

U.S. Racial/Ethnic/Cultural Groups in Counseling Psychology Literature:

A Content Analysis

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## ABSTRACT

### U.S. Racial/Ethnic/Cultural Groups in Counseling Psychology Literature: A Content Analysis

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Research on ethnic/racial/cultural (REC) groups can contribute to reducing mental health risks and treatment disparities among REC minorities. Content analysis is a way to measure the quantity and quality of REC-focused research within a given field. For this study, counseling psychology was chosen for its leadership in multicultural and social justice issues. Three journals (*Journal of Counseling Psychology*, *The Counseling Psychologist*, and *Journal of Counseling & Development*) were coded for several variables, including REC-minority focus, article topic, geographic location of sample, urban/rural setting of sample, and inclusion of ethnic identity and acculturation measures. The results showed that 490 (21.3%) of the articles were coded as REC-focused. Of the REC-focused articles, 107 (21.8%) articles were focused on African Americans, 99 (20.2%) were focused on Asian Americans, 74 (16.9%) were focused on Latinos, and 17 (3.5%) were focused on Native Americans. Additionally, 194 (39.5%) were coded as "Other." REC minorities, especially Latinos and African Americans, were found to be under-represented relative to their populations in the U.S. The results indicate a need for improved reporting practices and increased focus on REC minorities in counseling psychology research.

Keywords: content analysis, ethnic minorities, counseling psychology

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U.S. Racial/Ethnic/Cultural Groups in Counseling Psychology Literature:  
A Content Analysis

In 2001, the Surgeon General called for the United States to “continue on the road toward eliminating racial and ethnic disparities in the accessibility, availability, and quality of mental health services” (USDHHS, 2001, p. v). Racial/ethnic/cultural (REC) minorities have, of course, continued to experience significant disparities in mental health services in the ensuing years, including lower access to treatment, less engagement in treatment, and poorer quality of services than whites (Alegria et al., 2008; Cook et al., 2014; Holden & Xanthos, 2009). This is disconcerting considering that REC minorities are at higher risk for many mental health issues (Office of Minority Health, 2018). The clinical professions have attempted to bridge these gaps, in part, through increasing the cultural competence of their practitioners. For example, the field of counseling psychology seeks to “encompass a broad range of culturally-sensitive practices” as one of its main tenants (Hammer, 2018). This emphasis on cultural sensitivity can help practitioners fulfill their ethical obligation to understand and help their clients according to their specific needs.

In order for culturally competent treatment to be successful and more widely disseminated, it must be backed by high-quality and culturally-informed research. Unfortunately, much of the current research is based on European American, white samples and may not be externally valid, or generalizable to REC groups. This is an especially large concern given the growing REC minority populations, with projections suggesting that the U.S. will become “a majority-minority nation” as early as 2043 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). To understand ethnicity, race, and culture as they relate to the mental health needs of an increasingly-diverse America, the professional research must be evaluated in order to: (a) understand current levels of minority

inclusion (in research samples and conceptual discussions), and (b) guide the changes that need to be made in advancing the research of mental health factors in REC-diverse populations.

Content analysis is one methodological approach that can be used to evaluate a body of professional scholarship, examining factors such as the extent to which articles focus on REC minorities and utilize REC minority research samples. Content analysis is a research method that uses coding procedures to identify patterns in publications and, as such, can be used to provide disciplines with information regarding article themes (Sprenkle & Piercy, 2005). This article is one of several forthcoming content analyses that investigate the REC focus of articles within social science fields. The specific focus of this project is on the field of counseling psychology, chosen for its leadership in multicultural and social justice issues (Gelso, Williams, & Fretz, 2014; Vera & Speight, 2003).

Due to its multicultural focus, the field of counseling psychology has already featured several content analysis studies focusing on race/ethnicity/culture; however, recent studies were somewhat limited, including in their analysis of the specific REC groups studied. This information is necessary to ascertain which REC groups are over-/understudied in the U.S. The present study was designed to provide an update to previous content analyses (including data through 2016) by reviewing three leading counseling psychology journals: *Journal of Counseling Psychology* (JCP), *The Counseling Psychologist* (TCP), and *Journal of Counseling & Development* (JCD). In addition, several variables not previously examined in the literature were catalogued and reported in this content analysis (e.g. most often-studied topics and inclusion of ethnic identity and acculturation measures for each REC group).

### **Literature Review**

Counseling psychology, as a professional psychology discipline, focuses on personal and relational functioning across the life span. The field addresses issues associated with both normal development and disordered physical, emotional, or mental functioning (Hammer, 2018). Along with other clinical disciplines, the field of counseling psychology faces the issue of REC disparities in access to and quality of mental health treatment (Alegria et al., 2008; Holden & Xanthos, 2009). Given the relationship between ethnicity/race/culture and mental health diagnostic features, prevalence rates, and treatment barriers (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Harris, Edlund, & Larson, 2005; Ward, Clark, & Heidrich, 2009), an increased understanding of minority needs is required to provide higher quality psychological and bio- psychosocial treatment (Henderson, Kendall, & See, 2011; Mancoske, Lewis, Bowers-Stephens, & Ford, 2012). For example, understanding the association between REC characteristics and mental health can help clinicians identify etiologies of clients' disorders, determine accurate diagnoses, and provide the most appropriate treatment (Bell, Williamson, & Chien, 2008). Alternatively, it is possible for service quality to be negatively influenced by clinician ignorance or bias, as noted in studies where minority groups reported receiving less information about treatment rationales and higher rates of discrimination in regards to mental health services (Holley, Tavassoli, & Stromwall, 2016; Lin & Kressin, 2015). Thus, REC awareness and understanding is required for clinicians to provide the most suitable treatment with fairness across REC groups.

