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An Examination of Death in Premier Counseling Journals

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Abstract

This qualitative content analysis (QCA) examined five premier counseling journals and their coverage of death related issues from 1986-2022: Journal of Counseling and Development (JCD), Journal of Humanistic Counseling (JHC), Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development (JMCD), Counselor Education and Supervision (CES) and Counseling and Values (CV). Of the 6180 journal articles published across all five journals, 62 articles covered death related topics. Eight major death related themes emerged through the QCA process and included: Research on Death-Related Issues, Personal Reflection and Poetry, Grief and Loss Education, Book Reviews, Responding to Campus Death, Providing Grief Counseling, DSM and Bereavement Diagnosis and Counseling the Dying. Special attention was also given to analyzing how the five journals covered death related issues from a multicultural perspective. Results indicated that minimal attention has been paid to death related issues in the field of counseling. Death will touch 100% of all people and yet it was only covered one percent of the time in the five counseling journals analyzed for this study. The results of this study clearly demonstrate an extreme neglect of publishing about death. There is an urgent need to begin and expand a robust research agenda which will help counselors, counselor educators, counselor trainees and most importantly the clients that seek counseling services.

Keywords

Author Bio

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Introduction

Talking about death is difficult for humans as they are fully cognitively aware of their existence (Bozo et al., 2009). Dr. Irvin Yalom (2008) described how talking about death is like staring at the sun, in that one can only look for a little while before turning away. Theologian Paul Tillich (1952) talked about the great courage it takes to assert a sense of being in the face of one's future nonbeing. Humans are the only creatures on the planet that know that they will one day die, and this knowledge leads to a type of existential anxiety (Yalom, 1980). Despite death being one of the few universals in life, death and its accompanying anxiety are rarely discussed (Bassett, 2007). The denial of death is pervasive within American culture, and people employ countless strategies to deny one's inevitable death which leads to death anxiety (Firestone, 1993; Rainer, 2013).

Death is unavoidable, and everyone must encounter the grasp of death in their life. Mental health counselors face a unique challenge because they also encounter death in their professional lives when they counsel bereaved clients. It can be anxiety provoking for mental health counselors to navigate the difficult terrain of attending to death in both their personal and professional lives (Ober et al., 2012). Research has indicated that beginning counselors rank death-related counseling situations as more challenging to deal with as compared to other non-death-related situations (Kirchberg & Neimeyer, 1991). Thus, death education becomes crucial in assisting mental health counselors become more comfortable with death to provide high-quality services to their clients (Durlak & Risenberg, 1991; Harrawood et al., 2008).

Specifically, two major research studies provide evidence of the discomfort with death-related issues among counselor trainees (Kirchberg & Neimeyer, 1991; Kirchberg et al., 1998). Kirchberg and Neimeyer (1991) asked participants to rank the order of fifteen different

counseling scenarios from the most difficult to deal with to the least difficult. Results indicated that counseling trainees described the situations dealing with death as more complicated and uncomfortable to deal with than all the other situations.

Given the dearth of research in the counseling literature around death-related issues, Rosenthal (1981) evaluated the extent to which death-related courses were offered in counselor education programs. Rosenthal indicated that counselor education programs across the country had very few programs that offered any sort of class on death-related issues. The author further reported that, while courses in death education or seminars had increased over time, there was still potential for improvement. Rosenthal's research from 1981 was the last time there was a thorough examination of how counseling programs are covering death-related issues.

Nevertheless, Gamino and Ritter (2012) suggested that it is important for counselors to understand their own anxieties related to death and that this understanding is a major part of developing competence around death-related issues. If counselors do not understand their own sense of anxiety concerning death-related issues, they may work to avoid issues around death with their clients. Death competence refers to therapists being simultaneously aware of the academic material around death-related issues and the emotional material that comes from themselves, as well as the emotional material of their clients (Claxton-Oldfield et al., 2007; Gamino & Ritter, 2012).

Research has also indicated that, when people work to deny death, they can act more aggressively or perhaps even ignore those people who represent the pain of death (Lieberman et al., McGregor, 1999). It is therefore likely that if counselors have not dealt with their own death-related issues, this will potentially impact how they are currently practicing therapy. Researchers have suggested that a level of death competence must be present for therapists to not miss an

opportunity to fully explore their clients' experience with death-related issues (Gamino & Ritter, 2012). Many counselors have not received any education in their programs on the basic concepts of grief counseling and the associated terms like *bereavement, grief, mourning*. Furthermore, these authors have reported that it is not uncommon for counselors to immediately move to a place where they are pushing their client to find some sort of resolution to their loss. Unfortunately, when moving to solutions too quickly, clients may miss an opportunity to fully explore and understand their loss. It is also likely that, when clients are pushed to resolve their loss prematurely, they may experience a longer and more intensely painful period of grief (Gamino & Ritter, 2012).

