

## A Content Analysis of Counseling Mentorship in Higher Education: 1996-2017

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### Abstract

The topic of mentorship in the counseling profession received additional interest following the publication of the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) guidelines for research mentorship. An examination of mentorship articles across time may assist researchers in the field in understanding how mentorship research has developed in the profession. This content analysis of counseling mentorship includes 165 mentorship articles published across 27 professional counseling journals from 1996-2017. Articles were coded, separated into types of research and methodology, then arranged by focus. Common focus areas included mentorship of students, obituary or honorary article, and guidance or best practices. The analysis revealed a need for increased empirical research, following the publication of, and editorial calls for, mentorship guidelines and research.

### Keywords

Mentoring • Counselor education • Content analysis • Higher education

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Over 20 years ago, researchers in the counselor education field explored the ethics, importance of, and outcomes associated with faculty mentorship of students (Johnson & Nelson, 1999; Kring, Richardson, Burns, & Davis, 1999; Schwiebert, Deck, & Bradshaw, 1999). Since that time, researchers have provided strategies for student mentorship in counselor education (Black, Suarez, & Medina, 2004; de Dios et al., 2013; Haizlip, 2012), to assist in providing best practices to mentors in academia. The development of a counseling professional follows no set path; for early counseling students and professionals, developing a mentor relationship may help them navigate the pathway with greater confidence and success. However, Black, Suarez, and Medina (2004) suggested a difficulty in practicing research mentorship without a clear definition. Counseling researchers responded to the set of questions to guide mentors provided by Black et al. (2004), including mentorship for woman-to-woman mentorship (Casto, Caldwell, & Salazar, 2005; Rheineck & Roland, 2008). The Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) responded to this need for a counseling research mentorship definition and set of guidelines in 2012, publishing guidelines for research mentorship (Borders et al., 2012). These guidelines include suggested characteristics for both mentor and mentee, defining further those characteristics which constitute an effective researcher, ethical researcher, effective learner, and how one recognizes their research limitations (Borders et al., 2012). As outlined by Borders et al. (2012), a “mentee,” or individual receiving the act of mentorship, is not limited to a student enrolled in a university program. Instead, the “mentee” role remains broad, including counseling peers. Borders et al. (2012) provided recommendations for multi-level implementation of the guidelines for mentors and mentees, concluding with a call for future research on research mentoring. These guidelines serve as a guiding definition for counselor research mentorship; however, counselor educators serving in the mentor role may still encounter issues with this role, starting with their work with students.

Counselor educators can serve as a mentor to a student and may find mentorship beneficial for themselves as they grow in the profession; however, the process of mentoring students may entail ethical considerations. Ethical considerations for research mentorship with counseling students are not novel in the counseling profession. The American Counseling Association (ACA) 2014 Code of Ethics provides guidelines for working with students, “counselors who conduct joint research with colleagues or students/supervisors establish agreements in advance regarding allocation of tasks, publication credit, and types of acknowledgment that will be received,” (p. 17) and that any article or presentation which is based largely on the work of a student includes the student as lead author, and other contributors only at the discretion of the student (e.g., G.5.e. Agreement of Contributors, G.5.f. Student Research). The Council for Accreditation of Counseling & Related Education Programs (CACREP) includes the foundation for student professional counseling identity as participating in “...activities which contribute to professional growth” in the 2016 standards (CACREP, 2015, p.9). Adding to this foundation, CACREP outlines 10 standards for professional counseling identity research and program evaluation (CACREP, 2015, p.13). Mentorship in counseling higher education does not always occur in the faculty as mentor and student as mentee dynamic.

