Whatever Happened to Counseling in Counseling Psychology?

Michael J. Scheel¹, Margit Berman², Myrna L. Friedlander³, Collie W. Conoley⁴, Changming Duan⁵, and Susan C. Whiston⁶

Abstract

A suspected decline in published counseling-related research in The Counseling Psychologist (TCP) and the Journal of Counseling Psychology (JCP) was investigated through content analyses of the two journals from 1979 to 2008. A marked decline in counseling-related research may signify a shift in emphasis away from counseling as the most fundamental area of counseling psychology. Findings revealed a drop in counseling-related articles from 77.7% to 37.2% of all articles. Both journals independently showed a decline, but it was more pronounced for JCP. Analogue studies decreased most sharply, whereas field studies, supervision, career, and prevention research also declined markedly. Potential explanations are offered, including fewer counseling-related articles submitted, a trend toward more stringent methodological criteria, fewer senior role models, changing editorial preferences, expanded publication outlets, and a shift in emphasis or identity within counseling psychology. Recommendations are proposed for the promotion of more counseling-related research.

Keywords
counseling-related research, content analysis

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What fundamentally distinguishes counseling psychology from other subdisciplines within psychology (e.g., school or clinical) is the term counseling. Indeed, Gelso and Fretz (2001) state that counseling is the single professional activity performed by the greatest number of counseling psychologists. Research findings clearly support this assertion. Munley, Pate, and Duncan, in their 2008 survey of counseling psychologists, established by a wide margin health and mental health to be the primary activity of the field. In a second survey of counseling psychologists, Goodyear et al. (2008) compared their results with an earlier survey by Watkins, Lopez, Campbell, and Himmell (1986) to assess change in our field’s identities, roles, functions, and career satisfaction. Similar to Munley et al.’s findings, Goodyear et al. found that the activity to which counseling psychologists devote the most time was clearly psychotherapy (58.9% of time for nonmembers and 44.7% of time for members of the Society of Counseling Psychology [SCP]). In addition, percentage of time devoted to psychotherapy had actually increased substantially from the 27.5% of time revealed through the 1986 survey. The survey also showed that in 2008, 70.5% of SCP members and 86% of nonmembers were involved in the practice of psychotherapy. Furthermore, conducting research on counseling, psychotherapy, career counseling, clinical training, consultation, prevention, and supervision of counselors is a core aspect of the identity of counseling psychologists, inasmuch as counseling psychology as a field combines research and practice through a scientist-practitioner or scientist-professional training model (Epperson, Fouad, Stoltenberg, & Murdock, 2005; Murdock, Alcorn, Heesacker, & Stoltenberg, 1998). It follows, then, that because counseling and psychotherapy are (a) core identifying components of the field, (b) primary work activities of most counseling psychologists, and (c) tied to research through training models and professional status, research conducted and published within counseling psychology should reflect the prominent roles of counseling and psychotherapy and of clinical training and supervision in the profession.

The present research, coauthored by Society of Counseling Psychology Section for the Promotion of Psychotherapy Science (SPPS) comprised of Michael John Scheel, Margit Berman, Myrna L. Friedlander, Collie W. Conoley, Changming Duan, and Susan C. Whiston, was conducted to investigate a perceived downward trend in the quantity of counseling-related research in the field’s two flagship journals, The Counseling Psychologist (TCP) and the Journal of Counseling Psychology (JCP). This research was initiated to determine the extent of the perceived decline in publishing counseling articles and to suggest explanations for any shift in research focus that may have occurred. A severe decline in counseling-related research may
signify a shift in emphasis away from counseling as a fundamental area of counseling psychology. It also may indicate that currently preferred or frequently used research designs do not work well to answer research questions about counseling processes and outcomes.