Relatedly, there is also a growing body of literature referred to as Terror Management Theory (TMT) that further demonstrates the power of death anxiety and supports the assertion that paying attention to death-related issues in counseling is important. TMT describes how death anxiety drives much of human behavior. TMT is based on two basic assumptions that are true of most humans. First, humans will work to favor their own group or worldview (i.e., culture) that they are a part of or believe in over other groups and worldviews (i.e., cultures). Second, individuals will always work to protect their own sense of self-esteem (Solomon et al., 2004).

TMT posits that the awareness that we will die lies at the heart of much of why humans behave the way that they do. TMT further hypothesizes that many of our social structures are created to assuage our sense of death anxiety. Culture, for example, has developed to mitigate and assuage the experience of death anxiety. Having faith in one's culture, especially when it comes to religiosity, is an important way to manage death anxiety. Culture provides a means to make sense of the world and provides a systematic way for how to manage and cope with the journey through difficult times in life (Pyszczynski et al., 2012; Solomon et al., 2015).

TMT research has described how the role of culture works to assuage death anxiety (Pyszczynski, Greenberg, Solomon, & Maxfield, 2012; Solomon et al., 2015). Lieberman et al. (1999) evaluated death anxiety, culture, and aggression towards people of other cultures using hot sauce to identify levels of aggression. A control group was told that they were preparing a dish for a group of people from a different culture and that they were responsible for adding the hot sauce to the dish. The amount of hot sauce was a strategy to examine aggression safely and ethically. The experimental group was asked to do the same as the control group, but prior to adding the hot sauce, they were prompted to think about death. The researchers reported that the experimental group added higher amounts of hot sauce for people of a different culture, suggesting that humans will always work to protect their own group over other groups (Lieberman et al., 1999).

In summary, exploring issues of death and death anxiety are also important because death can serve as a source of inspiration to help an individual live life in a more positive way. In his book, *Existential Psychology*, Yalom (1981, p. 30) stated, "the physicality of death destroys man, but the idea of death saves him." Thus, Yalom asserted that an individual can live life in a deeper and more authentic way when they accept the reality of death. To be sure, it is challenging for an individual to reflect on death and its reality, but what about the field of counseling? How have issues around death been explored within the counseling field? Have counselors and researchers in the field avoided such questions or fully engaged them?

Death education is extremely important for training counselors on how to understand death-related issues. Grief, death, and loss will affect 100% of all people, yet little research exists on how such education is incorporated into counselor education programs. Much of the research that does exist is older and there has not been as much research or writing on death in recent

years in the counseling field. The last study that explored this topic was completed in 1981 (Rosenthal) demonstrated that very few programs have incorporated death education into their curricula. Other fields have done more with death education and there is much to be learned from the fields of nursing (Ferrell et al., 1999), medicine (Dickinson, 2006, 2011, 2017) and emergency medical services (EMS) (Smith-Cumberland, 2006). This study will begin the process of understanding how the field of counselor education has addressed death education and death related issues.

Purpose of the Study

This study systematically examined the research that exists in the counseling literature concerning death-related issues using a Qualitative Content Analysis Model (QCA) (Schreier 2012). Specifically, only those articles addressing grief, mourning, bereavement, loss from death, denial of death, death anxiety, death education, and TMT were utilized in this study. This study provides an awareness of the notion of death and will provide a rationale for counselor trainees, counselors, and counselor educators to be more mindful of the impact of death-related issues in their training and practice. Counseling journals represent the heart of the profession and provide the foundation for practical counseling practices. To investigate the level of research that addresses death-related issues in the counseling literature, a content analysis was performed on five journals: *Journal of Counseling and Development* (JCD), *The Journal of Humanistic Counseling* (JHC), *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development* (JMCD) *Counselor Education and Supervision* (CES), and *Counseling and Values* (CV). These journals were chosen because they are five of the ten premier counseling journals published by the American Counseling Association (ACA). These journals are the most frequently utilized in counselor education programs training students to become Licensed Professional Clinical Counselors

(LPCC). Content analysis works to analyze large amounts of data to determine themes and publication trends, as well as of examining interests or attitudes toward a specific topic (Krippendorff, 2013; Neuendorf, 2017; Schreier, 2012). The content analysis went back 36 years for each journal and covered the years from 1986 to 2022. This article includes and expands on the first author's dissertation published in 2019 which covered the years from 1986 until 2016 (Suomala Folkerds, 2019). This article includes that data and additional data from the last six years (2017-2022).

Methodology

Several research questions guided this content analysis: (RQ1) How many articles were written on death-related issues in each of the journals from 1986 to 2022? (RQ2) What is the exact percentage of articles that covered death-related topics in each of the journals from 1986 to 2022? (RQ3) What are the most frequent categories or themes that have been examined in the literature on death in each of the journals from 1986 to 2022? (RQ4) Finally, how many articles have been written that address the influence of diversity and culture on death-related issues in each of the journals from 1986 to 2022?