Mentorship in counselor education occurs with faculty as both mentor and mentee. Briggs and Pehrsson (2008) examined research mentorship in counselor education, which focused on mentorship of pre-tenured counselor educators. The aim was twofold, including a reflection on the vision statement made by the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) regarding the intention to increase awareness of the importance of research mentorship for pre-tenured counselor educators (Briggs & Pehrsson, 2008). Others

have examined this type of mentorship relationship also. In an exploratory study, [Rheineck and Roland \(2008\)](#) focused on both the personal and professional domains of female faculty mentorship, developing the Rheineck Mentoring Model as a result. The Rheineck Mentoring Model suggests the matriculation through a doctoral program as developmental, with the inclusion of a mentoring relationship during that process as integral ([Rheineck & Roland, 2008](#)). The publication of this model focused on female doctoral students, calling for a “comparison study between opposite-gender and same-gender mentoring” in order to examine differences and implications of these types of relationships ([Rheineck & Roland, 2008, p. 90](#)). Similarly, [Hammer, Trepal, and Speedlin \(2014\)](#) provided strategies for mentoring female faculty, while [Solomon and Barden \(2016\)](#) provided a mentorship framework for counselor education mothers, which included a call for research. To date, subsequent research examining the efficacy of these frameworks and models is lacking in the literature.

Following the multi-layered definition of counselor research mentor and mentee, as outlined by [Borders et al. \(2012\)](#), we sought to uncover how the counseling profession has responded to the call for counseling research mentorship. Since the publication of the ACES guidelines in 2012, 19 articles have been published in professional counseling journals, approximately 20% of which can be considered qualitative or quantitative research. With many researchers calling for future research aimed at implementing guidelines, best practices, and other strategies for counseling mentorship, we searched for a content analysis to determine themes of mentorship publishing in the counseling arena. By determining themes, we can better understand what exploration has occurred and what is in the future of counseling mentorship research for counselor educators. Finding a lack of published meta-analyses or content analyses on the topic of mentorship in the counseling field, we set out to find more information on what research is available in the field.

The purpose of this study is to understand publication patterns in counseling journals from 1996-2017, which involve counseling mentorship in higher education. The counselor educators on this research team focus their research and energy on counseling mentorship. Through performing a content analysis, we can better direct our future research efforts and increase our mentoring skills. With previous calls for counseling mentorship research, the publication of mentorship models and best practices, and the ACES guidelines for counseling research mentorship, we sought to uncover how counseling researchers have responded to the initiative to increase mentorship in the field. Understanding, as a profession, how we can improve current counseling research mentorship, will guide us as we move forward.

## **Method**

### **Researchers**

Two female counselor educators, one female research professor, and one female Master’s student comprised the research team. Both counselor educators are assistant professors at the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Programs (CACREP)-accredited universities. The research professor is an assistant professor in the College of Education at a southeastern university. The Master’s student served as a research assistant for the first researcher and focused her experience on research mentorship. With varied backgrounds, expectations for research outcomes differed.

The expectations for the content analysis varied. The first and second author value mentorship in their work, actively mentoring students over the past five years in areas of counseling and research. This value may create

bias in their work. The professor of research education has an interest in mentoring, previously publishing on the subject. The Master's student had no research expectations; instead, she was interested in learning more about the research process.

### **Data Utilized**

Content analysis, an empirically grounded method (Krippendorff, 2013), examines words in print (among other things) to better understand, explain and predict the meaning of a given idea to a given group of individuals (Krippendorff, 2013; Prasad, 2019). This systematic reading of peer-reviewed journal articles assists counseling professionals in better understanding a theme or area (Krippendorff, 2013). Additionally, content analysis is a method used to provide information regarding further action (Krippendorff, 2013; Prasad, 2019). More specifically, rules or coding schemes are followed by researchers to assign “numbers to objects to represent quantities of attributes” (Nunnally, 1967, p. 2). This study followed the procedure suggested by Insch et al., (1997), including: (i) “identify the questions to be investigated and the constructs involved” (A Suggested Procedure section, para. 5), (ii) “identify the texts to be examined” (A Suggested Procedure section, para.8), (iii) “specify the unit of analysis” (A Suggested Procedure section, para. 10), (iv) “specify the categories” (A Suggested Procedure section, para. 13), (v) “generate a sample coding scheme” (A Suggested Procedure section, para. 23), (vi) “purify the coding scheme” (A Suggested Procedure section, para. 32), (vii) “assess reliability” (A Suggested Procedure section, para. 42), and finally, (viii) “analyze data” (A Suggested Procedure section, para. 48). The following sections outline the processes associated with each of the procedure, as mentioned above suggested by Insch et al. (1997).

