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Multicultural Counseling Competencies Research: A 20-Year Content Analysis

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The authors conducted a 20-year content analysis of the entire field of empirical research on the multicultural counseling competencies (D. W. Sue et al., 1982). They conducted an exhaustive search for empirical research articles using PSYCInfo, as well as complete reviews of the past 20 years of several journals (e.g., *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, *The Counseling Psychologist*, *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, *Journal of Counseling and Development*, *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*). They identified 75 articles reporting findings based on 81 different samples. Findings include (a) descriptive data regarding the designs, methodologies, and sample characteristics of studies; (b) major topics and themes of the multicultural counseling competencies empirical research literature; and (c) leading contributors. A brief analysis of major findings and gaps in the literature is provided, and the authors make recommendations for further research.

Keywords: multicultural counseling competencies, content analysis, multicultural research, race, ethnicity

It has been 25 years since the first publication of Sue et al.'s (1982) model of *multicultural counseling competencies* (MCCs). In the intervening years since that seminal work was published, the vast majority of counseling psychology programs have incorporated the model into graduate training (Constantine & Ladany, 2001), several measures of MCCs were based on it (e.g., D'Andrea, Daniels, & Heck, 1991; LaFromboise, Coleman, & Hernandez, 1991; Ponterotto, Alexander, & Grieger, 1995; Ponterotto, Gretchen, Utsey, Rieger, & Austin, 2002; Sodowsky, Taffe, Gutkin, & Wise, 1994), the original model has been updated and revised (e.g., American Psychological Association, 2003; Arredondo et al., 1996; Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992; Sue et al., 1998), and meta-analytic research has demonstrated that multicultural education produces positive results related to MCCs (Smith, Constantine, Dunn, Dinehart, & Montoya, 2006). Yet, as recently as 2003, Atkinson and Israel noted that relatively little empirical research has directly evaluated the validity of this conceptual model.

Despite the paucity of empirical research in this area, the increased attention to understanding and counseling culturally diverse populations has inspired several content analyses designed to identify themes within the conceptual and empirical multicultural literature (e.g., Arredondo, Rosen, Rice, Perez, & Tovar-Gamero, 2005; Leach, Behrens, & Rowe, 1996; Perez, Constantine, & Gerard, 2000; Pope-Davis, Ligiero, Liang, & Codrington, 2001). None of these earlier content analyses have exclusively limited their focus to empirical research on the MCCs, and most have narrowed their focus to a single journal within a limited time frame (ranging from 9 to 15 years).

Ponterotto (1988) and Perez et al. (2000) each conducted content analyses of the *Journal of Counseling Psychology* racial and ethnic minority research published from 1976–1986 and from 1988–1997, respectively. These analyses reveal a similar pattern of a majority of studies during the two time periods examining racial and ethnic minority perceptions of counselor characteristics (38.8% and 30%, respectively), vocational and career issues of racial and ethnic groups (10.2% and 16%, respectively), and attitudes toward helping/giving sources (8.2% and 15%, respectively). Perez et al. (2000) found that only 4% of the racial and ethnic minority research published in the *Journal of Counseling Psychology* addressed multicultural competencies of counselors.

Pope-Davis et al. (2001) conducted a 15-year content analysis of the *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, including both empirical and nonempirical publications, and identified the most prevalent three content areas as multicultural competence/counseling (21%), psychosocial adjustment/development (14%), and multicultural training/education (10%). In a 10-year review of conceptual and empirical multicultural literature in the *Journal of Counseling and Development*, Arredondo et al. (2005) reported that the top three most-often-discussed content areas were worldview (32%), interventions (30%), and psychosocial adjustment/development (30%). Although 78% of multicultural articles in their review included content that was applicable to mental-health practice, only 8% of the articles provided a dedicated discussion of the MCCs. Furthermore, fewer than half (47%) of the articles they reviewed were based on empirical research (qualita-

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tive or quantitative), as opposed to being theoretical or conceptual in nature. In the current study, we focused entirely on empirical research addressing the MCCs.

MCCs

The multicultural literature has grown from an "infancy period" in the 1980s to developing "into a mature subset of behavioral science" in the mid 1990s (Rowe, Behrens, & Leach, 1995, p. 218), and it is currently posited to assume "the central core of the counseling profession's identity" (Ponterotto et al., 2002, p. 153). Dominating the conceptual and empirical literature during this exponential growth is the Sue et al. (1982) MCC model. The MCC model addresses counselor-competency areas with issues involving four American racial and ethnic minority groups: Native American/Alaskan Natives, African Americans, Asian Americans, and Hispanic Americans/Latinos. The model's three broad MCC areas are as follows: (a) *attitudes and beliefs*—awareness of one's own assumptions, values, and biases; (b) *knowledge*—understanding the worldview of culturally diverse clients; and (c) *skills*—developing appropriate intervention strategies and techniques. This long-standing model has been expanded (Sue et al. 1992, 1998) and operationalized (Arredondo et al., 1996), and it continues to be widely accepted as the core multicultural competency model within the field of counseling psychology.

In a comprehensive review of the models of multicultural counseling, Ponterotto, Fuertes, and Chen (2000) praised the Sue et al. model (1982) for having impressive content validity and for its foundational role in the field. Ponterotto et al.'s review identified two broad areas of MCC research. Their first MCC research category identified studies that addressed the effects of culturally responsive/consistent behavior. As defined by Atkinson and Lowe (1995), this category "refers to counselor responses that acknowledge the existence of, show interest in, demonstrate knowledge of, and express appreciation for the client's ethnicity and culture and that place the client's problem in a cultural context" (p. 402). Thus, Ponterotto et al. defined MCCs broadly by including research that involved some assessment of counselors' responsiveness to racial- and ethnic-minority clients (e.g., client satisfaction in response to a host of independent variables associated with counselor behaviors; general counseling competencies of counselors as assessed by racial-ethnic clients). The second MCC research category identified by Ponterotto et al. included research that directly examined scale-specific multicultural counseling-competency research. Thus, research in this category included correlates of multicultural counseling competence obtained via instruments designed to operationalize the MCC model (e.g., D'Andrea et al., 1991; LaFromboise et al., 1991; Ponterotto et al., 2002; Sodowsky et al., 1994). Studies in this area included examination of self-reported MCCs as related to (a) demographic and training variables, (b) case-conceptualization skills, and (c) hypothesized linked constructs (e.g., racial-identity development, expanded worldview, general nonracist personal stance).