For this study, research questions 1, 2, and 4 were answered through quantitative methods. Research Question 1 methods involved the determination of the total number of articles written in the selected journals on death-related issues. For Research Question 2, the percentage of articles written on death-related issues were calculated for each of the selected journals. Lastly, Research Question 4 tallied the number of multicultural articles that were written in the selected journals. The bulk of the qualitative content analysis of this study falls under Research Question 3 which coded the articles based on a qualitative content analysis procedure.

Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA)

QCA differs from other styles of qualitative research because it focuses on specific selected aspects of the material based on the coding frame. If researchers find data that invite them to expand their exploration, the coding frame can be adjusted. This study followed the QCA coding frame offered by Schreier (2012), a qualitative content analysis researcher from Germany who offered an eight-step process for how to complete a QCA. Schreier (2012) explained that her eight-step procedure is meant to be systematic and flexible, working to reduce the data so that the researcher can draw conclusions and interpret them. As noted above, the eight-step QCA process served as the main guide for this study (Schreier, 2012), and the Elo and Kyngas (2008) three-step open coding process was also used to guide the coding for Research Question 3. The Elo and Kyngas (2008) three-step coding process provided more detail and guidance for how to code in an inductive manner, something not provided by Schreier (2012).

Process of Article Selection

The next step after choosing the five journals for study was to specifically identify and select the articles about death-related issues within each journal. The content analysis covers a 36-year time span, which will provide a robust understanding of how death-related issues have been covered over a generation of time. This study examined journals from 1986 until 2022.

The first step in selecting the articles was to obtain the table of contents (TOC) for each issue of the five selected journals. The next step in the process was to examine each TOC manually to identify preselected keywords: death, grief, mourning, bereavement, loss from death, denial of death, death anxiety, death education, and terror management theory. If one of the articles listed on the TOC had one of the keywords, that article was selected for the study.

Methods by Research Question

Research Question #1: *How many articles were written on death-related issues in each of the journals from 1986 to 2022? (Quantitative Question)*

The first component of data to be analyzed was the number of death-related articles that were discovered from each of the five selected journals. These descriptive data were tallied by a simple count and recorded in an Excel spreadsheet for each of the five journals.

Research Question #2: *What is the exact percentage of articles that covered death-related topics in each of the journals from 1986 to 2022? (Quantitative Question)*

Percentages were calculated to rank order the journals from those publishing the most to the least amount of content on death-related issues. This information was recorded and calculated in an Excel spreadsheet.

Research Question #3: *What are the most frequent categories or themes that have been examined in the literature on death for each of the journals (Qualitative Content Analysis)?*

The most challenging part of the study involved coding the articles into different themes or categories. Many content analyses use already established categories from previous research to categorize articles using a deductive process (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). To date, however, there had not been a content analysis on death-related issues, so an inductive process was used. Thus, this step in the process attempted to take each article and organize it into different categories that were developed while examining the data. Elo and Kyngas (2008) outlined the process of coding data in an inductive manner that provided the structure needed to code the articles for this study. As noted earlier, this model of coding was used because there was not a specific inductive coding process outlined in the eight steps of Schreier's QCA model.

A three-part coding process was followed to categorize the main theme for each of the articles. The first step involved an open-coding process where the researcher made notes and included possible themes in the margins relating to what the article addressed. The article was then read a second time and the same open coding process was followed. The second step was to copy all the headings onto a separate coding sheet and develop generic categories based on the coded subheadings produced in the first step. The goal of this interpretive process by the researcher was to decide as to how the smaller pieces of data might fit together under specific categories. The third and final step in the Elo and Kyngas (2008) process is called abstraction, which is the process of taking the categories developed in the second step and creating a final overarching theme for the article. Abstraction entails how the researcher takes the categories developed in the second step and groups them into broader categories until a main category can be developed that describes the content of the article (Elo & Kyngas, 2008).

Research Question 4: How many articles have been written that address the influence of diversity and culture on death-related issues in each of the journals (Quantitative Question)?

During the coding process for question 4, special attention was paid to any articles that covered death-related issues from a perspective of diversity and/or multiculturalism. The number of articles about death-related issues and diversity/multiculturalism both for each journal and for the total number of journals were recorded.

Establishing Trustworthiness

This study worked to establish trustworthiness through establishing credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability (Creswell, 2007). This study worked to establish credibility by establishing prolonged engagement with the material. Transferability was established by using a thick and rich description of the articles by keeping a specific coding sheet

for each article. This coding sheet included the headings for each article, the general categories, and the final category describing the article. An additional memo was kept describing the procedure with which the headings and categories were processed and organized (Charmaz, 2006). Dependability was established by using an outside auditor who reviewed the choice of articles and the coding of the articles. The external auditor examined the whole project from the very beginning of selecting the data until the end of the research. Confirmability was established by writing about the authors' own personal biases that they potentially brought to the study. The biases of the researchers were also mitigated through journaling and by employing the use of an outside auditor (Creswell, 2007).