**Identify the Questions to be Investigated and the Constructs Involved.** Toward the goals of this study, we chose the following research questions:

*Research Question 1:* What is the amount of published counseling mentorship literature in the professional field from 1996-2017?

*Research Question 2:* What are the types of published counseling mentorship articles in counseling journals?

**Identify the Texts to be Examined.** The analysis focuses on 20 ACA journals and seven additional journals which were determined by the research team to be associated with counseling. For a complete list of journals, see Table 1. There are two ways journal articles were selected: each journal article over the specified time was selected individually using the website associated with each specific journal; or, using the EBSCO databases, entering the specific name of each of the 27 journals typed as input. We used the term “mentor” in the search field, and the dates 1996-2017 to narrow the analysis to the given time. All articles were examined to remove duplicates, calls for editors, and calls for general manuscripts (n = 165). Table 1 reflects the results of all mentorship search results. Finally, we analyzed all articles which focused on all counseling mentorship in higher education settings, resulting in a total of 65 articles.

**Specify the Unit of Analysis.** We used the term “mentor” in the search field, and the dates 1996-2017 to narrow the analysis to the past 22 years. All articles were examined to remove duplicates, calls for editors, and calls for general manuscripts (n = 165). Table 1 reflects the results from this portion of the mentorship search results.

Table 1

*Counseling Mentorship Articles in Counseling Journals*

Journal	Mentoring Articles	Total Possible Articles	Mentorship Percentage
Adultspan Journal*	15	136	11.03%
British Journal of Guidance & Counselling	10	943	1.06%
Counseling & Values*	1	430	0.23%
Counseling Outcome Research and Evaluation*	12	74 (Since 2010)	16.22%
Counselling Psychology Quarterly	2	699	0.29%
Counselor Education & Supervision*	7	482	1.45%
International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling	8	639	1.25%
Journal of College Counseling*	3	247	1.21%
Journal of Counseling & Development*	9	1,204	0.75%
Journal of Multicultural Counseling & Development*	4	463	0.86%
Journal for Social Action in Counseling and Psychology*	2	170	1.18%
Journal of Addictions & Offender Counseling*	2	241	0.83%
Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*	2	454	0%
Journal of Employment Counseling*	3	387	0.01%
Journal of Humanistic Counseling*	7	363	2%
Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling*	0	260	0%
Journal of Mental Health Counseling*	2	631	0%
Journal of Military and Government Counseling*	9	76	11.84%
Measurement and Evaluation in Counseling and Development	1	368	0%
Professional School Counseling	10	880	0.01%
Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin*	2	520	0%
Journal for Specialists in Group Work*	1	821	0%
The Career Development Quarterly*	7	619	0.01%
The Family Journal	7	1,557	0.45%
The Behavior Therapist	32	750	0.04%
Professional Counselor	2	142	0.01%

*Note.* \* = ACA journal.

We examined each title, set of keywords, and abstract (at a minimum); next, two members of the coding team determined whether the article captured, or could potentially capture the higher education setting. We included articles using specific words such as undergraduate/graduate student, university, professor, dissertation, college, and higher education. Finally, we analyzed all remaining articles in order to ensure we included all which focused on counseling mentorship in higher education settings, resulting in a total of 56 articles.