Findings from previous content analyses suggest that the field of counseling psychology has been somewhat uneven in the publication of minority-focused research, and the five most relevant studies are reviewed here (Blancher, Buboltz, & Soper, 2010; Case & Smith, 2000;

Delgado-Romero, Galvan, Maschino, & Rowland, 2005; Lee, Rosen, & Burns, 2013; Pope-Davis, Ligiero, Liang, & Codrington, 2001). Additional content analysis publications were excluded from review (i.e., Arredondo, Rosen, Rice, Perez, & Tovar-Gamero, 2005; Baker, Bowen, Butler, & Shavers, 2013; Buboltz, Deemer, & Hoffman, 2010; Nilsson, Love, Taylor, & Slusher, 2007; Perez, Constantine, & Gerard, 2000; Yoon, Langrehr, & Ong, 2011) due to one or more of the following disqualifying factors: older publication date, narrow topical focus (e.g. spirituality, acculturation, etc.), or differential focus (e.g. class, gender).

More specifically, past content analyses determined that most counseling psychology studies did not have adequate REC representation in their samples, and many studies did not state their samples' race/ethnicity/culture at all (Blancher et al., 2010; Delgado-Romero et al., 2005; Pope-Davis et al., 2001). In a content analysis of 796 articles from JCD, JCP, and TCP (1990-99), Delgado-Romero et al. (2005) found that only 57% of the studies provided an REC breakdown of their samples. For articles that did report an REC breakdown, African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans were found to be underrepresented relative to their U. S. population numbers, while Caucasians and Asian Americans were overrepresented. These findings suggest poor practices in sample description within many articles that are accepted and published, since the omission of race/ethnicity/culture can lead to lack of generalization and applicability to nonwhite populations. Taken as a whole, Delgado-Romero et al. provided valuable information to the field regarding the external validity of research to REC minority groups; however, this article analyzed data only through 1999 and did not did not analyze how frequently each REC group is studied.

Case and Smith (2000) reported similar results in a 5-yr. review (1993-1997) of several psychology disciplines, including counseling psychology. They found that 56.8% of empirical



articles reported participant ethnicity within JCD, 65.0% within TCP, and 82.1% within JCP. Of the articles that reported participant ethnicity across all disciplines studied (clinical, counseling, and school psychology), the researchers found that “54.4% of the research participants were European American, 12.3% were African American, 4.4% were Hispanic American, 2.1% were Asian American, 0.8% were Native American, 22.5% were international, and 3.4% were other.” Their findings suggested an overrepresentation of African American subjects and an underrepresentation of Hispanic American subjects relative to their U.S. populations. They also found that 7.2% of all articles were focused on a specific REC group. This study provided valuable information about past sample representation of REC minorities, but updated analyses are needed to understand recent REC representation of current U.S. demographics.

In a subsequent content analysis of the *Journal of Counseling & Development* (JCD), Blancher et al. (2010) found improvements in sample representation and reporting practices (only 18% of articles failed to report sample ethnicity). They also compared content themes with two previous content analyses of JCD (Pelsma & Cesari, 1989; Williams & Buboltz, 1999), finding that the percentage of articles focused on “multicultural, disadvantaged, and minorities” increased from 5.6% in 1969 to 9.8% in 2006. This reflects an increased focus on the needs of minority groups within counseling psychology literature. However, the amount of research focused on each specific REC group remains unknown.

In a content analysis of JCP (1954 to 2009, 55 years), Lee et al. (2013) reported the content themes within multicultural articles (articles focused on gender, race/ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, religion, disability or social class). They found that while only 0.3% of articles focused on race and ethnicity in the 1950’s, the number increased to 21.4% in the 2000’s. The study also found that that the most studied topic for articles focused on race/ethnicity/culture

was counseling process (e.g. counselor rapport, cross-cultural interactions in therapy), studied at least three times more than any other topic. They concluded that the field has an increased focus on race/ethnicity/culture and is improving the quality of services for REC minorities. However, consistent with the other content analyses reviewed, Lee et al. (2013) did not examine the inclusion of individual REC groups, and it remains unknown which REC groups are over-/under-studied relative to their populations.

The only study found that did examine the extent to which individual REC groups were studied was a content analysis of *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development* (Pope-Davis et al., 2001). The article reported the field's representation of multicultural articles, or articles focused on a particular sex, ethnic group, age group, or other (e.g. disability, religion, or sexual orientation). As a proportion, African American were the focus of 26% of multicultural articles, Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders were 12%, Latinos-9%, Native Americans-7%, Whites-6%, International-7%, and the Other category was 2%. As important as it is to understand the numbers (and types) of multicultural articles, it is also important to weigh these percentages with all published research (a number that invariably favors white, European American samples). Furthermore, as Pope-Davis et al. examined publications through 1999, there is the need to update analyses for more recent research.

In summary, over the last two decades, reviews and content analyses have reported on the counseling psychology's focus on race/ethnicity/culture, but have not detailed the field's inclusion of specific REC groups. By comparison, the present study examined the counseling psychology literature (across its three most prestigious journals) for the inclusion of individual REC groups and several other variables. These variables (not often studied in content analyses) include: research topics most studied for each REC group, geographical groupings of samples,

urban/rural setting of samples, and use of ethnic identity or acculturation measures. These other variables were added in this content analysis in order to provide a better understanding of the quality of research focused on REC groups and not just the quantity of research studies.

### Method

In order to be included in this analysis, journals had to qualify as one of the most prominent journals for the profession of counseling psychology. Qualifying criteria were: (a) inclusion in previous discipline-specific review and/or a top ranking (5-year impact factor) in the ISI Web of Knowledge<sup>SM</sup> Journal Citation Report; (b) publication of primarily U.S.-based articles, as this study's focus is on diversity within the U.S.; and (c) having broad focus on the counseling psychology field, instead of specific topics or sub-disciplines (e.g. adolescents, etc.). Based on these criteria, the following journals were selected for this content analysis: *Journal of Counseling Psychology* (3.88, 5-year journal impact factor), *The Counseling Psychologist* (1.92), and *Journal of Counseling & Development* (0.89). Among the excluded journals with higher impact factors was *Patient Education and Counseling* (excluded for having a more narrow focus and for being international rather than U. S. based in its scope).