In this article, we use the term *counseling-related research* to describe our focus, because we sought to gauge the overall interest in counseling through scientific inquiry in the field of counseling psychology. Counseling-related research will include the more traditional areas of process and outcome studies as counseling research, but publications in areas inextricably connected to the practice of counseling (e.g., counselor training and supervision) also comprised the content of this investigation.

The Section on Counseling and Psychotherapy Process and Outcome Research was formed in 2002 within the SCP and the American Psychological Association (APA) out of a sense on the part of its founders that counseling psychology had drifted away from its historic focus on counseling-related research as a core professional activity (J. W. Lichtenberg, personal communication, August 17, 2009). The section’s name change in 2006 (to the Section for the Promotion of Psychotherapy Science) emphasized the perception that interest in the production of counseling and psychotherapy research was declining and in fact would require active promotion in order to maintain its traditional place as a cornerstone of our field.

This continuing concern of the possible diminishing role of counseling-related research in counseling psychology formed the basis for the current investigation. More specifically, the purpose of this study was to assess the validity of these concerns through content analyses of *TCP* and *JCP*. Prior to 1994, *JCP* had a designated portion of the journal devoted specifically to counseling process and outcome research. Between 1994 and 2006, this section was eliminated. Then, starting in 2006, a smaller section for counseling process or for counseling process and outcome articles sometimes appeared in the table of contents. Anecdotally, it seemed to us that process and outcome research in both of our flagship journals was being published notably less frequently than it had in the past. Consequently, we wondered whether process and outcome research has retained its historically programmatic, knowledge-building focus as described by Wampold and White (1986). Therefore, we examined the content of empirical and conceptual articles in both journals in order to clarify research and publication trends in counseling psychology’s two most prominent publication outlets.

Counseling and psychotherapy research largely consists of outcome and process studies. Outcome research examines the results or effects on clients of counseling or counseling-related activities such as prevention or supervision.
Outcome measurement usually occurs directly after treatment ends and sometimes again after a follow-up period has elapsed (Gelso & Fretz, 2001). Measured outcomes typically include alleviation of presenting problems or symptoms (e.g., decreased depression or anxiety, smoking cessation, decreased relationship distress), improved overall functioning or well-being, or improvement in specific desired behaviors or attitudes (e.g., hope, problem solving, vocational identity, healthy lifestyles). The Center for the Study of Collegiate Mental Health (CSCMH), representing more than 140 college counseling centers, provides a current example of a large, ongoing outcome study. The instrument used by CSCMH is the Counseling Center Assessment of Psychological Symptoms (CCAPS), a composite measure with subscales assessing depression, generalized anxiety, social anxiety, academic distress, eating concerns, family distress, hostility, and substance use (CSCMH, 2009). The CCAPS and its subscales are representative of the types of outcome measures used in counseling outcome research.

On the other hand, counseling process research generally focuses on what happens during, rather than as a result of, the intervention and is usually measured in terms of counselor and client behaviors, and/or the interaction between client and counselor during or between sessions (Hill & Corbett, 1993; Lambert & Hill, 1994). Process investigations typically include studies of the therapeutic relationship (e.g., working alliance), client variables (e.g., motivation, affect, insight), actions in therapy (e.g., completion of homework, self-disclosure), or therapist variables (e.g., experience, congruence, empathy). Hybrid studies that link processes to outcomes are also an important part of process and outcome research in counseling and psychotherapy.

Counseling process and outcome research includes a wide range of topics such as examining counseling methods and modalities (e.g., Kivlighan, Multon, & Patton, 2000), analyzing therapist in-session behaviors (e.g., Jennings & Skovholt, 1999), assessing the effectiveness of specific treatments for psychological disorders (e.g., Hope, Heimberg, & Bruch, 1995), evaluating preventive (e.g., Newman-Carlson & Horne, 2004) and career (e.g., Kerr & Erb, 1991) interventions, assessing how clinical supervision affects counselor training and client outcomes (e.g., Ladany, Hill, Corbett, & Nutt, 1996), and studying cultural factors within the context of therapeutic intervention (e.g., Atkinson, Kim, & Caldwell, 1998). Counseling research typically incorporates several extremely relevant values of the field of counseling psychology such as an interest in the impact of culture and ethnicity on counseling, a focus on life span and career development, and the use of client strengths in therapy. Counseling-related research and writing also include
supervision, counselor training, scale development to measure counseling phenomena, and counseling theory development. Each of these activities is considered to have important effects on counseling processes and outcomes.

