are encouraged to investigate a wider range of clinical issues affecting individual adults, children, and adolescents to provide a comprehensive picture of how African American client issues are disseminated within ACA journals to inform the membership. Additionally, research focusing on clinical interventions for this client population should be augmented.

Conclusion

The current study investigated the trends in counseling research on Black/African American families over the span of the past 20 years. By identifying these trends, the researchers' goal is to inform scholars in the counseling field and offer guidance for future studies. The results of this study show that only 6% of the articles found were published in ACA journals, suggesting a need for further counseling research in this area. Although publication rates remained steady from 2002 to 2012, the large majority of published articles were quantitative. In addition to the call for more research publications in ACA journals, the researchers also recommend that scholars conduct culture-centered, strengths-based studies that employ qualitative and mixed methodologies to highlight resiliency factors found in Black/African American communities. We recommend that ACA leaders and journal editors facilitate the expansion of counseling research on Black/African American client populations by offering grant-incentives and collaborating on special issues. In addition, counselor educators are urged to conduct research on Black/African American client issues, both to contribute to the existing body of knowledge and to influence students' research agendas. Knowledge of client issues and strengths specific to Black/African American families can increase counselor competence when working with this population, thus making strides toward more equitable services.

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