<div align="center">**Results**</div>

This section will present the results of each of the four research questions. Research questions 1, 2 and 4 are quantitative and descriptive in nature. Research question 3 is qualitative and served as the primary research question for this study. The purpose for describing this is to make it clear which research questions were answered using quantitative methods and how research question 3 was answered through a qualitative approach.

Research Question 1: How many articles were written on death-related issues for each journal? (Quantitative)

The journal with the most articles on death-related issues was JCD. From 1986 until 2022, there were 2,787 total articles published in JCD and 30 of them were about death-related issues. CV followed with 14 articles on death-related issues out of a total of 881 articles. JHC had a total of 775 articles, of which 13 were related to death. JMCD had a total of 769 articles with four on death-related issues. CES had just one article written about death out of a total of

968 articles. For all five journals, there were 62 death-related articles out of a total of 6,180 articles published across all the journals.

Research Question 2: What is the exact percentage of articles that covered death-related topics for each journal?

The journal with the highest percentage of death-related articles was JHC at 1.7%, followed by CV with 1.6%, and JCD at 1.10%. JMCD was at 0.5%, followed by CES at 0.10%. When all five journals were considered, the total percentage of death-related articles was 1% of all articles published.

Research Question 3: What are the most frequent categories or themes that have been examined in the literature on death for each journal?

Introduction to the Eight Major Themes

The following section first provides an overview of the eight major themes that emerged through the inductive coding procedure developed by Elo and Kyngas (2008). The eight major themes discovered through this process were: Research Theme #1: Research on Death-related Issues; Research Theme #2: Personal Reflection and Poetry; Research Theme #3: Grief and Loss Education; Research Theme #4: Book Reviews; Research Theme #5: Responding to Campus Death; Research Theme #6: Providing Grief Counseling; Research Theme #7: Diagnostic and Statistical Manual and Bereavement Diagnosis; and Research Theme #8: Counseling the Dying.

Overarching Themes in 62 Articles Across Five Journals

The following section is an overview of how the articles from the five journals support each of the eight themes that emerged through the QCA process.

Research Theme #1: Research on Death-related Issues (11 Articles)

Qualitative (7 Articles)
Kinnier, Tribbensee, Rose, & Vaughn, 2001 (JCD)

Glazer and Marcum, 2003 (JHC)
Inman, Yeh, Madan-Bahel, & Shivani Nath, 2007 (JMCD)
Shimabukuro, Daniels, & D'Andrea, 1999 (JMCD)
Baggerly & Abugiedeiri, 2010 (JMCD)
Puterbaugh, 2008 (CV)
Andrews & Marotta, 2005 (CV)

Quantitative (4 Articles)
Stevens, Pfost, & Wessels, 1987 (JCD)
Ober, Haag Granello, & Wheaton, 2012 (JCD)
Cruz-Ortega, Guiterrez, & Waite, 2015 (CV)
Matthews, Fonseca, Varnado-Johnson, 2021 (JMCD)

Research Theme #2: Personal Reflection and Poetry (21 Articles)

Personal Reflections (15 Articles)

Death of a Significant Other
DePauw & Luther, 1988 (JCD)
Garfield, 1990 (JCD)
James, 1994 (JCD)
Siehl, 1992 (JCD)
Pollack, 1988 (JCD)
Hayes, 1993 (JHC)
Hulse-Killacky, 1993 (JHC)
Colley, 1993 (JHC)
Wineman, 2000 (JHC)
Counseling Dying Children
Landreth, 1988 (JCD)
Linville, 1988 (JCD)
Counseling Bereaved Parents
Steed, 1988 (JCD)
Weinrach, 1988 (JCD)
Counseling a Bereaved Adult Child
Hughes, 1988 (JCD)
Working With a Dying Elderly Patient
Elliott Ingersoll, 2000 (CV)

Poetry (6 Articles)
Angelieri, 1986 (JCD)
Conyne, 2008 (JHC)
Tlanusta Garrett, 2001 (JHC)
Mazza, 2004 (JHC)
Patricola-McNiff, 2004 (JHC)
Mazza, 2004 (JHC)

Research Theme #3: Grief and Loss Education (2 Articles)
Doughty Horn, Crews, & Harrawood, 2013 (CES)
Harrawood, Doughty Horn, & Wilde, 2011 (CV)

Research Theme #4: Book Reviews (4 Articles)

Grief Counseling for Families
Hodges, 2005 (JCD)
Counseling Children and Adolescents in Grief
Wilson, 2009 (JCD)
Death Anxiety
Gressard, 1989 (C&V)
Grief and Grieving: Finding Meaning in the Five Stages (Kubler-Ross)
Bolden, 2007 (C&V)

Research Theme #5: Responding to Campus Death (3 Articles)
Halberg, 1986 (JCD)
Rickgarn, 1987 (JCD)
Sorenson, 1989 (JCD)