Articles were coded only if they represent a conceptual or empirical work, thereby excluding book reviews, feedback pieces and editor's notes and introductions. Two separate and distinct categories were used to classify the articles: (a) focused – REC groups were examined as a principal part of the study's design or conceptual discussion (articles qualified if their title, PsycINFO subjects (topic designation), or abstract indicated an emphasis on race/ethnicity/culture or a specific REC minority group); and (b) not focused – REC minorities were not a primary part of the research population or any conceptual discussion. This "non-focused" category of articles typically includes a default focus on white, majority culture

(referred to here as Anglos). Additionally, in order to maintain the focus on REC diversity within the United States, articles examining international populations were not reviewed in this study.

### **Coder Training**

Each journal article was coded by two undergraduate students trained using the following protocol: (a) enrollment in a upper-division research practicum (after fulfilling a research methods course and other pre-requisites); (b) weekly instruction and supervision of coding procedures; (c) tests of coding knowledge based on a detailed coding manual; (d) successful completion of twenty practice articles; (e) individual meetings with coding supervisors; and (e) regular attendance at quality control meetings. Undergraduate students were supervised by a team of expert coders, who qualified as such by completing a two-month training program, including practice articles, quizzes and weekly training meetings. The expert coders were, in turn, supervised by a faculty member and graduate students.

Each article was coded by a pair of coders, working independently from one another, and their coding responses were compared to determine inter-rater reliability (IRR). To do this, expert-level coders marked any incongruences for each coded variable and reviewed the original article to negotiate into agreement each variable that contained an incongruence. The marked incongruences were then totaled, and a congruency percentage was calculated for each variable. Across all journals, years, and variables, the average congruency (IRR) between coders was calculated to be 93.5%.

Journal articles were coded for the specific research topics addressed therein using a process that began with the PsycINFO-provided topics (termed subjects in PsycINFO). Up to five topics were recorded for each article using the PsycINFO subjects listed, excluding subjects that were sample demographic identifiers (e.g., adolescent female, children (age 6-12)).

Consistent with Prior (2014), topics were ordered by frequency, aiding in the identification of the field's primary topics (as represented in these three professional journals). Topics were then organized into concept clusters, based on categories derived in previous content analyses (i.e., Smithee, Bean, Limb, & Holmes, 2018), with attention to conceptual overlap, synonyms, and diagnostic groupings (social anxiety was grouped with phobias and generalized anxiety as anxiety disorders). The categorization process was performed by the faculty advisor, confirmed by the author and other graduate students, and resulted in 87 different categories.

The following questions were used to guide this content analysis. These research questions are based on past content analyses and emerging interest in other multicultural topics.

- a. What is the percentage of minority-focused articles for each REC group?
- b. Is there a change (across the timespan) in the percent of articles focused on race/ethnicity/culture and individual REC groups?
- c. What are the most frequently studied topics for each REC group?
- d. What were the geographical groupings (by region and state) for each REC group?  
What was the number of studies where no location was specified for each REC group?
- e. What was the urban/rural setting of the samples?
- f. Out of total REC focused articles, how many contained a measure of ethnic identity and/or acculturation?

To answer these questions, the corrected and cleaned data was entered into SPSS and variables were analyzed using crosstabs (except question (b.) where multinomial regression was used).

## Results

### 1. What is the Percentage of Minority-focused Articles for each REC Group?

A total of 2,544 articles were initially coded, with 242 articles removed for their international focus, leaving 2,302 articles for content analysis (812 from *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 628 from *The Counseling Psychologist*, and 862 from *Journal of Counseling & Development*). Articles were coded as “focused” if their title, PsycINFO subjects (topic designation), or abstract indicated an emphasis on race/ethnicity/culture or a specific REC minority group. A total of 221 (27.2%) articles were coded as focused in *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 152 (24.2%) in *The Counseling Psychologist*, and 117 (13.6%) in *Journal of Counseling & Development* (Table 1). The high percentages in JCP and TCP reflect the journals’ explicit focus on diversity and underrepresented populations (American Psychological Association, 2018) and multiculturalism (Sage Publishing, 2018). In sum, 490 (21.3%) of the articles from all three journals were coded as focused. The REC-focused articles had a larger proportion that were empirical in nature (61.1% quantitative and 15.5% qualitative) than did the non-focused articles (47.8% quantitative and 8.9% qualitative). Indeed, 43.4% of non-focused articles were coded as conceptual, whereas only 23.4% of focused articles were conceptual (Table 1).

Of the REC-focused articles, 107 (21.8%) articles were focused on African Americans, 99 (20.2%) were focused on Asian Americans, 74 (16.9%) were focused on Latinos, and 17 (3.5%) were focused on Native Americans. Additionally, 194 (39.5%) were coded as “Other,” a grouping that includes multiple REC groups, multiracial groups, and REC groups not otherwise categorized (e.g. Middle Eastern, Pacific Islander).

Of the 1,276 articles with a human sample (there were 126 empirical articles with samples of books, articles, and other non-living subjects that were excluded from this analysis), 1,176 (92.2%) articles reported at least a partial REC breakdown of their sample, and 1,085 (85.0%) articles reported samples that included REC minorities. One or more Anglo research subjects were represented in the samples of 898 articles (70.4%), one or more African American individuals were represented in the samples of 821 articles (64.3%), Latinos in 722 (56.6%), Asian Americans in 699 (54.8%), Native Americans in 342 (26.8%), and Other in 709 (55.6%). Note substantial overlap as most samples included multiple REC groups.