Ponterotto et al. (2000) critiqued the existing MCC literature, stating that "direct empirical tests of the model's specific competencies is limited," but noted that research provides "indirect support of clusters of competencies" in the model (p. 641). For example, self-report MCC instruments have been shown to be related to demographic and training variables (e.g., Ponterotto et al., 1996; Pope-Davis & Dings, 1995; Sodowsky, Kuo-Jackson, Richardson, & Corey, 1998), as well as to other constructs, such as worldview (Sodowsky et al., 1998). However, the MCC instruments have also failed to demonstrate a relationship with counselors' ability to conceptualize cases from a multicultural perspective (Constantine & Ladany, 2001; Ladany, Inman, Constantine, & Hofheinz, 1997). Ponterotto et al. cited additional problematic areas within the MCC research, such as (a) the lack of correspondence among the several self-report measures intended to assess the Sue et al. (1982) model; (b) the finding that at least one subscale on each MCC instrument correlates with a measure of social desirability; and (c) the overuse of certain research methodologies, such as analogue designs.

Atkinson and Israel (2003) have also argued that the MCC movement must begin to develop a strong empirical base and move beyond intuitive appeal to continue making meaningful contributions to the profession. Ponterotto et al. (2000) articulated the need for true experimental research, field-based process and outcome studies that use actual clients in diverse settings, and revision of all the MCC measures. In addition, multicultural scholars have advocated a strong need for nontraditional methods of inquiry with MCC research, such as multimethod studies, mixed designs, and qualitative research using phenomenological, grounded theory or consensual qualitative research methods (e.g., Ponterotto et al., 2002; Pope-Davis et al., 2002). In responding to these concerns, Darcy, Lee, and Tracey (2004) recently introduced paired comparison methods and multidimensional scaling techniques for use within normative, idiographic, and idiothetic approaches to MCCs.

Weinrach and Thomas (2002, 2004) published a more stinging critique of the MCC model, asserting that "there is no evidence that those who master the Competencies are, or will be, better counselors than those who do not" (p. 20). They claimed that more empirical research was necessary before the MCCs should be required of counselors or counseling programs, yet they did not provide any sort of literature review upon which their claims were based, and they left major pieces of empirical research uncited. Although Arredondo and Toporek (2004) and Coleman (2004) have written persuasive articles to refute the majority of criticisms of Weinrach and Thomas (2002), they have also acknowledged that empirical support for the MCCs is lacking in many ways. Thus, despite a growing body of research in the MCC area, a central question remains unanswered: "Do counselors who possess these competencies evidence improved counseling outcome with clients across cultures?" (Ponterotto et al., 2000, p. 641). Past reviews have not provided sufficient data to address this issue because of the lack of focus on empirical articles. A thorough and critical content analysis of the MCC empirical research is necessary to respond to this question.

Reflection on our history is critical to help identify our current location, understand where we have been and how we got there, and illuminate the multitude of pathways available to us in the future (Brown, 1969; Worthington & Navarro, 2003). Although past content analyses on the multicultural literature in general are highly useful, they have not fully captured the complexity of the MCC research in our field over the last two decades. Whereas past content analyses focused on the broader multicultural racial- and ethnic-minority literature, the present study is limited to *empirical* studies of the *MCC model* with respect to racial and ethnic groups.

Articles of a theoretical or conceptual nature were not included in the study. In addition, distinct from previous content analyses, our research covered a longer period of time (i.e., 20 years), an unrestricted number of journals (i.e., our search was not confined to a narrowly specified set of journals), and a more customized approach to operationalizing constructs and coding data (i.e., unique to MCC research). In the current article, we systematically review and evaluate the existing empirical MCC studies to examine patterns and trends in (a) research design, methodology, and sample characteristics; (b) leading contributors; and (c) major findings. In addition, we sought to respond to the question posed by Ponterotto et al. (2000) and others regarding the relations of MCCs to counseling processes and outcomes.

Method

Judges

A Latino male professor organized the project and helped define and clarify the categories. Roger L. Worthington trained two doctoral students in coding and analyzing articles for this study. The counseling-psychology doctoral-graduate-student coauthors (one 28-year-old European American woman and one 26-year-old Latino man), served as the judges in this study.

Inclusion Criteria

All articles included in this analysis reported empirical research and were published between 1986 and 2005. We searched for data-based research on the MCCs via several methods:

1. We conducted a search on PsychInfo using multiple variations on the following terms: *multicultural*, *counseling*, *counselor*, *therapist*, *cross-cultural*, *competency*, and *effectiveness*.

2. We searched the complete tables of contents of the following journals for the time-period under investigation: *Journal of Counseling Psychology, Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development, Journal of Counseling and Development, Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology,* and *The Counseling Psychologist*.

3. We examined reference lists for several major studies and reviews of the multicultural counseling literature to identify potential candidates for inclusion (e.g., Constantine & Ladany, 2001; Ponterotto et al., 2000; Pope-Davis & Dings, 1995).