*JCP* is the counseling psychology journal published through the APA. The purpose of the journal, as stated on the inside front cover of every issue, is to publish empirical research in the areas of (a) counseling activities (including assessment, interventions, consultation, supervision, training, prevention, and psychological education), (b) career development and vocational psychology, (c) diversity and underrepresented populations in relation to counseling activities, (d) the development of new measures to be used in counseling activities, and (e) professional issues in counseling psychology.

*TCP* is the official publication of the SCP. Articles in *TCP* are more varied than in *JCP*, with relatively more conceptual or theoretical articles and a thematic focus in each issue, covering “theory, research, and practice in counseling psychology” (see p. 4 of vol. 29, 2001). Traditionally, this theme was elaborated through the Major Contribution, consisting of an article or series of articles that address a topic, followed by reactions to the Major Contribution. In addition to the thematic focus in each issue, other nonthematic articles were included “about professional issues, methodological and theoretical issues, integrative reviews, special populations, interviews with pioneers in counseling psychology, international issues, and comments on previous publications” (p. 4).

In a content analysis of the first 19 volumes of *JCP*, Munley (1974) found that the major categories of published research were, first, counseling process and outcome and, second, vocational behavior and test development and evaluation. Twenty-five years later, Bubolz, Miller, and Williams (1999) replicated Munley’s study in another content analysis of *JCP*, covering the volumes from 1973 to 1998. Again, process and outcome research were found to be the two principal content areas published in the journal during this 26-year period, with vocational behavior research and tests and measures as the third and fourth primary areas. In fact, during this period, 44% of the research published in *JCP* was categorized as outcome, process, or process outcome research. Thus, since the beginning of the journal until the end of the 1990s, the most prolific research categories in *JCP* were counseling process and outcome research.

This sustained focus over time on process and outcome research in counseling has had important benefits for the advancement of knowledge in
counseling psychology. Wampold and White (1986) provided snapshots of the content in *JCP* through a cluster analysis of all 92 process and outcome articles identified from the 1974, 1977, 1980, and 1982 volumes. These authors analyzed recurrent themes in the journal based on a commonality-of-citations index calculated for each process and outcome article. Findings demonstrated that a “robust research theme in counseling psychology is the social influence model” (p. 125), suggesting that—at least for that period of time—counseling process and outcome research benefited from a programmatic focus, with studies that built upon one another and added to a specific knowledge base.

Many readers may not be surprised that Wampold and White (1986) found counseling process and outcome research to be the major focus in our flagship journal and that this sustained focus resulted in advancements within the field. As mentioned, counseling and therapy are core professional activities of counseling psychologists. Furthermore, the scientist-practitioner training model espoused by most counseling psychology training programs emphasizes the need for counseling psychologists to conduct and consume research that is relevant to practice. Given the stability of process and outcome research as the leading area of research in *JCP* from the journal’s beginning, any trend away from publishing counseling research in *JCP* might represent a major departure for the journal and for the field. Evidence of such a shift should demand our attention, as it would reflect, at the least, a major shift in scholarly endeavors and perhaps a profound change in the identity of field itself.