## **2. Is There a Change (Across the Timespan) in the Percent of Articles Focused on Race/Ethnicity/Culture or Individual REC Groups?**

Examining the question of whether there was a significant statistical change across time (2000-2017), multinomial regression analyses (SPSS, IBM Corporation, 2018) were conducted for focused articles (all REC groups) and for each specific REC group. Non-focused articles were utilized as the reference group in order to account for any overall change (increase/decrease) in the number of published articles. The field's total publication numbers (all three journals combined) were examined and while no single REC group saw a significant increase across time, minority-focused articles (in general) were found to increase across the timespan ( $\beta = .021$ ,  $df(1)$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The corresponding odds ratio of REC focused articles versus unfocused articles indicated a very small increase ( $OR = 1.021$  or 2.1% increased odds), meaning that these three journals in counseling psychology experienced a very small yearly increase in REC minority-focused articles across the 16-year time period studied.

In addition, regression analyses were conducted to identify publication rates within each journal. Given these findings for the combined data, it was not surprising that regression analyses

carried out by specific journal also yielded largely non-significant findings. In the case of the *Journal of Counseling Psychology* and *Journal of Counseling and Development*, the number of articles did not change significantly (increase or decrease) for any specific REC group or for the overall “focused” category of articles. In contrast, several groups were found to have experienced significant publication increases within *Counseling Psychologist*, including Latinos ( $\beta = .13, df(1), p < .01$ ), Asian Americans ( $\beta = .10, df(1), p < .05$ ), and total focused articles ( $\beta = .06, df(1), p < .01$ ). The corresponding odds ratios indicated an increase of 13.5% for articles specific to Latinos, 10.1% for Asian Americans, and 5.9% for overall minority-focused articles. Although these results reached statistical significance, they were of very small magnitude. Nevertheless, the findings reflect a commitment of this particular journal to investigate topics relevant to multiculturalism (Sage Publishing, 2018).

### **3. What are the Most Frequently Studied Topics Studied for Each REC Group?**

Journal articles were coded for the specific research topics addressed therein using PsycINFO topics/subjects. Given the hundreds of narrowly defined topics, it was necessary to group them into categories in order to produce a useful list of the topics that were most studied for each REC group (Table 2). For example, “racial and ethnic differences” and “multiculturalism” were both recoded as “diversity and culture topics,” and “counseling” and “psychotherapy” were both recoded as “individual therapy and intervention.”

For Anglo-focused articles, individual therapy and intervention (538, 9.4% of total Anglo-focused articles), professional practice and identity (370, 6.5%), and sexual minorities (262, 4.6%) were the topics most studied. For Asian American-focused articles, the topics most studied were diversity/culture topics such as “race and ethnic discrimination” and “racial and ethnic differences” (69, 23.4%), stress and distress (19, 6.4%), and psychometrics and specific



measures (16, 5.4%). For African Americans, the most studied topics were diversity/culture topics such as “racism” and “racial and ethnic attitudes” (42, 13.5%), ethnic/racial identity (20, 6.4%), and psychometrics and specific measures (16, 5.1%). The topics most studied for Latinos were diversity/culture topics such as “ethnic values” and “race and ethnic discrimination” (32, 13.5%), ethnic/racial identity (18, 7.5%), and work/employment (10, 4.2%). For Native Americans, the topics most studied were diversity/culture topics such as “cross cultural counseling” and “multiculturalism” (4, 12.1%), individual therapy or intervention (4, 12.1%), and ethnic/racial identity (2, 6.1%). The topics most studied for the Other group were diversity/culture topics (153, 23.5%), individual therapy or intervention (40, 6.2%), and psychometrics and specific measures (40, 6.2%).

#### **4. What Were the Geographical Groupings for Each REC Group? What Was the Number of Studies Where No Location Was Specified for Each REC Group?**

Empirical articles were coded according to the stated (author-provided) geographic location of the sample. Specifically, the location area was coded according to the following categories: specific state, a regional area of the U. S. (e.g., Midwest, Southeast), a sample collected nationally, or a collection of multiple states (e.g., sample collected from New York, New Jersey and Florida). The primary purpose in coding for geographic location is to track whether REC samples are being recruited in a representative and more generalizable way or if there is any indication of bias in sample acquisition methodologies. Additionally, geographic area is important to report given evidence of location-relevant differences within REC groups, such as culture, health, socio-economic status, and levels of discrimination (Kitayama, Conway, Pietromonaco, Park, & Plaut, 2010).

As a category, non-focused articles reported the highest number of national samples (103, 11.2% of all empirical articles reporting sample location), while only 26 focused articles (2.8%) were drawn from national samples. Of the non-focused empirical articles, 343 (37.4%) articles had samples drawn from larger geographic regions (multiple states), and 136 (39.7%) of these had samples from the Midwest. Also, 58 (6.3%) articles reported a specific state, with 24 states represented and California being the most represented (7, 12.1% of state samples). The focused articles contained a report of the sample's geographic location far more frequently than non-focused articles. In fact, the non-focused category included 377 (41.4%) articles that did not report a geographical area, whereas focused articles only included 104 (29.1%) that did not report a geographical area.

Articles focused on African Americans reported regions which were more widely distributed than any other REC minority group, with fairly even representation from the South, Southeast, Mid-Atlantic, Northeast, and Midwest. This finding is consistent with African Americans' wider distribution across the U.S. than other REC minority groups. Almost half (36, 46.8%) of the empirical studies focused on Asian Americans reported regional samples, of which 23 (46.9%) were sampled from the Midwest and 11 (22.4%) sampled from the West Coast. California was the state-specific location for 6 (46.2%) of articles reporting individual state samples. Asian American-focused studies were drawn from almost no national samples (3, 3.3%).