Inclusion of articles was determined by one or more of the following criteria, which were adapted from the categories provided by Ponterotto et al. (2000): (a) any investigation that used one of several self-report or observation instruments intended to measure MCCs; and/or (b) research in which members of racial- or ethnic-minority groups served as participants and evaluated the general counseling competencies, MCCs, counselor credibility, satisfaction with counseling, or other similar variables; and/or (c) studies in which judges objectively assessed one or more components of counselors' MCCs (e.g., multicultural case-conceptualization ability). We found 75 published articles (containing 81 separate studies) in 17 different journals and one empirical book chapter that met the inclusion criteria for the content analysis.

Procedure

Recent content analyses (e.g., Arredondo et al., 2005; Pope-Davis et al., 2001) were used as a guide for developing the classification categories for this investigation. However, these guiding resources were not sufficient for classifying all of the data in the articles reviewed for this study. Because all other content analyses included empirical MCC research alongside research and conceptual articles from other areas of the broader multicultural literature, their coding schemata reflected a broader range of inclusion (often coding MCC research/conceptual articles as a distinct category among several others). The coding schema for the current study was, by necessity, unique to the MCC empirical-research literature. Although we consulted other content analyses for guidance on how their categories were derived, we were not able to apply their coding schemata to our study. Thus, because our research focused on only one category inherent to these other studies, we had to move to a different level of abstraction to tease apart this group of studies into distinct categories.

We inductively reviewed the content of the 75 articles and 81 studies to further develop the classification system. Once the classification system was initially developed, judges rated articles independently and met on a regular basis to ensure consistent ratings. Discrepancies between judges were discussed and resolved by consensus. Studies were coded into the following eight primary content categories:

1. *Scale development/instrument validity.* This category contained studies that focused on the empirical scale development and assessment of MCCs.

2. *Client perceptions.* Studies in this category addressed client perceptions of different qualities of counselors in either a quasi-counseling or real-counseling dyad. These qualities consisted of the following factors: counselor credibility, MCCs, counselor effectiveness, and general counseling competencies.

3. *Client outcomes.* This category contained studies that focused on different measures of client outcomes, such as satisfaction, self-disclosure, and attrition.

4. *Objective ratings of trainee or counselor MCCs.* In studies in this category, objective observers rated MCCs, multicultural case-conceptualization ability, or other similar variables.

5. *Multicultural counseling training interventions.* This category included studies in which researchers identified and addressed counseling training in an educational institution to promote multicultural competencies.

6. *Intrapersonal correlates of counselors' MCCs.* This category contained studies addressing the following intrapersonal correlates of counselors' MCCs: (a) demographics, (b) attitudes, (c) personality, (d) identity, (e)

theoretical orientation, (f) multicultural counseling training, (g) cross-cultural contact, (h) clinical experience, and (i) social desirability. All of these subcategories were grouped together because they used self-report measures of counselor characteristics, and none of these characteristics involve actual counseling behaviors.

7. *Counseling process.* This category included studies that presented data on the process of counseling.

8. *Other.* The judges determined that the studies in this category did not fit into any of the other content categories.

In addition to coding the 81 studies into content categories, judges assigned each study one of the following fields for research methodology: (a) qualitative, (b) quantitative, or (c) mixed methods. If the study was quantitative or mixed methods, it was further categorized into the following research designs: (a) *experimental–laboratory true experiment*, (b) *experimental–laboratory analogue*, (c) *experimental–field true experiment*, (d) *experimental–field analogue*, (e) *descriptive–field analogue*, (f) *descriptive–field survey*, (g) *descriptive–laboratory analogue*, and (h) *descriptive–laboratory survey*.

After categorizing research methodology and design, we recorded the following characteristics for each study: (a) sample type (convenience, random, snowball, unspecified) and (b) participant role (counselors, clients, trainees, observers, combined counselor/trainee and observer, and other). Participant role was determined by the position of the individual rating the MCCs. Finally, for each study sample, the following participant demographics were recorded: (a) sample size, (b) mean age, (c) gender, and (d) race/ethnicity.

We computed authorship using a productivity index—a weighted, proportional counting system created by Howard, Cole, and Maxwell (1987). Each article was awarded 1.0 point, which was divided by number of authors. A single-authored article netted that author a single unit of credit (1.0). An article with two authors awarded the first author 0.6 credits and 0.4 credits for the second author. Three authors received 0.47, 0.32, 0.21 points; four authors received 0.42, 0.28, 0.18, and 0.12 points; five authors, 0.38, .0.26, 0.17, 0.11, and 0.08 points; six authors, 0.37, 0.24, 0.16, 0.11, 0.07, and 0.05 points; and so on.

Results

Table 1 presents frequencies and percentages of the research designs and methods used in the 81 studies assessed in this investigation. The vast majority of research studies were quantitative (90.1%). Qualitative and mixed-methods designs each accounted for only 4.9% of the studies in the total sample. In total, survey research accounted for 72.7% of quantitative studies (n = 56 of 77 quantitative or mixed-method studies), and analogue research accounted for 24.7% (n = 19).

We calculated frequencies and percentages for data-collection and sampling methods for the 81 studies. Paper-and-pencil measures were the data-collection method of choice for the overwhelming majority of studies (95.1%), and convenience sampling was the predominant sampling approach (70.4%). Although random sampling was used in 19.8% of the studies, it was almost exclusively combined with survey methodologies (in which response rates limit the advantages of random sampling). The remaining studies used either snowball sampling (6.2%) or did not specify sampling methods (3.7%).

Table 1
Research Design of the 81 Multicultural Counseling Competencies Empirical Studies

Research design	Quantitative method: True experiment *f*	True experiment %	Analogue *f*	Analogue %	Survey *f*	Survey %	Total *f*	Total %
Qualitative							4	4.9
Quantitative							73	90.1
Experimental								
Laboratory	0	0.0	13	17.8				
Field	2	2.7	2	2.7				
Descriptive								
Field			2	2.7	53	72.6		
Laboratory			1	1.4	0	0.0		
Mixed method							4	4.9
Experimental								
Laboratory	0	0.0	1	25.0				
Field	0	0.0	0	0.0				
Descriptive								
Field			0	0.0	3	75.0		
Laboratory			0	0.0	0	0.0		

Note. Articles: N = 75. Studies within articles: N = 81. All percentages are in relation to studies within each research-design category.