Indeed, some evidence exists that our field has expanded and diversified in both its research interests and professional activities. Hill, Nutt, and Jackson (1994), comparing psychotherapy and counseling process research published in *JCP* and the *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology (JCCP)*, analyzed the publications of both journals over 15 years (1978-1992). Counseling and psychotherapy process research was far more prevalent in *JCP*: 42% of published articles in *JCP* were of process research, in comparison to 19% in *JCCP*. However, Hill et al. did note a downward trend in *JCP* across time: Process research composed 55% of articles published in the first 5 years, 37% in the middle 5 years, and 32% in the last 5 years, whereas publication of process research in *JCCP* held steady over the 15-year period at approximately 19%. These results may represent greater fluidity in the core identity of counseling psychology in contrast to clinical psychology. Alternatively, these findings may foreshadow a shift away from counseling process and outcome research in the field of counseling psychology.
As can be seen, previous reviews of counseling research in counseling psychology have concentrated solely on counseling process and outcome (i.e., Bubolz et al., 1999; Munley, 1974). Our study defines counseling research more broadly, including counseling-related activities (i.e., prevention, supervision, career, counselor education, theory development, and scale development, as well as counseling process and outcome) in various research contexts (i.e., field, analogue). In this article, we report the results of a content analysis covering 30 years (1979-2008) of articles in TCP and JCP, the purpose of which was to answer the following questions: (a) Has the proportion of published counseling- and psychotherapy-related studies declined over the past 30 years in TCP and JCP? (b) How do the proportions of counseling- and psychotherapy-related articles in TCP and JCP compare? (c) How has the content of counseling-related research shifted over the past 30 years in the two journals? (d) To what degree have the proportions of analogue and field studies changed over this time period?

Method

One of the present authors, a senior counseling psychology researcher, reviewed all articles in JCP from 1979 to 2008, that is, 30 years. (Excluded from the analysis were 1987, issue 4, and 2005, issue 2, which were devoted solely to statistics.) Every article (excluding editorials and errata or corrections) was scanned to determine, first, whether its content was related to counseling or psychotherapy, which was broadly defined as personal–social and career counseling, prevention interventions, and the training or supervision of counselors or paraprofessionals. Then, those articles that were determined to be counseling related were classified by content area.

The nine content areas were developed inductively rather than a priori; they emerged from the nature of the publications in the 30 years of JCP (see Table 1). The nine areas included (1) field studies of individual, group, and couple/family counseling, (2) analogue studies (individual and group personal–social counseling), (3) counselor education/training (including training for multicultural competence), (4) clinical supervision, (5) career (workshops, counseling, and counseling analogues), (6) prevention (with college students and others, focusing on self-improvement other than academic performance or career decision making), (7) scales (development or validation of measures used primarily in counseling-related studies or descriptions of methodologies for studying counseling-related processes), (8) theory/research (purely theoretical articles, literature reviews or meta-analysis on
Table 1. Criteria for Classification of Counseling Related Articles for Content Analysis of The Counseling Psychologist and the Journal of Counseling Psychology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content Analysis Coding Scheme</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Field studies—Studies done with actual clients and/or counselors (or counselors in training). Includes college or university students with test anxiety or academic achievement problems if they actually have these problems. Includes assessment studies (expectancies, preferences, etc.) if actual clients were used. In other words, the clients need to have identifiable problems, not just volunteering for credit or money, and to be in more than one experimental session.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Analogue studies—Includes surveys of nonclients about attitudes, expectancies, and preferences, even if there is no actual counseling stimulus. Includes clinical judgment analogs. May be one or two counseling sessions with volunteer clients (usually undergraduates receiving course credit or getting paid who are asked to talk about a personal problem as part of an experiment). Does not include studies about training or interview skills. Includes studies of self-help books, tapes, and computer-assisted counseling. Includes studies with therapists or therapists in training as participants if the focus of the study is not training.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Counselor education—Includes studies whose focus is on training or development of counselors, including multicultural competencies. Studies that are not primarily about counseling and simply used trainees are coded instead as field studies or analogues. Includes paraprofessional training.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Supervision—Includes studies whose focus is the actual clinical supervision of trainees or analogues of supervision processes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Career—Includes career workshops, individual or group field studies, or career analogue studies (including studies of providing feedback on career assessments to clients).</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Prevention/college students—Includes noncareer studies focused on self-improvement or personal issues (e.g., weight loss, personal well-being, interpersonal relations, etc.) unrelated to academic performance or career decision making. Includes high school students being seen in groups or workshops for academic improvement, or other people in the community, such as those receiving parenting skills training.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Scales—Includes studies that are primarily about the development and/or validation of scales for general or career counseling, counselor education (including multicultural competencies), and supervision. Also includes process scales (e.g., response modes) or outcome scales (e.g., depression, marital satisfaction) if they are specifically to be used with clients and that is made explicit in the article. Also includes studies in which the focus is developing a specific methodology to study counseling (i.e., not a scale per se but a way of studying counseling processes).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Theory/research—Includes purely theoretical articles about counseling (general or career), prevention, counselor education, or supervision, or reviews of literature or meta-analyses on these topics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Reactions—Reaction articles or commentaries on other articles written on any of the above topics.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Excluded are special issues that are entirely devoted to stats or methodology (in general), editorial pieces, or errata and corrections.
counseling-related topics), and (9) reaction articles or commentaries on other
counseling-related articles.