Research Theme #6: Providing Grief Counseling (11 Articles)
Grief Counseling in a Funeral Home
Riordan & Allen, 1989 (JCD)
Grief Counseling for Those Bereaved by Suicide
Valente, Saunders, & Street, 1988 (JCD)
Freeman, 1991 (JCD)
Grief Counseling for Special Populations
Springer & Lease, 2000 (JCD)
Withrow & Schwiebert, 2005 (JCD)
Grief Counseling for Bereaved Parents and Surviving Siblings
Schwab, 1997 (JCD)
Disenfranchised Grief
Lenhardt, 1997 (JHC)
Counseling Grieving Parents
Wright, 1992 (JHC)
Spirituality/Religion for Bereaved
Thurston Dyer & Hagedorn, 2013 (CV)
Counseling Bereaved Adolescents
Muselman & Wiggins, 2012 (CV)
Grief Counseling in the Schools
Hannon, Mohabir, Cleveland & Hunt, 2019 (JCD)

Research Theme #7: DSM and Bereavement Diagnosis (2 Articles)

Fox & Jones, 2013 (JCD)
Crunk, Burke & Robinson, 2017 (JCD)

Research Theme #8: Counseling the Dying (8 Articles)

Counseling Terminally Ill Children
O'Halloran & Altmaier, 1996 (JCD)
Glazer & Landreth, 1993 (JHC)
Bioethics in Dying
Albright & Hazler, 1995 (CV)
Farrugia, 1993 (CV)
Werth & Crow, 2009 (JCD)
Religious Spiritual Needs of the Dying
Smith, 1993 (CV)
Miner Holden, 1993 (CV)
How to Have a Healthy Death
Smith & Maher, 1991 (CV)

Table 1 summarizes these quantitative findings.

Table 1

Quantitative Outcomes and Qualitative Themes

	Total Number of Death Related Articles Recorded	Research Theme #1: Research on Death Related Issues	Research Theme #2: Personal Reflection and Poetry	Research Theme #3: Grief and Loss Education	Research Theme #4: Book Reviews	Research Theme #5: Responding to Campus Deaths	Research Theme #6: Providing Grief Counseling	Research Theme #7: DSM and Bereavement Diagnosis	Research Theme #8: Counseling the Dying
JCD	30	3	11	0	2	3	7	2	2
JHC	13	1	9	0	0	0	2	0	1
JMCD	4	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
CES	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
CV	14	3	1	1	2	0	2	0	5
Totals	62	11	21	2	4	3	11	2	8

Research Question #4: How many articles have been written that address the influence of diversity and culture on death-related issues in each of the journals from 1986 to 2022?

Of the 62 articles that were published in five premier journals ACA (JCD, JHC, JMCD, CES, CV), only ten could be classified in the category of diversity/culture.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that there is a substantial lack of articles covering death-related issues in the five major American Counseling Association (ACA) journals reviewed. Of the 6,180 articles published across the five ACA journals reviewed in this study going back 36 years each, only 62 articles were death related.

These findings suggest that the field of counseling seemingly avoided exploring death-related issues. A primary reason that people seek counseling services is due to loss-related issues (e.g., loss of a loved one, job loss, disease, accident). In fact, one study reported that 28% of the individuals seeking counseling tended to do so to deal with a loss, trauma, or death (Barna Group, 2018). Even though many people seek counseling for a range of loss-related issues, only 1% of the published articles in these journals reported any death-related material. This clearly suggests that more attention to death-related issues should be covered in counselor professional journals.

Given the high numbers of people seeking counseling for death-related issues, it would make sense that there would be many publications for how to teach new counselors about death related issues. Yet, there was only one article published in CES on how to teach about death-related issues (Doughty Horn et al., 2013). This is significant because issues around death have been documented to be of concern for developing practitioners (Kirchberg & Neimeyer, 1991; Kirchberg et al., 1998; Terry et al., 1996). The literature suggests that there is a desire and need for counselors to learn more about death in general and how to work with death-related situations. However, the findings of this study indicate that very little research has been conducted in this area. Additionally, it is concerning that investigations about developing practitioners have not been published in over two decades in these ACA journals. In fact, the

most recent publication addressing counselor trainees and death-related issues was published in
1998 (Kirchberg et al., 1998).

There are three major areas of research demonstrating that developing practitioners are
uncomfortable with issues of death. Neophyte counselors have consistently ranked counseling
scenarios around death as more uncomfortable to deal with in comparison to more benign
scenarios (Kirchberg & Neimeyer, 1991; Kirchberg et al., 1998). The counselor trainee
participants in both studies consistently rank-ordered the scenarios around death as more difficult
to deal with. A related study examined counselors practicing in the field and explored their level
of comfort with death. The researchers discovered that one's level of experience influences their
comfort with death, and, once again, it was reported that the more experience practitioners had
with counseling in general, the more comfortable they tended to be with death (Terry et al.,
1996).