Table 2 describes the roles and statuses of participants by research method for each of the 81 studies. In general, participants were most often described as counselors (35.8% of the studies), followed by trainees (27.2% of the studies) and clients (21.0% of the studies). Only 3.7% of the studies used independent raters to provide assessments of MCCs. When counseling professionals were studied, the investigations almost exclusively involved survey research in which MCCs were assessed via self-report and correlated to intrapersonal variables (such as counselor race/ethnicity, multicultural training, multicultural clinical experience, etc.). When trainees were studied, the investigations most frequently involved surveys using self-reported MCCs to assess changes pre- and post-coursework or multicultural intervention; but they also included a small number of studies involving the use of analogue research. The majority of analogue studies involved studies in which college students served as pseudo-clients and provided ratings of perceived credibility, satisfaction, or willingness to receive counseling on the basis of experimental conditions designed to somehow depict culturally sensitive versus culturally neutral counseling.

As can be seen in Table 3, there was considerable variability in sample characteristics across studies. Average ages of participants in the 54 studies for which data were available ranged from 18.9 to 51.6 years. Sample sizes ranged from 10 to 604 (which included qualitative studies). The average percentages of female participants reached nearly 70%. European Americans represented the largest average percentage of sample participants (61.36%), which may reflect the research questions being asked in this research

Table 2
Role of Participants Within the 81 Multicultural Counseling Competencies (MCCs) Empirical Studies

	Research method											
	True experiment		Analogue		Survey		Qualitative		Subtotal		Total	
Participant role (reporting method)	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%
Counselor (self-report)											29	35.8
Professionals	0	0.0	0	0.0	17	58.6	1	3.5	18	62.1		
Trainees	0	0.0	0	0.0	4	13.8	0	0.0	4	13.8		
Mixed trainees/professionals	0	0.0	0	0.0	7	24.1	0	0.0	7	24.1		
Clients (rating of counselor MCCs)											17	21.0
Student pseudo-clients	0	0.0	9	52.9	1	5.9	2	11.8	12	70.6		
Community pseudo-clients	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	5.9	0	0.0	1	5.9		
Mixed pseudo-clients	0	0.0	1	5.9	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	5.9		
Self-referred real clients	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	11.8	0	0.0	2	11.8		
Self-referred & recruited real clients	1	5.9	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	5.9		
Trainee (self-report)											22	27.2
Graduate students	1	4.5	3	13.6	14	63.6	1	4.5	19	86.4		
Predoctoral interns	0	0.0	0	0.0	3	13.6	0	0.0	3	13.6		
Observer (objective rating)											3	3.7
Trained graduate-student raters	0	0.0	2	66.7	1	33.3	0	0.0	3	100.0		
Combination of counselors or trainees (self-report and observer rating)											6	7.4
Counselor self-report/graduate-student raters	0	0.0	1	16.7	3	50.0	0	0.0	4	66.7		
Trainee self-report/graduate-student raters	0	0.0	1	16.7	1	16.7	0	0.0	2	33.3		
Other	0	0.0	2	50.0	2	50.0	0	0.0			4	4.9

Note. Articles: $N = 75$. Studies within articles: $N = 81$. Total percent is out of 81. Other percentages are calculated within participant-role categories.

and/or the demographics of the various groups being studied (e.g., professional psychology practitioners and trainees).

A content analysis of the dependent variables in the studies is shown in Table 4. The majority (57.3%) of the dependent variables studied were intrapersonal correlates of counselors' MCCs (i.e., demographic, identity, multicultural counseling training, social desirability). Clients' perceptions of counselors were next as the leading dependent variable at 34.7%. The majority of these ratings were counselor's credibility (16.0%) and counselor's MCCs (12.0%). In addition, scale development accounted for 14.7% of the findings. Objective-observer studies accounted for 12.0%, whereas only 8.0% of the dependent variables were related to client outcomes, such as client self-disclosure, attrition, and satisfaction.

Table 3
Sample Characteristics

Characteristic	Range	%	*M*	*SD*
Mean age of study participants[a] ($n = 54$)	18.9–51.6		32.49	8.32
Sample size ($n = 81$)	10–604		129.37	110.99
Gender				
Female ($n = 71$)	9–349	69.62	93.08	69.95
Male ($n = 71$)	0–254	30.46	44.59	47.32
Race/ethnicity				
White/European American/ Caucasian ($n = 72$)	0–574	61.36	92.81	102.83
Black/African American ($n = 71$)	0–100	14.53	13.06	19.04
Latino(a)/Hispanic ($n = 71$)	0–189	8.79	13.83	35.65
Asian/Pacific Islander ($n = 71$)	0–155	12.16	12.52	27.04
Native American Indian ($n = 71$)	0–5	0.45	0.54	1.03
Biracial/multiethnic ($n = 71$)	0–10	0.71	0.86	1.95
Other ($n = 71$)	0–48	1.99	3.32	8.43

Note. We used each study (as opposed to each article) as the unit of analysis, because a number of articles contained multiple studies with discrete samples. $N_{studies} = 81$; $N_{articles} = 75$. Some studies did not report all demographic data included in this table; thus, the numbers of studies that reported each characteristic are indicated in parentheses. [a]Mean age was calculated from the average age reported for each sample.

Table 5 displays leading author contributors to empirical MCCs research. The number of articles per contributor ranged from 2 to 18. Table 6 lists the journals with the highest number of articles published in empirical MCCs research. By a considerable margin, the *Journal of Counseling Psychology* published the largest percentage of MCC empirical research over the past 20 years. Figure 1 shows the trend in the overall number of articles published from 1986–2005 (in 2-year increments). Although there were substantial fluctuations, there was a gradual increase from 1986–1999, followed by a spike in the rate of publication for 2000–2001, followed by a significant decline in publications for 2002–2003 and 2004–2005.