Similarly, Latino-focused studies relied on very few national samples (2, 3.4%), while 18 articles (31.0%) reported samples from individual states, including 8 (44.4%) from California, 4 (22.2%) from Texas, and 4 (22.2%) from Florida. Of the articles focused on Latinos that reported a region, most (18, 85.7%) reported samples from the Southwest, West, or Midwest. Of the few

empirical articles focused on Native Americans, two (22.2%) reported a regional sample, and three (33.3%) reported state-specific samples (i.e., Oregon, South Dakota, Wisconsin). No Native American-focused studies were found to utilize national samples. The final group (Other category) had a more even distribution of regional samples and a larger number of national samples (14, 12.3%).

### **5. What Was the Urban/Rural Setting of the Samples?**

Articles were coded for setting of the study's sample (i.e., urban, rural, suburban, mixed) from the sample description. Articles were assumed to have a "mixed" designation when the sample was collected over a large geographic area (e.g. national, regional, state). Of the total REC focused and empirical articles (those with research samples,  $n=357$ ), 237 articles (66.4%) reported no information on the sample's setting. Of the non-focused articles with samples, 675 (74.0%) did not report the sample's setting. For both non-focused and focused articles, the most common setting was a mixed setting (164, 17.9% for non-focused and 70, 19.6% for focused).

For every REC group, the second most common setting was urban/metropolitan (Table 3). Only 4 (3.3%) focused articles had samples solely from rural or suburban locations, suggesting underrepresentation of rural and suburban populations. No articles focusing on Latinos, Asian Americans, or Native Americans used completely suburban samples, and no articles focusing on Asian Americans or Native Americans used completely rural samples. Articles focusing on Latinos and Native Americans were the most likely to use urban samples (15, 22.7% for Latinos and 2, 22.2% for Native Americans). Articles focused on Asian Americans had the highest number of articles that did not report sample setting (67, 72.8%).

## **6. Out of Total REC Focused Articles, How Many Contained a Measure of Ethnic Identity and/or Acculturation?**

Focused articles were coded for the presence of ethnic identity and acculturation measures. Ethnic identity refers to an individual's sense of belonging to REC groups (Phinney, 2000). Acculturation is the "process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members" (Berry 2005, p. 698). Acculturation is most commonly studied for REC groups with higher percentages of immigrants (e.g. Latinos, Asian Americans). This portion of the content analysis was designed as an indirect assessment of researcher sensitivity to within-group differences, given consistent reminders to measure these important contextualizing factors for minority populations (e.g., Berry, 2005; Phinney, 2000).

Of the empirical focused articles, 94 articles (26.3%) contained a measure of ethnic identity. Articles focused on Asian Americans contained 31 (33.7%) articles with a measure of ethnic identity. For Latinos, 19 (28.8%) articles contained a measure of ethnic identity. There were 22 (25.9%) articles focused on African Americans which measured ethnic identity. Of articles focused on Native Americans, one (11.1%) contained a measure of ethnic identity. For Other groups, 23 (20.4%) contained a measure of ethnic identity.

Of the REC-focused articles, 76 articles (21.3%) contained a measure of acculturation. Almost half (n=29, 43.9%) of the articles focused on Latinos contained a measure of acculturation. For Asian Americans, 35 (38.0%) articles measured acculturation. One article (11.1%) measured acculturation among Native Americans. For Other groups, 9 (8.0%) contained a measure of acculturation. Finally, across the timeframe studied (18 years), there were no

marked increases in the rates of inclusion for either construct (acculturation and ethnic identity) in studies.

## **Discussion**

### **Percentage of Minority-focused Articles for Each REC Group**

One of the groups most often-studied, relative to their population size, was Asian Americans (4.3% of all articles and 20.2% of focused articles). While surprising, given that they make up only 5.7% of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015), this finding is consistent with a previous content analysis of the same journals, where Delgado-Romero et al. (2005) found Asian Americans to be the only REC minority group not significantly underrepresented among REC-focused articles. Delgado-Romero et al. did not offer an explanation for this particular finding; however, our analysis suggests that it is likely a product of two factors: (a) an “over-reliance” on college samples, and (b) a higher proportion of Asian Americans in universities (compared to other REC groups) relative to their proportion of the U.S. population (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). Indeed, 77.2% (71 of 92) of Asian American-focused articles (empirical), utilized research samples of college students. In reality, this means that apart from this one age/education group (college students), Asian Americans continue to be largely underrepresented in this body of research. Furthermore, it is important to note that this relative over-utilization of college samples can diminish generalizability of findings to the majority of the Asian American population. This is an important consideration given that college students usually have different lifestyles and family backgrounds than non-students and certainly occupy different socio-demographic categories (e.g., age, income, acculturation level).

In the case of other REC groups, Latinos and African Americans were found to be the most understudied groups relative to their U.S. populations. The percentage of studies focused on

Latinos was found to be 3.6%, while Latinos make up 17.8% of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). Similarly, the percentage of articles focused on African Americans was 4.6%, while African Americans represent 13.3% of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). The underrepresentation of Latinos is at least partly due to their recent and rapid growth as a larger part of the U. S. population, increasing from 12.5% in 2000 to 17.8% in 2015 (Esri, 2012; U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). In addition, Latinos are not as likely to live in the Midwestern U.S., where 45.1% of the studies recruited their samples (Statistical Atlas, 2018). Lastly, disparities in receiving mental health care may reduce representation of all REC minorities within clinical samples (Alegria et al., 2008; Coker et al., 2006; Cook et al., 2014; Cook, Li, Hou, & Progovac, 2017; Holden & Xanthos, 2009). Subsequent studies of several other mental health fields (in process) will help confirm and better understand the nature of this issue and to what degree other clinical disciplines also struggle to engage research samples from these various REC groups.

Obviously, many of these findings are significant and very troubling, given that lower rates of research participation among these REC groups forces clinicians to make under-informed decisions about treatment and intervention, which alienates or simply under-serves families and individuals, perpetuating their lower inclusion rates in clinical treatment. Increasing REC representation in research studies can help the field understand barriers to treatment and improve services to minority groups, and increasing cultural competency and access to mental health treatment may, in turn, lead to naturally higher REC representation in clinical studies.