After the 120 JCP articles were classified, a different author, also a senior
female counseling psychology researcher, with the help of a graduate stu-
dent, used the descriptions of each content area written by the previous coder
to categorize all articles in the 1979-2008 issues of TCP (a total of 146
issues). The Major Contributions, including reactions or commentaries to the
Major Contributions, and Professional Forum articles were categorized sepa-
rately (presidential addresses or articles in the International Forum were
excluded). Table 2 displays the category frequencies and the percentage of
counseling-related articles for six equal time intervals from 1979 to 2008.

The data were compiled by these two senior researchers, who together
have published articles in every one of the nine content areas, except preven-
tion. However, to assess the reliability of the two researchers’ frequency
counts, two teams of PhD graduate students in counseling psychology classified
a randomly selected subsample of articles from each journal. For the JCP
articles, the judges were two women, a Taiwanese American and a European
American, who classified 22 articles (4% of the total). For the TCP articles,
the judges were one man and one woman, European Americans, who classified
34 (7.7% of the total) Major Contribution articles and 13 (12% of the
total) Professional Forum articles. The two judges on each team independ-
ently calculated the frequencies of counseling-related articles by referring to
the written descriptions of the nine content areas. Intraclass correlations were
.90 for the JCP articles, and .92 and .93 for Major Contribution and
Professional Forum articles, respectively, of the TCP issues.

Results

The frequencies and percentages of counseling-related articles in TCP and
JCP during each 5-year interval from 1979 to 2008 are displayed in Table 2,
as well as the combined values from both journals. The number of articles in
each of the nine categories of the content analysis is also presented in
Table 2.