Studies about comfort levels with death for counselor trainees have been limited to a
previous generation of students. Much has changed since the 90s when these articles were
published (Kirchberg & Neimeyer, 1991; Kirchberg et al., 1998). It would be especially
important to gain a greater understanding of how the current generation of counselor trainees
understand and experience death related issues, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Researchers have also discovered that education can help people become more
comfortable with death. Several studies suggested that taking a course in grief and loss can help
individuals become more comfortable when working with the bereaved and with their own sense
of loss (Basu & Heuser, 2003; Cohen Conrad, 2010; Kramer, 1998). Some researchers in
psychology have promoted the idea of death competence and the importance of practitioners
becoming more competent to work with the bereaved. Death education has been confirmed as an

effective strategy for helpers to become more competent with death-related issues (Gamino & Ritter, 2012).

In summary, this finding confirms that, in the field of counselor education, there has been little attention in the literature to guide death-related curriculum development. Unfortunately, the last documented consideration of how the counseling field was including death-related material in their curriculum was conducted over 38 years ago (Rosenthal, 1981). The fields of nursing, medicine, emergency medicine, and psychology have each conducted more recent assessments of death-related curricula and can serve as a resource for the counseling profession (Dickinson, 2006, 2017; Eckerd, 2009; Ferrell et al., 1999; Mallory, 2003; Smith-Cumberland, 2006). Thus, there is great potential for the findings of this study to guide the counseling profession to take a more proactive lead in developing curricula that would ensure that counselor trainees and professional counselors would report greater comfort levels and expertise in managing death-related topics. Given the lack of consistent research initiated by counselor educators, the field has primarily depended upon research from other disciplines. Counselor education must develop its own research to assess how well the field is covering death related issues. It is concerning that the last published research in counselor education that explored this area was published in 1981 (Rosenthal, 1981).

Overall Summary of Themes Across the Five Journals

The following section will offer a summary of how the eight themes were interpreted across all five journals. A discussion of each theme will be offered below.

Research Theme #1 Research on Death-Related Issues

There were 11 research articles that were published from 1986 to 2022. These studies were more exploratory in nature and were primarily descriptive. Five of the studies explored

grief and loss from a religious or spiritual perspective and how one's spirituality or religion helps in coping with loss. Four of the studies offered suggestions for how to work with specific populations of people who are grieving. One study examined levels of competence on death-related issues among professional counselors, and the last study examined how a near-death experience can impact how a person lives. It is interesting that the bulk of the research studies were completed around spirituality or religion. This makes sense because there has been an increased focus on spirituality and religious issues in the field over the last twenty years. These articles provide a glimpse of how spirituality and religion help a grieving person cope with their loss. This would be an important area to continue to explore as spirituality and religion is a key coping mechanism during loss for many individuals. Another missing area is how to provide grief counseling and to begin to identify a list of evidence-based practices developed from the research to assist bereaved individuals. Along with developing evidenced-based practices through research, it would be important to also expand research on the efficacy of grief counseling.

Research Theme #2: Personal Reflection and Poetry

The most common theme emerging from the five journals was personal reflection with 21 published articles, of which six were poetry. In the theme of personal reflection and poetry, the authors wrote about their own experiences with loss, counseling the dying or counseling the bereaved. These essays were not research focused and were only based on the authors' personal experiences with death-related issues. In addition, an associated theme of personal reflection was poetry, this was another form of personal reflection in which authors processed their loss through creative writing. The last two personal reflection articles were published twenty-three years ago which provides evidence that personal reflections may not be as valued as they once were for

publication. It appears that theme of personal reflection was more valued between years of 1988-1994 when 13 personal reflection articles were written across all five journals. The last poem about death was published in 2008. One hypothesis for this change in the reduction of personal reflections is that it is reflective of the counseling profession as the discipline has moved developmentally from the late 1980 to 2008 to valuing a more research and evidence-based practice in more contemporary years.

Research Theme #3: Grief and Loss Education

Only two articles focused on how to teach about grief and loss to counselor trainees. One of these articles was published in CES (Doughty Horn et al., 2013) and the other was in CV (Harrawood et al., 2011). Although there were two articles published about grief and loss education, it is significant to note that this research team Harrawood and Doughty represented the only research on this important topic. In fact, Doughty Horn et al. (2013) built on their previous research in Harrawood et al. (2011). This indicates that very few people within the field of counseling were conducting the critical work of developing curricula for how to best teach counseling trainees about death-related issues.