Discussion

Our research produced a number of important findings. First, our trend analysis showed that empirical research on the MCCs has increased consistently over the past 20 years. It is unclear, however, whether the observed spike in the number of studies in the period from 1998–2001 and the subsequent drop in the two most recent 2-year periods studied (2002–2005) reflects an actual drop-

Table 4
Content-Analysis Categories for Multicultural Counseling Competencies (MCCs) Empirical Studies

Content-analysis category	*n*	%
Intrapersonal correlates of counselors' MCCs	43	57.3
Client perceptions of:		
Counselor credibility	12	16.0
Counselor MCCs	9	12.0
Counselor effectiveness	2	2.7
Counselor general counseling competencies	3	4.0
Client outcomes		
Client self-disclosure	3	4.0
Client attrition	1	1.3
Client satisfaction	2	2.7
Counseling process	4	5.3
Objective ratings of counselor or trainee MCCs	9	12.0
Multicultural counseling training interventions	8	10.7
Scale development/instrument validity	11	14.7
Other	2	2.7

Note. $N = 75$. Percentages are in reference to the number of articles. Numbers do not sum across categories to 75, and percentages do not sum to 100, because the categories are not mutually exclusive and some articles were coded into more than one category. "Intrapersonal correlates of counselors' MCCs" refers to demographics, attitudes, personality, identity, theoretical orientation, multicultural counseling training, multicultural contact, multicultural counseling experience, and/or socially desirable responding.

Table 6
Leading Journals Publishing Multicultural Counseling Competencies Empirical Research Literature (1986–2005)

Rank	Journal name	No. of Articles	%
1	*Journal of Counseling Psychology*	20	26.7
2	*Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*	12	16.0
3	*Journal of Counseling and Development*	7	9.3
4	*Professional School Counseling*	6	8.0
5	*Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*	4	5.3
	Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin	4	5.3
7	*Measurement and Evaluation in Counseling and Development*	3	4.0
	Counselor Education and Supervision	3	4.0
	Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology	3	4.0
10	*Counselling Psychology Quarterly*	2	2.7
	Rehabilitation Education	2	2.7
	The Counseling Psychologist	2	2.7

Note. Total number of articles = 75.

off in interest in this area or is reflective of a normal process of ebb and flow in research productivity (alternative demarcations of time were not useful in addressing this question). We also found that a single researcher, Madonna G. Constantine, is responsible for producing nearly a quarter of all of the published empirical research on the MCCs and that the majority of her research was published in the period during which there was a spike in productivity. In addition, 72% of all MCCs empirical research has been produced by the top 10 contributors, indicating that only a small number of scholars are producing the vast majority of research in this area. It is also worthwhile to note that there are a number of scholars who frequently publish in the area of MCCs but have not produced empirical research on the topic (including the harshest critics of the model). Finally, the number of published articles required for an author to be listed among the top 10 contributors was relatively small, suggesting that the majority of contributors to this area of research typically publish only a few articles. Atkinson and Israel (2003) expressed concern about this state of affairs by suggesting that the small number of scholars contributing to this area of research tends to limit the degree of creativity that is applied to research questions.

In fact, our findings revealed that the methods used in producing empirical research on the MCCs are also narrow in scope. More than two thirds of the studies on the MCCs reported findings from descriptive field surveys ($n = 56$; 72.7%), followed almost exclusively by some form of analogue research ($n = 19$; 24.7%). Similarly, studies in this area were dominated by convenience samples, limiting the generalizability of findings. A large proportion of the research was based on self-reports of MCCs by professional counselors, trainees, or both. Very few studies used some form of objective assessment of MCCs ($n = 9$; 11.1%). Further-

Table 5
Leading Contributors to the Multicultural Counseling Competencies Empirical Research Literature (1986–2005)

Rank	Name	Institution	Overall productivity index[a]	No. of articles
1	Madonna G. Constantine	Teachers College, Columbia University	12.76	18
2	Cheryl Holcomb-McCoy	University of Maryland—College Park	3.20	4
3	Don Pope-Davis	University of Notre Dame	2.73	6
4	Donald R. Atkinson	University of California at Santa Barbara	2.53	7
5	Gargi Roysircar-Sodowsky	Antioch New England	2.44	4
6	Nicholas Ladany	Lehigh University	1.50	4
7	Darcy H. Granello	The Ohio State University	1.47	3
8	Roger L. Worthington	University of Missouri—Columbia	1.34	3
9	Joe E. Wheaton	The Ohio State University	1.32	3
10	Hardin Coleman	University of Wisconsin—Madison	1.32	2

[a] Authors received a productivity index for each article that they authored or coauthored, based on the weighted, proportional counting system created by Howard, Cole, and Maxwell (1987). The overall productivity index is the sum of the productivity index scores of each author listed in the table.