**Specify the Categories.** Two researchers independently coded each article in four areas: general basis of article (e.g., research, non-research), type of research (e.g., mixed methods, qualitative, quantitative, non-research), methodology (e.g., confirmatory factor analysis, MANOVA/MANCOVA, descriptive statistics, t-test, correlation, ANOVA/ANCOVA, structural equation modeling, chi-square test, discriminant analysis, exploratory factor analysis, canonical analysis, cluster analysis, regression analysis, other, theme analysis/coding), and general focus area. The type of research was a chosen area for coding, as examining

whether publication trends focused on empirically based information may provide insight into what types of strategies we use in the field and whether we then test them for efficacy. The code for methodology involved different research strategies, allowing us to code each article for multiple classifications, and using assumed categories (Insch et al., 1997). Finally, the focus area was chosen to understand better where the profession began and how it has developed in its view of mentorship. The focus area categories were inuerred, allowing an inductive process, yet resulting in multiple categories (Insch et al., 1997).

**Generate a Sample Coding Scheme.** Using both assumed and inuerred categories, the team created a category coding document. We created a spreadsheet for each specific category, numbers assigned to each term within the category, and the two coders independently coded each of the 56 articles. Following coding, the third member of the research team examined the spreadsheets to determine levels of agreement, and to purify the coding scheme (Insch et al., 1997).

**Purify the Coding Scheme.** The third researcher described an issue with two areas of the coding scheme, leading to a redefinition of both content focus areas. We discussed this, resulting in a decision to return to the articles with the new definition of the content focus areas. This discussion resulted in two researchers coding each article an additional time.

**Assess Reliability.** Spreadsheets were hand-coded, which requires a test-retest by the same coder (Insch et al., 1997). Both members of the coding team performed the hand-coding task. The third investigator revisited the spreadsheets, serving as a member to identify errors and assist in any conflicts which may arise during the coding process (Insch et al., 1997). This process of a third party highlighting each pair of non-matching codes increased reliability while providing the two initial researchers an opportunity to meet, discuss and review each article and the assigned codes until we reached 100% interrater agreement.

**Analyze Data.** A simple trend analysis was performed to assist in counting and demonstrating trends across the 22-year analysis. We created charts and codes to address topics, aligned these topics to specific years and examined the data. Tables and figures were used to summarize large amounts of information succinctly. We separated research articles from non-research articles, with the content focus areas analyzed separately, according to research or non-research designation, and together. Each article was entered into a spreadsheet, complete with research citation and abstract. Separate members of the research team then coded these abstracts according to our code book. When abstracts were vague, or questions raised regarding the coding, full-text articles were reviewed for clarity.

## Results

*Research Question 1:* What is the amount of published counseling mentorship literature in the professional field from 1996-2017?