No inferential statistical analysis was needed inasmuch as we were not
using a sample of the population to estimate the probability of decline. Rather,
our data constituted the entire population of counseling-related articles in TCP
and JCP. Consequently, we report the actual decline in counseling-related
articles in each of the two journals. Because we categorized the articles in the
entire 30-year population, our analysis was simply inspection of the results
from the content analysis. In Table 2, the frequencies refer to the number of
articles with counseling-related content, whereas the percentages indicate the
Table 2. Frequencies of Articles and Percentage of Counseling-Related Articles in *TCP* and *JCP* in 5-Year Intervals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time interval</th>
<th>Total articles</th>
<th>Counseling related</th>
<th>% counseling related</th>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Analog</th>
<th>Counselor education</th>
<th>Supervision</th>
<th>Career</th>
<th>Prevention</th>
<th>Scales</th>
<th>Theory/research</th>
<th>Reaction</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Counseling Psychologist (TCP)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1979-1983</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>84.4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984-1988</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>86.2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989-1993</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>69.0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>68</td>
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<tr>
<td>1994-1998</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>75.6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>81</td>
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<tr>
<td>1999-2003</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>70.5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>81</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004-2008</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>71.5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>110</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Journal of Counseling Psychology (JCP)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1979-1983</td>
<td>426</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>75.6</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>1984-1988</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>66.6</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>1989-1993</td>
<td>307</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>53.4</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
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<td>1994-1998</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>51.4</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>1999-2003</td>
<td>220</td>
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<td>37.7</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004-2008</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TCP and JCP combined</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1979-1983</td>
<td>561</td>
<td>436</td>
<td>77.7</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>70</td>
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<tr>
<td>1984-1988</td>
<td>429</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>70.2</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>89</td>
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<tr>
<td>1989-1993</td>
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<td>222</td>
<td>56.8</td>
<td>55</td>
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<td>25</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>45</td>
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<tr>
<td>1994-1998</td>
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<td>186</td>
<td>57.2</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>1999-2003</td>
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<td>157</td>
<td>48.3</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>91</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004-2008</td>
<td>282</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>37.2</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following special issues were not included: *JCP* 1987 (issue 4), 2005 (issue 2); *TCP* 1987 (issue 4), 2003 (issues 1, 3, and 4), 2005 (issue 1), 2006 (issues 5 and 6), 2007 (issue 2 and 3). In 1998, *TCP* went from four to six issues. Beginning in 1983, *JCP* went from six to four issues. Reaction articles were not included in the total number of articles or in the total number of counseling articles.
proportion of counseling-related articles to the total number of articles in each 5-year period.

We decided not to include reaction articles in either the totals or the percentages, but the number of reaction articles per 5-year period is displayed in Table 2. This decision was based on the reasoning that the inclusion of these articles in analyzing the decline would violate the assumption of independence, inasmuch as reaction articles are linked to counseling-related articles.

Figure 1 presents a graph of the frequencies of *JCP* and *TCP* counseling-related articles across the 30 years of interest, and Figure 2 is a graph of the percentages of counseling-related articles to total number of articles. The Figure 1 graph displays a clear drop in *JCP*-published counseling-related articles across the 30 years and a less pronounced drop for *TCP* articles. Figure 2 displays similar trends for the two journals.

Inspection of the *TCP* portion of Table 2 revealed a high point in counseling-related articles during the 1979-1983 period (i.e., 84.4% of all articles; 114 articles) and a low point in the final time interval from 2004 to 2008 (i.e., 61.5%; 49 articles). In inspection of frequencies for each category in Table 2, the most noteworthy declines occurred in (a) *JCP* field and analogue studies (i.e., 57 to 20 and 149 to 14), (b) *TCP* counselor education articles (28 to 16),
(c) JCP counselor education articles (27 to 4), (d) JCP supervision articles (13 to 5), (e) JCP career counseling articles (27 to 1), (f) JCP prevention articles (28 to 1), and (g) TCP counseling theory and research articles (81 to 25). In TCP articles, it should be noted that for the entire 30 years of publications only 3 supervision articles, 3 career counseling articles, and 1 prevention article were published. As shown in Table 1, for an article to be categorized in any of these three areas, it had to report a study of an actual intervention, for example, clinical supervision, career workshops, career interventions, or self-improvement programs. Articles that did not describe intervention studies but rather were literature reviews of supervision, intervention, or prevention theory or practice were categorized as theory/research.

**Discussion**

Our results support the perceived decline in the number of counseling-related articles in JCP and to a lesser degree in TCP, the two major U.S. counseling psychology journals. The difference in findings between JCP and TCP might be explained through the differences in the stated missions of the two journals. Taken together, the publications in the two journals reflect the current interest
and emphasis on counseling-related research and practice in counseling psychology. Overall, our findings after inspection of the frequencies and percentages in Table 2 and the graphs in Figures 1 and 2 indicate a diminishing focus on counseling-related topics within our field.