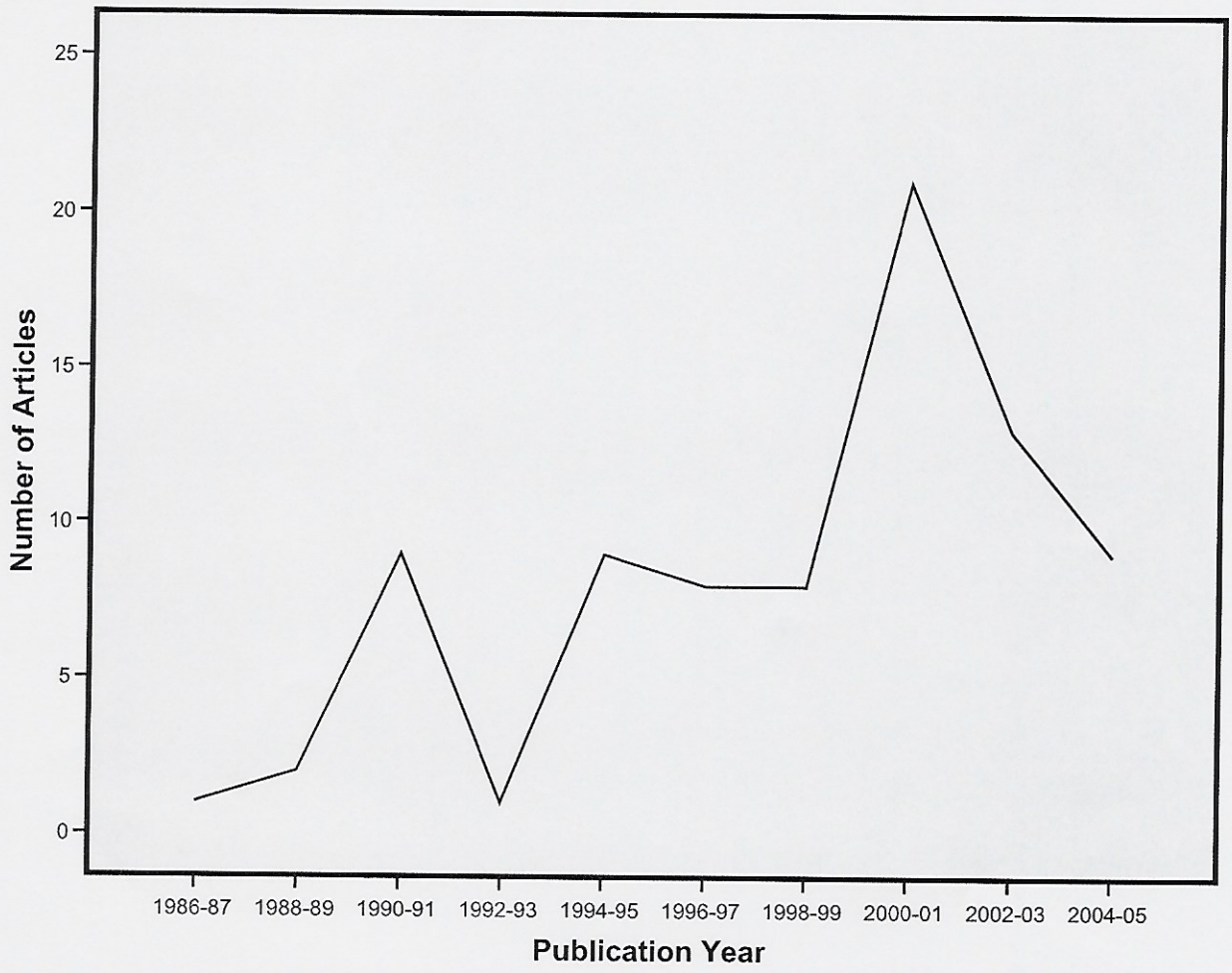

Figure 1. Publication trend of empirical multicultural counseling competencies research (1986–2005).

more, within the 17 studies containing client ratings, the vast majority used some form of "pseudo-clients" (82.4% of client ratings of counselor MCCs). Thus, there has been a substantial amount of research on (a) "intrapersonal correlates" of counselors' self-reported MCCs, (b) the impact of training on self-reported MCCs of graduate students, (c) pseudo-client research-participant perceptions of multiculturally competent counseling, and (d) the psychometric properties of the self-report measures of MCCs. On the other hand, there has been relatively little research to investigate (a) whether the "intrapersonal correlates" of self-reported MCCs are also correlated to observer-rated MCCs, (b) the impact of specific training interventions on observer-rated MCCs of graduate students, and (c) the process and outcomes of multicultural counseling with real-life clients. In the remainder of this section, we address the strengths and shortcomings of the current empirical literature on the MCCs and provide a set of recommendations to guide future research.

Theory–Research Gap

Historically, MCCs seem to be more thoroughly *discussed* than they are actually *investigated* in the literature, although the trend in the past several years seems to have begun to reverse. Only recently has the number of data-based empirical articles begun to balance the number of conceptual articles in the MCC literature (Arredondo et al., 2005). However, in their review of the literature, Ponterotto et al. (2000) could only point to three types of support for the model: (a) widespread acceptance among professional organizations, training programs, and prominent multicultural scholars; (b) scale-specific MCC research; and (c) research on the effects of culturally responsive counselor behavior. After more than 20 years of existence, it is critical that any theoretical model move beyond the type of support described in the first category. Widespread acceptance and the persuasive power of respected scholars ultimately will not be enough to sustain the MCC model into the future. Furthermore, evidence of the second type (scale-specific MCC research) has exposed a number of potential weaknesses in the conceptual clarity of the model, including a lack of relationships among scales intended to measure the model, poor validity outcomes for self-report scales, and lack of correspondence between scale-development findings and the basic tenets of the model. That leaves only a small number of studies of the third type upon which to base our training and practice. Fortunately, since the publication of the Ponterotto et al. (2000) chapter, several studies have been published that further extend the MCCs research

support. Specifically, (a) recent findings regarding observer-rated MCCs have produced outcomes that are consistent with the underlying assumptions of the model (Constantine, 2001; Worthington, Mobley, Franks, & Tan, 2000), and (b) data on client perceptions of counselor MCCs have also produced results consistent with the model (Pope-Davis et al., 2002). However, much more needs to be done with these lines of research inquiry.

Arredondo et al. (2005) found that only 47% of the multicultural counseling articles they reviewed for a content analysis of the *Journal of Counseling and Development* were quantitative or qualitative (i.e., empirical). Although these findings were not specific to the MCC literature, they suggested that the theory–research gap may be due to (a) the lack of instrumentation for many multicultural-related constructs, (b) the difficulties associated with obtaining adequate sample sizes with respect to ethnic- and racial-minority populations, and/or (c) the small number of empirically based multicultural research articles already in existence. On the basis of their findings specific to the MCC literature, they recommended that new research should focus on empirical tests of the effectiveness of the MCCs as a guide to education and training, assessment, research, and practice.