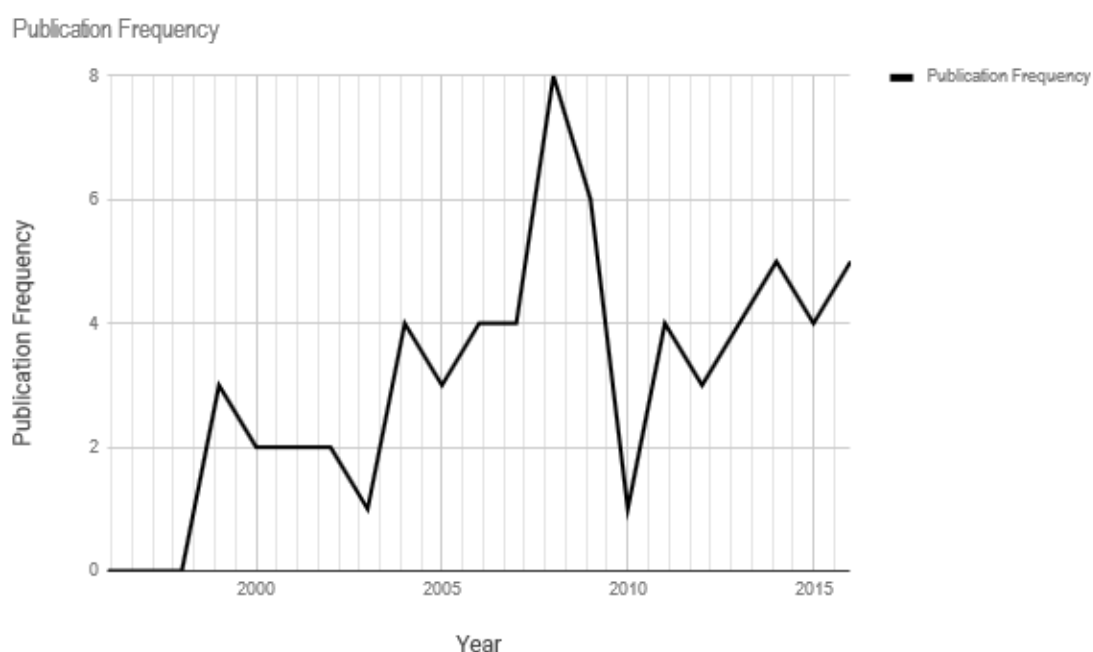
The counseling journals with the highest number of mentoring articles included *The Behavior Therapist* (n = 32), *Adultspan Journal* (n = 15), *Counseling Outcome Research and Evaluation* (n = 12), and *Journal of Military and Government Counseling* (n = 9). The journals with the highest percentage of mentorship articles as compared to total published articles were *Counseling Outcome Research and Evaluation* (16.22%), *Journal of Military and Government Counseling* (11.84%), and *Adultspan Journal* (11.03%). Of the 14,502 articles published from 1996-2017 (we analyzed *Counseling Outcome Research and Evaluation* from 2010-2017 due to

lack of online access), 165 focused on mentoring, which represents 0.01% of all published articles. Table 1 includes the results of the number of mentorship articles as compared to the total possible articles published in each journal.

After analyzing each of the mentoring articles in the 27 counseling journals, we found 56 articles which represented counseling mentorship in higher education. Figure 1 represents the frequency of publication across time. An increase in mentorship articles occurs from 2005 to the highest number published in one year, in 2008 (n = 8). In 2012, Counselor Education & Supervision published the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision Guidelines for Research and Mentorship (Borders et al., 2012). A gradual increase in mentorship in higher education publications seems to occur from 2012, with 36% (n = 4) of the research articles analyzed for this article published from 2012 to 2016.

Figure 1

*Frequency of Publication*



*Research Question 2:* What are the types of published counseling mentorship articles in counseling journals?

Of the 56 examined articles, there were four quantitative, three qualitative, four mixed methods, and 45 non-research-based articles. There were 11 counseling journals which published the 11 research-focused articles within the time. Two journals published two articles each (Counselor Education and Supervision, Journal of Counseling and Development, Journal of Humanistic Counseling), with the remaining five publishing one each (Adultspan Journal, International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling, Journal of College Counseling, The Behavior Therapist, and Professional Counselor). Of the 11 research-focused articles, we found the use of 27 methodologies; some articles listed multiple methodologies within one research focus. Descriptive statistics were most common within quantitative practice (n = 6), followed by regression (n = 3). Coding and theme analysis were most prevalent for qualitative research and mixed methods (n = 8), with consensual qualitative

research as the only other used qualitative methodology ( $n = 1$ ). Table 2 includes the methodology information from this analysis.

Table 2

*Methodology*

Methodology	Result
Confirmatory Factor Analysis	1
MANOVA/MANCOVA	1
Descriptive Statistics	6
t-test	2
Correlation	2
ANOVA/ANCOVA	2
Structural Equation Modeling	0
Chi-square test	0
Discriminant Analysis	0
Exploratory Factor Analysis	1
Canonical Analysis	0
Cluster Analysis	0
Regression Analysis	3
CQR	1
Other	0
Theme Analysis/Coding	8

We separated and analyzed the 45 articles which we placed into the non-research category. These comprised the majority of all examined articles (80%). After coding, the manuscripts fell into one of seven categories: conceptual, a letter from the editor, literature review, strategy, obituary, ponderings, and profiles. The strategy category held the most manuscripts ( $n = 12$ ; 27%), followed by profiles ( $n = 10$ ; 22%), and obituaries ( $n = 6$ ; 13%). There were five literature reviews, five conceptual articles, five ponderings, and one letter from the editor calling for increased mentorship in the field.