One positive advancement is that percentage of articles reporting the sample race/ethnicity/culture has increased over the last 30 years. Two content analyses of the same three journals (Case & Smith, 2000; Delgado-Romero et al., 2005) showed that 56-83% of

studies (percentages varying by journal) provided an REC breakdown of their samples during the 1990s. This percentage increased to 82% within JCD from 1996 to 2006 (Blancher et al., 2010). The present analysis (from 2000 to 2017) shows further improvements in reporting practices, as 92.2% of articles were found to report at least a partial REC breakdown of their samples. These changes reflect higher quality levels in the field's scholarship and in the editorial/publication process.

In addition, while previous content analyses have not detailed the percentage of articles that reported samples with REC minorities, the present study found that 85.0% of articles reported samples that included REC minorities. For specific REC groups, a previous analysis of the same journals from 1990 to 1999 (Delgado-Romero et al., 2005) indicated that African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans were under-sampled relative to their numbers in the U.S. population, and Caucasians and Asian Americans were overrepresented. Another analysis of the same journals (1993-1997) suggested Latinos were under-sampled (Case & Smith, 2000). The present study suggests that sample representation has improved, as each group except for Native Americans is represented with at least one research subject in the majority of samples. The higher number of samples with REC minorities is hopeful; however, many of these samples still have low percentages of minorities relative to their populations, and purposeful sampling of REC minority groups is needed in order to approach more accurate representation.

### **Change in the Percent of Articles Focused on Race/Ethnicity/Culture**

The percentage of articles focused on race/ethnicity/culture has increased dramatically over the last several decades. A previous content analysis of JCP found that the percentage of articles focused on race/ethnicity increased from 0.3% in the 50s to 21.4% in the 2000s (Lee et al., 2013). In an analysis of JCD, the percentage of articles focused on "multicultural,

disadvantaged, and minorities” increased from 5.6% in 1969 to 9.8% in 2006 (Blancher et al., 2010). The present content analysis also shows an increase of REC-focused articles, from 15.6% in 2000 to 23.6% in 2017. The steady increase in the field’s inclusion of REC-focused studies shows its increased cultural awareness and sensitivity in response to the growing percentages of REC minorities in the U.S.

### **Most Frequently Studied Topics Studied for Each REC Group**

The most frequently studied topics for all article types were: (a) individual therapy or intervention, (b) diversity and culture topics, and (c) professional practice and identity. These topics are in line with the field’s focus on providing high quality and culturally sensitive counseling (Hammer, 2018). Understandably, individual therapy or intervention was the topic most studied for articles focused on Anglos, and diversity and culture topics was the area most studied for each REC minority group. Whereas previous analyses show that articles focused on race/ethnicity/ethnicity most often included topics such as counseling process and psychological processes (Lee et al., 2013), the recent focus on diversity/culture as the most frequently studied topic shows the field’s attempts to increase cultural sensitivity.

Many of the topics that were studied run parallel to the legitimate needs of specific REC groups. For instance, mental health treatment disparities, racial discrimination, and racial ethnic identity have been cited as some of the most pertinent issues for REC minorities (Durham, 2018; Office of Minority Health, 2018; Yip, 2018), and these topics were frequently addressed for all REC groups. As another example of congruence between analysis findings and a group’s needs, several Latino-focused studies examined immigration (6, 9.1%) and acculturation (13, 19.7%), which are some of the most pressing issues for Latinos. The same is true for Asian Americans, where 5 (6.9%) articles studied immigration and 23 (25%) studied acculturation.



Other relevant issues for REC minority groups have arguably been understudied in counseling psychology journals. As an example of an unstudied issue for an REC group, African American children are more likely to be underdiagnosed and undertreated for ADHD (Coker et al., 2016); yet, none of the counseling psychology articles in this review studied this topic. As another example, challenges such as educational concerns, acculturation concerns, alcohol and substance abuse, domestic violence, and suicide have been cited as relevant issues for Native Americans (Sue & Sue, 2013; Office of Minority Health, 2018); yet, none of the articles focused on Native Americans studied these topics. More issue-specific research for Native Americans is needed in order to understand and address these stated challenges.

A recent call to action for Asian American research cited the need for future research on issues such as: suicide among Asian American older women, PTSD in Southeast Asian refugees, and managing shame (Sue, Cheng, Saad, & Chu, 2012). The counseling psychology journals analyzed contained two articles focusing on Asian Americans which discussed shame, one article on PTSD, and four on suicide; however, these articles sampled from college students and did not study the specific population recommended (e.g. Asian American older women, Southeast Asian refugees). Thus, many population-specific issues are not being addressed in counseling psychology research.

### **Geographical Groupings for Each REC Group**

Non-focused articles included 377 (41.4%) articles that did not report a geographical area, and focused articles contained 104 (29.1%) that did not report a geographical area. The lack of reporting diminishes the generalizability of those studies because several factors can vary by geographic region, including culture, health, socio-economic status, and levels of discrimination (Kitayama et al., 2010). Understanding these within-REC group differences provides a more

robust viewpoint of those groups' needs and potential risk factors based on location. As an example, very few (14.3%) Latino-focused articles reported a region other than the Southwest, West, or Midwest. This is problematic because those studies may not be generalizable to Latino populations living in the Eastern United States, partly because the country of origin for most Latinos in the West is Mexico, whereas the East has much higher populations of Latinos from Central America and the Caribbean (Pew Research Center, 2016). Differences such as these are often not captured if the researchers do not report geographic region.