Process/Outcome Research

Process/outcome research has been described as the best approach to address our central research question: "Do counselors who possess these competencies evidence improved counseling outcome with clients across cultures?" (Ponterotto et al., 2000, p. 641). Our content analysis indicated that process/outcome research accounts for a substantial percentage (48.0%) of studies on the MCCs (when client perceptions of counselor competencies, credibility, and effectiveness are considered outcomes). Although this figure may appear to be impressive at first glance, it is important to more deeply assess the characteristics of these studies to understand their broader contribution to our knowledge about MCCs.

In our research, outcome studies were found to fall into one of several different categories that could be broadly conceptualized as either *client perceptions of counselors* or *client outcomes* (see Table 4). These two classes of outcome studies are distinct in that client perceptions of counselors reflect facilitative outcomes that might lead to more effective counseling (i.e., perceptions of counselor credibility, effectiveness, MCCs, and general counseling competencies), whereas client-specific counseling outcomes reflect outcomes that are in and of themselves important indicators of successful or unsuccessful counseling (i.e., self-disclosure, attrition, satisfaction). Both are the results of specific counseling behaviors or approaches, but neither of these two broad categories included studies that assessed client change in counseling (a point we return to later).

In terms of outcome research, several scholars (e.g., Atkinson & Lowe, 1995; Ponterotto et al., 2000) have recently recognized that one of the critical pieces of evidence to support the Sue et al. (1982) MCCs model resides in a group of studies that examined the effects of culturally responsive verbal behavior on client evaluations of their counselors. Collectively, these studies have demonstrated that culturally consistent and culturally responsive counselor verbalizations positively impact client outcomes. Atkinson and colleagues have been prolific in this area, producing a series of studies that indicate the superiority of specific cultural referents by counselors over verbalizations that tended to universalize the human experience (e.g., Atkinson, Casas, & Abreu, 1992; Atkinson & Matsushita, 1991; Gim, Atkinson, & Kim, 1991; Poston, Craine, & Atkinson, 1991; Thompson, Worthington, & Atkinson, 1994). Unfortunately, this very promising area of research is based exclusively on analogue studies that involve pseudo-clients, and there is a need to extend these findings to real-life counseling in descriptive and quasi-experimental field studies.

Constantine (2001, 2002) conducted two of the few studies to use real clients to investigate the MCCs. Constantine (2001) found that racial and ethnic-minority counselor trainees were rated as more multiculturally competent than their White American peers and that prior multicultural training predicted observer-rated MCCs but self-reported MCCs did not. Furthermore, Constantine (2002) found that racial- and ethnic-minority clients' ratings of counselors' MCCs predicted significant variance in ratings of counseling satisfaction beyond the variance previously accounted for by general counseling-competence ratings. Although these investigations were limited by their use of counselor trainees, they serve as exemplars of the type of research that many scholars have called for in the MCC literature.

Statistics show that minority populations underutilize mental health services and that those who do enter therapy frequently drop out prematurely (Cheung & Snowden, 1990; Echemendia & Nunez, 2004; McCabe, 2002; Sue & Sue, 1990; Zane, Enonmoto, & Chun, 1994). In the only study that investigated attrition in relation to the MCCs, Wade and Bernstein (1991) found that clients assigned to counselors with cultural-sensitivity training returned for more sessions than did clients assigned to counselors in a control condition. Clearly, there is a substantial need for additional systematic investigations in this area.

Similarly, although there have been a series of calls for MCC process research, we found only a few studies that investigated counseling process. Thompson and Jenal (1994) conducted a qualitative assessment of counseling interactions in dyads in which the counselors had been instructed to be race-avoidant in their work with African American clients. The majority of clients appeared to experience difficulty communicating concerns about race or racism when interacting with a counselor who avoided making references to race or culture. In cases in which the interactions were characterized as "smooth," clients appeared to concede to counselors who did not raise the issue of race. In another process study, Kim, Li, and Liang (2002) demonstrated that Asian American clients working with a counselor who emphasized immediate resolution of problems (deemed more culturally congruent) tended to rate the working alliance higher than did clients who worked with a counselor who emphasized the attainment of insight. Worthington et al. (2000) found that counselors who had more frequently used racial or cultural referents in their spontaneous verbalizations tended to be rated higher on the MCCs by trained observers. However, the Worthington et al. study was limited by the use of an analogue counseling situation.

In summary, the existing empirical MCC process/outcome research has shown consistently that counselors who possess MCCs tend to evidence improved counseling processes and outcomes with clients across racial and ethnic differences (the central question of the current study). That is, positive results were obtained with respect to client perceptions of counselors, client outcomes, attrition, and self-disclosure when counselors exhibited MCCs.

Furthermore, we did not find any studies that demonstrated negative findings in this regard. Nevertheless, there are a number of limitations associated with the existing literature addressing this question. Specifically, there was a limited number of studies that could directly address this issue, and most of the studies in this area used analogue designs. Thus, there continues to be a need for new research on this topic, including (a) broadening the racial and ethnic composition of samples, (b) using real counselor–client dyads, and (c) replicating existing findings across contexts and samples.