The reasons for the decline can be explored through the variations among the types of studies that have been published. In the period from 1979 to 1983, 152 analogue studies comprised the largest category of counseling research articles. In the next 5-year period (1984-1988), the number of analogue studies dropped by more than half ($n = 72$). The decline continued over the span of 30 years to only 18 analogue studies from 2004 to 2008. Although analogue studies showed the most dramatic decline, marked declines also occurred for field studies, career counseling, counselor education, supervision, prevention, and counseling theory and research across the six time intervals for the combined TCP and JCP data.

The decline in analogue studies is troubling because analogue research maximizes control of variables, thereby offering the best possibility for internal validity and client safety. Research progression dictates laboratory examination and then field trial. Even though field trials now outnumber analogue studies in the two journals, field trials have also decreased significantly. In the 1994-1998 period, field studies ($n = 52$) overtook the number of analogue studies ($n = 24$). The last 5 years have produced slightly more field ($n = 22$) than analogue ($n = 18$) investigations. Ironically, the numbers may reveal a nonwinner in the rigor versus relevance debate. The dwindling number of field and analogue studies cannot bode well for our further understanding of psychotherapy processes and outcomes.

The decline in process and outcome studies in JCP is less clear in TCP. Although TCP has few analogue and field investigations, a fairly steady production (with a small dip in the last 5 years) of theory and research articles as well as articles about counselor education consistently appeared in the 30 years examined. Yet, as noted above, few studies of supervision, prevention, or career counseling have appeared in TCP in the past 30 years. Perhaps our interest in counseling theory and counselor training has not diminished, whereas our interest in empirical investigations of counseling has. In what follows, we offer several possible explanations for the precipitous drop in counseling-related articles.

**Explanation 1.** Could our caviar taste in research design and statistical analysis not match our hamburger funding of counseling projects? The development of sophisticated designs and statistical analyses may influence editors and reviewers to evaluate less complex submissions as poor in comparison.
Perhaps a new standard could help: If a study sets forth a new, helpful insight and possesses sound reasoning, more latitude could be made in the expectations of the study’s design. For example, studies with small sample sizes, case studies, or analogue studies would be welcomed as the initial steps. The criteria for acceptance would be based on meaningfulness or contribution to practice.

This extends Borckardt et al.’s (2008) perspective on the need to support case studies, as well as the endorsement by the APA’s Presidential Task Force on Evidence-Based Practice (2005) of the systematic single-case designs, as “scientifically sound and instructive” (Borckardt et al., 2008, p. 78). Both *JCP* and *TCP* have published articles in the past few years on mixed methods research and on qualitative methods (Creswell, Hanson, Clark Plano, & Morales, 2007; Hanson, Creswell, Clark, Petska, & Creswell, 2005; Haverkamp, Morrow, & Ponterotto, 2005). These articles encourage diversified research modalities. Perhaps even more acceptance of suggestive research opening new hypotheses needs encouragement as well.

**Explanation 2.** Our interest in process and outcome research may have waned as we absorbed Wampold and colleagues’ (e.g., Imel & Wampold, 2008; Wampold, 2001) influences about the lack of outcome differences across specific treatment approaches. Wampold’s arguments for the primacy of common or nonspecific factors may have led to an unwarranted tendency to group all process variables (e.g., working alliance, client motivation) as equally important. Much remains to be discovered about common factors as they are applied within a myriad of clinical contexts, as well as attaining differing objectives.

**Explanation 3.** Field of counseling psychology has expanded and broadened beyond the primacy of counseling outcome and process research into topics such as social justice and cultural competence. Perhaps, from 1979 to 1983, when almost 80% of published articles were counseling related, counseling psychology was narrowly focused. We hope the field of counseling psychology will absorb new frontiers while maintaining its identity in counseling research.

Perhaps other areas have drawn the attention of students and faculty in counseling psychology. For example, social justice and cultural diversity may be more personally compelling and emphasized to students than counseling research is. Students’ graduate school experiences reflect the focus of the faculty. If faculty members are not publishing counseling research, then students have no role models or mentors to support interest in these efforts.