California is the most frequently cited state for research focused on Anglos, Latinos, Asian Americans, and populations in the Other category. Of articles with one specific state mentioned, California is the sample state of 12.1% of articles focused on Anglos, 44.4% of articles focused on Latinos, 46.2% of Asian American articles, and 50% of Other articles. While California certainly has high populations of REC minorities, the disproportionately high percentages of California-based samples could be due to other factors as well, such as higher levels of funding, easier access to minority research populations, or higher awareness of REC issues among citizens. It should be noted that other states with high numbers of REC minorities were not found in our analysis (of state-specific samples) including New Mexico, Arizona, Georgia, and New Jersey. As such, certain geographic populations are being understudied, implying that certain states could have insufficient data when planning for their citizens. This lack of information may inhibit these states from providing helpful government resources, effectively directing funds, or adequately supporting local governments and organizations. Furthermore, when states that do have relevant data fail to make it available for research and review, demographically similar states may have the same deleterious consequences.

### **Urban/Rural Setting of the Samples**

Of the eligible articles (REC-focused and empirical - those with research samples), 237 articles (66.2%) reported no information on the sample's setting. Of the non-focused articles with samples, 675 (74.0%) did not report the sample's setting. Similar in importance to the report of geographical region, a description of the sample's setting provides valuable information about the study population due to the numerable setting-based within-group differences. The fact that almost two-thirds of focused articles and three-fourths of non-focused articles did not report sample setting is disconcerting because REC disparities in access to treatment are often a function of location and socioeconomic status (Guerrero & Kao, 2013). The inclusion of sample setting is a simple addition to the sample description (sometimes only 2-3 words) but can provide significant information about the group being studied. As a partial explanation, the underreporting of setting could be due to the clinical nature of counseling psychology, as many researchers collecting clinical samples are not usually collecting a sample in light of this variable; however, most of the studies collected non-clinical samples and still did not include a report of the setting. More frequent inclusion of this variable is necessary to increase the external validity of counseling psychology research.

The results from the articles that did report sample setting show underrepresentation from rural and suburban areas. No articles focusing on Latinos, Asian Americans, or Native Americans used completely suburban samples, and no articles focusing on Asian Americans or Native Americans used completely rural samples. The experiences of REC minority groups in suburban or rural areas may largely differ from those living in urban areas. In terms of mental health differences, individuals from rural areas have more intense stressors that place them at greater risk of mental health disorders (Haynes et al., 2017; Taylor & Ruiz 2017). These

stressors, such as economic hardships and discrimination, have been shown to negatively affect mental health and contribute to barriers to help seeking (Haynes et al., 2017; Taylor & Ruiz, 2017). As many people in rural settings have higher levels of stressors and lower levels of access to treatment, researchers should (a) report setting to account for these differences, (b) where possible, sample from rural locations to increase understanding of their needs, and (c) consider applying treatment approaches to these populations based on their set of community-based strengths and weaknesses.

### **Measures of Ethnic Identity and/or Acculturation**

Ethnic identity and acculturation are important measures to include in studies because they provide researchers with a more robust understanding of their sample populations within a given REC group. Viewing the inclusion of these measures over time can assess the field's sensitivity to within-group differences, as this is an important component of gaining a thorough multicultural understanding. Thus, the presence of these measures is used to partly evaluate the field's effectiveness in working toward cultural competence.

The group with the lowest number of studies including a measure of ethnic identity was Native Americans (1, 11.1%). This may be a function of the samples' ethnic identity being assessed as Native American tribal affiliation (something that all empirical articles did); however, the degree to which they affiliate with their tribe and the degree to which their identity is group-/tribe-based is still important to assess (Mooney, 2017). Most of the articles focused on Native Americans do not assess this, which is unfortunate because ethnic identity has been shown to greatly vary for Native Americans and affect self-efficacy and reliance on culture (Mooney, 2017). The Other group had the second lowest percentage of articles measuring ethnic identity (23, 20.4%). Many studies in the Other group had multiracial samples, for whom

measuring ethnic identity would be particularly important. This is because racial and ethnic ambiguity is common among multiracial individuals (Sue & Sue, 2013), and their ethnic identities may vary more broadly than do those belonging to one REC group.

Understandably, Latinos and Asian Americans were found to have the highest percentage of articles which contained a measure of acculturation (Latinos: 29 articles, 43.9%; Asian Americans: 35, 38.0%), given that these two groups are most likely to be involved in the acculturation process. The measure of acculturation is important because it can help researchers understand within-group differences (Bean, Crane, & Lewis, 2002), such as language, cultural practices, and levels of stress and discrimination. These differences can be significant, as acculturative stress has been found to be associated with higher levels of depressive symptoms and externalizing problems and lower levels of self-efficacy and family functioning (Lawton, Gerdes, & Kapke, 2018; Lorenzo-Blanco et al., 2016; Titzmann & Jugert, 2015).

### **Conclusion**

There are several limitations to this study. Firstly, while the journals studied are three of the major journals in counseling psychology, they do not make up all of the field's professional journals nor represent all of the field's endeavors (particularly all the clinical work and practice that does not reach publication). While REC minority groups have been found to be generally underrepresented in these journals, there are other journals that focus more specifically on REC minorities, such as *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, and those journals help balance the representation of REC minorities in counseling psychology research. Second, this analysis excluded book reviews and letters to the editor, which may have included information about REC minorities. Thirdly, this study only analyzes published articles, and it is unknown how many REC-focused articles are submitted for publication. Lastly, there is always

possibility for coder bias, especially given that the majority of the coders were Anglo college students.

This review found that REC minorities, especially non-college students, were underrepresented relative to their populations, and Latinos and African Americans were the most underrepresented groups. Over the last 18 years, counseling psychology has seen an increase in the number of REC-focused articles in the journals studied, and there have also been significant improvements in the number of studies reporting race/ethnicity/culture and including REC minorities in samples. These trends must continue in order to provide adequate research on the needs of REC minorities. Certain issues for each population require further research, such as substance use and suicide among Native Americans and ADHD among African American children. In addition, more studies are needed across geographic areas and settings, especially for rural areas which have unique stressors and increased mental health concerns.