The paucity of process research on the MCCs has been noted frequently in the literature, and we echo that call again on the basis of our findings. The primary barrier to this logical next step, however, is a lack of standardized process-measurement strategies with which to carry out the research effectively. That is, to extend the findings on cultural responsiveness to the field, we must improve on existing methods of categorizing the real-life verbalizations of counselors on the basis of cultural content. For example, most counseling psychology researchers are probably familiar with the Hill Counselor Verbal Response Category System (Hill, 1985) that has become one of the most widely used process measures in the counseling literature. There is a need for a similar classification system of counselor multicultural verbal content. This classification system would need to be multidimensional and derived from interpretive research that uses actual counselor verbal responses. A multicultural verbal response category system could help to address a host of research questions related to the impact of MCCs on counseling processes and outcomes. For example, what types of multicultural verbal responses increase with MCC training? What types decrease? What types of multicultural verbal responses lead to greater self-disclosure, enhanced trust, greater satisfaction with counseling, and beneficial outcomes for clients? Process measures of multicultural verbal content and counseling intentions could facilitate multicultural-counseling process/outcome research.

Measurement Issues

The vast majority of investigations on MCCs have used self-report instruments and produced a substantial number of correlates to self-reported MCCs. In this study, the correlates of self-reported MCCs were classified into nine different categories: (a) demographics, (b) attitudes, (c) personality, (d) identity, (e) theoretical orientation, (f) multicultural counseling training, (g) cross-cultural contact, (h) clinical experience, and (i) social desirability. Note that none of these variables reflects actual counseling behaviors. Furthermore, several investigations on the validity of self-report measures have demonstrated that there is little correspondence among the subscales of the four most frequently used measures (Ponterotto et al., 2000) and that self-reported MCCs do not seem to be strongly related to observer-rated MCCs (Constantine, 2001; Worthington et al., 2000). Both of these types of findings have been replicated by independently conducted research. Worthington et al. (2000) also found that observer-rated measures were correlated with other criterion-based evidence of MCCs (i.e., causal attributions and multicultural verbal content). Unfortunately, relative to correlates of self-report MCC measures, far fewer correlates of observer-rated MCCs have been identified, primarily because of the smaller number of studies. In all, the scale-specific research on self-reported and observer-reported MCCs appears to indicate that we need to move in new directions.

A number of authors (e.g., Constantine & Ladany, 2001; Ottavi, Pope-Davis, & Dings, 1994) have suggested that the widely used MCC self-report measures appear to assess self-efficacy for engaging in multiculturally sensitive counseling (e.g., a counselor's confidence in his or her ability to perform a set of multicultural counseling skills and behaviors successfully). However, Constantine and Ladany (2001) have cautioned that there is an important distinction between multicultural counseling self-efficacy and self-perceptions of MCCs. Although both may or may not be predictive of the provision of multiculturally competent counseling, self-report measures of multicultural counseling self-efficacy are likely to have more construct validity than existing self-report measures of actual competencies. That is, whereas the measurement of self-efficacy by definition is inherently amenable to a self-report format (e.g., it is reasonable for a person to self-report his or her confidence in carrying out a specific action), the self-report measurement of competencies has been described as susceptible to inherent biases that are difficult to control (Worthington et al., 2000). In other words, individuals may be less susceptible to self-reporting bias when responding to questions about their confidence in carrying out multicultural counseling than they are to items designed to measure their competencies. Furthermore, on the basis of social cognitive theory, multicultural counseling self-efficacy should be responsive to training and supervision interventions and predict actual performance on multicultural counseling tasks (Constantine & Ladany, 2001). Thus, we need specific scales to measure multicultural counseling self-efficacy that might supplement or even replace the existing self-report MCC instruments that are of questionable validity.

In addition, measurement of MCCs should be based on assessments of actual performance, rather than on survey-based self-reports. The Cross-Cultural Counseling Inventory–Revised (CCCI–R; LaFromboise et al., 1991) is the only instrument specifically developed as an observer-rated measure of the MCCs. Although research has indicated that it is an effective brief, global measure that assesses specific multicultural counseling behaviors more effectively than self-report instruments (e.g., Constantine, 2001; Worthington et al., 2000), other more refined measures are also needed. Measurement of multicultural counseling knowledge and awareness might also include performance-based paper-and-pencil tests. For example, a performance-based measure of multicultural counseling knowledge probably ought to be founded in a content domain of multicultural counseling research. Similarly, measures of multicultural counseling awareness should assess an individual's awareness, rather than request an individual to report self-perceptions (which are too often confounded by social desirability, political correctness, and attitudinal and attributional biases). Furthermore, it is impossible to measure actual multicultural counseling performance or skills via paper-and-pencil self-reports. Instead, measurement of skills should be based on observations of actual performance and should be highly contextualized—meaning that a counselor's score should be specific to each discrete performance, rather than based on global ratings assumed to generalize to future performances. Atkinson and Israel (2003) also have addressed some of these important issues.

Finally, multicultural counseling knowledge, awareness, skills, and self-efficacy should be measured at different levels of abstrac-

tion. For example, some research questions could be easily addressed by a more global measure of MCC knowledge, but a global measure may prove inadequate when we want to evaluate knowledge more precisely with regard to a target population (e.g., Latinos), or even more specifically some segment of the target population (e.g., Chicanos/Chicanas). Therefore, we should be working toward the development of instruments that will assess knowledge, awareness, and skills that range from very broad and basic to very focused and complex. Thus, scale-development research is strongly needed to continue to advance this area of inquiry.

Conclusion

It is important to point out that, although it is far from "miniscule" (e.g., Weinrach & Thomas, 2002), the current research foundation for the MCCs is still not adequate to address the future challenges we are likely to face (Atkinson, 2000; Atkinson & Israel, 2003). Atkinson et al. (2001) suggested that the multicultural counseling movement is on a collision course with the empirically supported treatment movement and that there is a tremendous need for research that is designed to ensure the application of MCCs into empirically supported treatments and to challenge the common universalistic assumptions underlying empirically supported treatments. To accomplish these goals, we must overcome the theory–research gap in the MCC literature, in part by addressing the problems of instrumentation and the scarcity of process/outcome studies. We believe that these actions will result in the further validation of all or part of the Sue et al. (1982) MCC model. We also believe that revisions on the basis of new research will strengthen the model, as is true with all good theoretical models.

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