The occurrence of fewer counseling studies means the existence of fewer role models within counseling psychology as a field. The decreasing training
opportunities can perpetuate the dwindling research production. However, there is interest in counseling research among other colleagues. The Section on the Promotion of Psychotherapy Science sponsored a well-attended pre-conference workshop on innovative methods in small-sample-size psychotherapy research at the 2008 International Counseling Psychology Conference (Angus, 2008; Constantine, 2008; Hill, 2008a; Hoyt, 2008;) and a symposium, Advancing Psychotherapy Process and Outcome Research: Current Status and Future Directions (Friedlander, 2008; Hill, 2008b; Scheel & Conoley, 2008; Whiston, 2008). Perhaps more workshops, symposia, or special focused contributions in our journals can support the growth of counseling research.

Explanation 4. Perhaps the diminishing counseling research is indicative of publications moving to other outlets. At least two other prominent journals are devoted to research on counseling and counselor training: the Division 29 journal, Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training, and the journal of the Society for Psychotherapy Research, Psychotherapy Research. In addition, journals with origins in clinical psychology seem increasingly interested in small-sample-size process studies. Family therapy researchers have a number of alternative outlets (e.g., Family Process, Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, Contemporary Family Therapy, American Journal of Family Therapy).

The trend for the publication of counseling research to move away from the counseling flagship journals cannot be good news for our identity. Counseling research applied to career, prevention, and clinical supervision is sorely needed. Each of these areas has not been strongly represented in the past 10 years. Supervision studies in JCP, for example, have varied from their highest number, 16, between 1984 and 1988, to a low of only 5 studies between 2004 and 2008. Good supervision is an essential hallmark of our field (Epperson et al., 2005; Gelso & Fretz, 2001; Murdock et al., 1998). Career counseling research also declined, from a high of 27 published articles between 1979 and 1983 to a low of 1 article in JCP in 2004-2008. Supervision and career counseling researchers may be publishing elsewhere, which is good for these areas but nevertheless of serious concern for counseling psychology.

Our group conducted this investigation because we perceived a decline in counseling research in our major journals. The steady drop in the number of published counseling-related articles over the past 30 years was far more pronounced than we had suspected. We hope that the tentative explanations for the decline that we have offered will be further examined. More important, we hope that our suggestions will be seriously considered.
Our journals do not define the field of counseling psychology; rather, they serve as markers both indicating and shaping our current interests, needs, and training emphases, all of which are guided by contextual factors. It may be true that the reason our journals are not publishing more counseling-related research is because they are not receiving quality manuscripts on these topics. If this is the case, then the issue is far more an identity issue for counseling psychology than a research methodology issue.

Our call is not just to our flagship journals but to the larger field of counseling psychology to consider our fundamental identity. Counseling psychology is a profession because of its emphasis on ethics and research in the practice of our specialty. The present article highlights the need to examine our research practices in counseling psychology. Are these practices centered where we want them to be? Does our research reflect the professional identity to which we, as counseling psychologists, aspire? We pose these questions in the hope that further dialogue and review will reinvigorate the study of counseling by counseling psychologists.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interests with respect to the authorship and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research and/or authorship of this article.

Note

1. Counseling and psychotherapy have sometimes been differentiated from one another, with counseling referring to interventions that are brief or psychoeducational, that engage in problem solving at a conscious level, or that are conducted with normal individuals, and with psychotherapy referring to interventions that are of longer duration, that are analytic and focused on the subconscious, or that are applied to abnormal behaviors (Brammer, Abrego, & Shostrom, 1993; Gelso & Fretz, 2001). Regardless of the term used, counseling and psychotherapy have substantial overlap and are often indistinguishable. Because any distinctions between the two have never been definitive, the terms are often used interchangeably.

References


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