Research Theme #4: Book Reviews

JCD and CV were the only journals that incorporated any book reviews (four books) on grief and loss. JCD focused on the area of grief and loss in the family, as outlined in Hodges (2005), and on grief and adolescents as outlined by Wilson (2009). CV focused on describing concepts when reviewing Kubler-Ross's book on grief and grieving (Bolden, 2007) and the book *Death Anxiety* by Gressard (1986). It is interesting to note that this is the only time that death anxiety was mentioned was when it was buried in a book review. There were no books that focused on the many other models of grief such as Worden's Phase Model (Worden, 2009),

Rando's stage theory (Rando, 1984), Neimeyer's Meaning Reconstruction and Loss (Neimeyer, 2000), Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1980; Rainer, 2013; Shaver & Tancredy, 200) or Stroebe and Schut's Dual process model (Stroebe & Schut, 2010).

Theme #5: Responding to Campus Death

Three articles from the late 1980s referenced how to respond to a death on campus. One major theme across these articles was the importance of being prepared and developing a team of people to respond to a campus death. It is logical to think that there would be more recent articles on this topic, given the increase in campus shootings across the country. This would be another notable area to publish on as college campuses work to be more prepared to respond to tragedies when they arise.

Research Theme #6: Providing Grief Counseling

This theme represented another major finding, with 11 of the 62 articles addressing grief counseling. Two of the articles described losing a child, and one of the two also focused on caring for the siblings of the deceased child. Three of the 11 articles were about providing grief counseling to special populations, including how to work with a surviving twin, the gay male population, and those who have been disenfranchised in their grief. Two additional articles described providing care to those who have survived a loved one dying by suicide. There were also two articles on how to care for clients from a spiritual perspective and the remaining article was about establishing a group model for counseling those who struggle with grief in a funeral home setting. One last article described the process of school counselors providing grief counseling. These articles were specific in their content about working with a particular population. There were no articles that discussed a more universal or generic set of guidelines for how to care for those who are grieving the loss of a loved one. In addition, none of the articles

discussed the process of becoming a grief counselor and the list of competencies necessary to do such work. Additionally, a meta-analytic study reported that grief counseling may only be effective for certain populations and can make the client feel worse over time (Fortner, 1999). Given the controversy surrounding the efficacy of grief counseling (Larson & Hoyt, 2009), it would be important to expand the research to include investigations that more closely examine the effectiveness of grief counseling for specific populations. With its relational focus, the field of counseling provides a unique perspective and therefore more research is necessary to inform the field with a voice that can uniquely guide counseling the bereaved, dying and all those who avoid the reality of death in their life.

Research Theme #7: DSM and Bereavement Diagnosis

Out of the 62 articles on death-related issues, only two of the articles covered the topic of grief, diagnosis and the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM). This is significant because of the wide-ranging debate in the literature about whether to include a specific diagnosis related to grief in the DSM (Fox and Jones, 2013). Recently, a disorder called Prolonged Grief Disorder was added in the latest version of the DSM-5-TR that came out in Spring of 2022 (APA, 2022). There were no articles in the reviewed journals that covered and described its inclusion in the latest DSM.

Research Theme #8: Counseling the Dying

There were eight articles published within the theme of counseling the dying. Two of the articles described counseling terminally ill children, two of them were about the bioethics involved on right to die issues, and three were about the spiritual and religious issues of the dying. It is significant that there were at least three articles on issues of spirituality and religion as this is often a tool that grieving individuals use to cope with their loss. The last article that was

published in this theme was in 1996. Consequently, it has been 27 years since there have been any publications on counseling the dying. Much has changed within this time frame, and it would be important to publish more in this area. For example, while the Kubler-Ross (1969) model has provided a foundation for understanding the experience of the dying individual, and the profession has utilized this model as a guide to counsel the bereaved. It would seem important to develop models more specifically designed for bereaved. An additional example would be the increasing conversation about one's right to die or euthanasia. There is some likelihood that a professional counselor might be called upon to counsel someone who wants to end their life because of illness, and it would be important for the counselor to have competencies in this area.

Summary of the Research Questions

Findings of this study suggest that the field of counseling appears to have neglected to address the topic of death in five premier ACA journals over the course of 36 years. It might even lead one to hypothesize that there is a deeper and overarching death anxiety within the field of counseling as demonstrated by the paucity of the research reviewed in this study. Several major conclusions emerged through this review of five ACA journals and death related issues. The first conclusion emerging from Research Questions 1 and 2 is that there is an overall lack of death-related articles being published in the five premier ACA journals reviewed in this study. It is staggering to consider that death will affect 100% of humanity, yet only 1% of the articles published across all five ACA journals reviewed cover any sort of death-related issue.

The second conclusion drawn from RQ 3 is that while there have been a variety of articles published, the counseling profession has much to accomplish in terms of developing a more focused and purposeful agenda to understand death-related issues. The eight themes that

emerged through the inductive analysis could potentially provide a road map that would serve as a guide to expand death-related research for the field of counseling.

Lastly, Research Question 4 indicated that there have been few articles published on the intersection between culture, diversity, and death-related issues. To be sure, there is a start on the research examining the intersectionality of these important issues, but the research is significantly lacking. This is especially evident in that there were only ten published articles concerning the influence of diversity and culture on death related issues for a total of .10% of the total 6,180 articles published.