To respond to disparities in mental health treatment, growing minority populations, and lack of adequate research, increased attention should be given to REC minorities by researchers, policy makers, and mental health professionals. Researchers should improve their reporting practices, and editors can raise the bar for including important variables such as ethnic identity, acculturation, geographic area, and setting, which increase the depth of understanding of REC groups. More research should also include samples from diverse geographic regions and understudied settings, such as rural areas. Perhaps most importantly, researchers must increase the field's knowledge about exigent issues for each REC group. In summary, it is important for researchers to increase their study of non-student REC minority populations, which are largely underrepresented.

Furthermore, policy makers can create policies that target the reduction of mental health disparities and assist REC minorities in receiving culturally competent care. Educators can promote understanding and inclusion of REC minority groups and increase awareness of issues such as immigration, acculturation, and discrimination. Mental health professionals should seek to understand the barriers to treatment experienced by REC minority groups, such as the stigma of receiving treatment and Anglo-centric therapy approaches, and they can strive to become culturally competent to help mitigate those barriers within their practices. The efforts of researchers, policy makers, educators, and mental health professionals can all contribute to improving cultural awareness and understanding. With growing REC minority populations, the field of counseling psychology must give adequate attention to REC groups in order to provide culturally sensitive practice and help reduce mental health treatment disparities in the United States.

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## Appendix

Table 1: *Frequency of Article Type for Focused and Non-focused Articles by Journal: n (%)*

	<u>Focused</u>			<u>Non-focused</u>			<u>Total</u>
	<u>Conceptual</u>	<u>Quantitative</u>	<u>Qualitative</u>	<u>Conceptual</u>	<u>Quantitative</u>	<u>Qualitative</u>	
<i>Journal of Counseling Psychology</i>	8 (1.0)	185 (22.8)	28 (3.4)	50 (6.2)	496 (61.1)	45 (5.5)	812
<i>The Counseling Psychologist</i>	68 (10.8)	58 (9.2)	26 (4.1)	317 (50.5)	112 (17.8)	47 (7.5)	628
<i>Journal of Counseling &amp; Development</i>	39 (4.5)	57 (6.6)	21 (2.4)	418 (48.5)	257 (29.8)	70 (8.1)	862
Total	115 (5.0)	300 (13.0)	75 (3.3)	785 (34.1)	865 (37.6)	162 (7.0)	2302

Table 2: *Most Frequently Studied Topics by Ethnic Group: n(%)*

<u>Subject</u>	<u>Anglo</u>	<u>AA<sup>a</sup></u>	<u>L<sup>a</sup></u>	<u>AsA<sup>a</sup></u>	<u>NA<sup>a</sup></u>	<u>Other</u>	<u>Totals</u>
Individual Therapy or Intervention	<b>538 (9.4)</b>	12 (3.9)	9 (3.8)	11 (3.7)	<b>4 (12.1)</b>	40 (6.2)	614
Diversity and Culture Topics	202 (3.5)	<b>12 (13.5)</b>	<b>32 (13.3)</b>	<b>69 (23.4)</b>	<b>4 (12.1)</b>	<b>153 (23.5)</b>	499
Professional Practice and Identity	370 (6.5)	6 (1.9)	3 (1.3)	2 (0.7)	2 (6.1)	20 (3.1)	403
Psychometrics and Specific Measures	239 (4.2)	16 (5.1)	5 (2.1)	16 (5.4)	1 (3.0)	40 (6.2)	317
Sexual minorities	262 (4.6)	3 (1.0)	2 (0.8)	0 (0)	0 (0)	9 (1.4)	276
Work and Employment	206 (3.6)	10 (3.2)	10 (4.2)	4 (1.4)	2 (6.1)	21 (3.2)	252
Stress and Distress	92 (1.6)	13 (4.2)	7 (2.9)	19 (6.4)	0 (0)	8 (1.2)	139
Mental Illness and Psychopathology	97 (1.7)	14 (4.5)	8 (3.3)	6 (2.0)	0 (0)	12 (1.8)	137
Ethnic and Racial Identity	19 (0.3)	20 (6.4)	18 (7.5)	14 (4.7)	2 (6.1)	34 (5.2)	104
Wellbeing and adjustment	59 (1.0)	7 (2.3)	3 (1.3)	16 (5.4)	0 (0)	8 (1.2)	92
Totals (for all topics studied)	2,084	143	979	157	15	345	.

<sup>a</sup>AA=African American. L=Latino(a), AsA=Asian American, NA= Native Americans

*Note: Articles focused on both African Americans and Latinos were included in the count for both ethnic group categories.*



Table 3: *Urban/Rural Setting by Ethnic Group: n(%)*

<u>Subject</u>	<u>Anglo</u>	<u>Focused</u>	<u>AA<sup>a</sup></u>	<u>L<sup>a</sup></u>	<u>AsA<sup>a</sup></u>	<u>NA<sup>a</sup></u>	<u>Other</u>
None	675 (73.5)	237 (66.2)	53 (62.3)	40 (60.6)	67 (72.8)	5 (55.6)	74 (64.9)
Urban	62 (6.8)	47 (13.1)	10 (11.8)	15 (22.7)	7 (7.6)	2 (22.2)	16 (14.0)
Rural	9 (1.0)	3 (0.8)	1 (1.2)	2 (3.0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Suburban	8 (.9)	1 (0.3)	1 (1.2)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Mixed	164 (17.9)	70 (19.6)	20 (23.5)	9 (13.6)	18 (19.6)	2 (22.2)	24 (21.1)
Totals	918	358	85	66	92	9	114

<sup>a</sup>AA=African American. L=Latino(a), AsA=Asian American, NA= Native Americans

*Note: Articles focused on both African Americans and Latinos were included in the count for both ethnic group categories.*