Suggestions for Future Research

The eight research themes discovered in this qualitative content analysis could be utilized as possible topics for further research. The follow section describes those recommendations.

Research Theme #1: Research on Death Related Issues

The major recommendation under this theme is to increase the amount of research that is conducted on death related issues in the counseling profession. One important area to consider is the efficacy of bereavement counseling.

Research Theme #2: Personal Reflection and Poetry

Personal reflections have not been published since the 1990s and poetry since the early 2000s. Given the importance of counselors and counselors in training doing the important work of self-reflection it would be good to revitalize and expand this area.

Research Theme #3: Grief and Loss Education

It would be important to do a survey of counselor education programs across the country to discover how they are covering death related issues in their program. The last time such a study was completed was in 1981 (Rosenthal), it would prove important to update this research.

Research Theme #4: Book Reviews

There were only four book reviews published on death related issues across the five journals from 1986-2022. The main recommendation in this area is to simply increase the number of book reviews published.

Research Theme #5: Responding to Campus Death

It would also be important to publish more research on how to best respond to deaths or related crises in schools and on college campuses.

Research Theme #6: Providing Grief Counseling

There is a scarcity of research in counseling journals on the efficacy and best practices of providing grief counseling. It would be important to expand such research in the field of counseling.

Research Theme #7: DSM and Bereavement Diagnosis

Given the fact that counselors utilize the DSM and can diagnose, it would be important to include more research on how to incorporate death related issues in the diagnostic process.

Research Theme #8. Counseling the Dying

There were very few articles on how to care for and counsel the dying, this would be yet another area of research to expand upon.

Diversity, Culture and Death

The findings of this study indicate that multicultural concerns and death related issues have received limited attention in the literature. More specifically, there is a need to research evidence based practices and multicultural competencies for counselors working with diverse populations around death related issues.

A Call to The Profession

In 1992, Sue et al. issued a landmark call to guide the profession in developing more multiculturally competent counselors and counselor trainees. This seminal article served to ignite and organize the incorporation of multicultural competencies in the classroom and the counseling field. Their work led the field of counseling to actively pursue the exploration of multicultural competencies and to find new ways of infusing multicultural practices into counseling (Collins & Arthur, 2010). Though their work is over thirty years old, their critical call to pursue a greater understanding of multicultural competencies remains paramount (Fietzer et al., 2018).

The time has now come to issue a new and urgent call to the counseling profession to develop a model of death competencies to ensure that counselors, counselor educators and counseling students are better prepared to boldly address the apparent death anxiety of the field. Developing competencies for the counseling profession will contribute to greater understanding, awareness, and strategies to overcoming the barriers that have prevented the field from addressing the universal truth of death. The efforts of Sue et al. in validating the need for multicultural competencies in the profession can provide a model for how to expand and elaborate the conversation on death-related issues and critically needed competencies.

Following this model, the first recommendation would be to convene a group of counselor educators interested in the field to come together to begin the process of preparing a competency document. One venue to begin this process would be the regional and national Association of Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) conferences. An announcement could be sent out to begin the process of convening interested counselor educators to start conversations about the major death-related issues.

The second step in the process would be to prepare a document that would list the major competencies needed for counselors who are working with death, grief, and loss issues. Again, the work Sue et al. (1992) could be helpful in providing a model for of this magnitude. In their work, they organized cross-cultural competencies and standards around three central topics. This article could serve as an important model for how to draft a new set of competencies for counselors in working with death related issues. It would be especially important for these competencies and death education in general to include an experiential component as research demonstrates that experiential learning is especially effective for developing competencies around death related issues (Van Geest, 2001). Furthermore, research demonstrates that as one grows in their level of experience with death related issues, the less anxiety that they will feel in working with such issues (Maglio & Robinson, 1994; Terry et al., 1996)

A more parsimonious approach would be to consider how to utilize the model developed by Sue et al. to directly guide counselors and counselor trainees in their work with individuals struggling with death related issues. Regardless to the approach taken, based on the findings of this study, the counseling professionals must broadly attend to death related issues and infuse the topic of death into counselor education and into the practice of counseling. Death affects everyone and it is important to acknowledge this reality and explore the role it plays in the development of counseling trainees, the effectiveness of professional counselors and the ability of counselor educators to engage in this topic with their students. Gamino and Ritter (2009, 2012) emphasized that death competence is an ethical imperative and that counselors should be trained in how to care for clients who struggle with death related issues.

Conclusion

This study evaluated how well the field of counseling has covered death-related issues in five of the ten American Counseling Association journals. Although there has been some coverage of such issues in these journals, a great deal of work remains. These findings affirm that the counseling profession has contributed limited time to death related issues. This knowledge suggests that a call to the profession to establish death-related competencies that will enhance the development of professional counselors is warranted. Ultimately this will increase the likelihood of providing evidence based and state-of-the-art counseling services for clients struggling with death related issues.

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