When combining articles coded as either research or non-research, the coding analysis allowed articles to fall into more than one content focus area. Examination of the 56 articles which fell into the counseling mentorship in higher education scope revealed 12 content focus areas. Twenty-three of the articles were assigned a single focus area; 15 assigned to two areas, 16 to three areas, three articles were assigned to four areas, and one article assigned to five content areas. Overall, mentorship of students was the most active focus area, representing 26% of all content areas.

Articles honoring mentors in the field or providing an obituary for a mentor was the second highest, with 12% of all content areas. The Behavior Therapist represented the highest number of publications of this kind, publishing 10 of the 15 articles (Journal of Counseling and Development published four, Journal of Creativity in Mental Health published one). Guidance or Best Practices was the third most substantial content area, with 10% of all content areas ( $n = 13$ ). See Table 3 for further delineation of focus area results.



Table 3

*Content Focus Areas*

Focus Area	Result
Guidance or Best Practices	13
Mentorship of Faculty	9
Model for mentorship or program for mentorship	12
Females/Gender	7
Development OR Framework	4
Mentorship of Students	33
Multicultural mentorship/Social Justice	12
Ethics	2
Obituary or article to honor a mentor	15
Research Training	11
Theory	3
Innovative Strategies	5

In order to understand the most recent research focusing on counseling mentorship, we examined articles published in the most recent two years of our analysis (2015-2017). Through this analysis, we located nine of the 56 total articles. Of the nine articles, four described specific mentors (i.e., an obituary, interview, description of losing a mentor, and spotlight on a mentor); two focused on undergraduate research mentorship, one provided challenges and training recommendations for first-generation students, with the final two articles which outlined the self-compassion framework for counselor education mothers, and ethical issues with graduate students serving as mentors, respectively.

### Discussion

The researchers developed this study to examine the patterns of publications in counselor education mentorship over the past 22 years. We reviewed publications to provide an answer to the longitudinal trends of mentorship in counselor education and the type of publications focused on counseling mentorship. Awareness of trends of publication in counselor education can help provide the field with gaps in the literature, hopefully sparking more research on this vital topic, in response to the call for counseling mentorship research.

The trend in counseling mentorship publications is highest in 2008 with eight publications across 26 journals. The Behavior Therapist published the most counseling mentorship articles in the 22 years, with Counseling Outcome Research and Evaluation representing the most significant mentorship publications to total publications ratio. However, we analyzed Counseling Outcome Research and Evaluation publications since 2010 due to author accessibility issues. After ACES presented the guidelines for effective mentorship in 2012 (Borders et al.), mentorship as a topic in counseling publications has increased, particularly in the area of student mentorship.

The most common type of mentorship article focused on the subtopic of mentoring students. More than half of all of the examined articles included a content focus of mentoring students. This emphasis in the articles reviewed could be separated into a separate publication because it represents such a broad topic as counselor education programs begin to branch out in online delivery and increase in diversity. The next highest publication

content focus (obituary or article to honor a mentor) covered 27% of the publications. We were surprised at the number of articles which we coded as non-research.

The majority of articles published on mentorship involved non-research. Specifically, strategies of effective mentorship are the most common type of article found on mentorship. This draw towards publishing mentorship strategies indicates that the field has an interest in what effective mentorship is, but notably, is not capturing quantitative or qualitative research on the topic. The authors found 11 articles out of 56 (20%) with a research focus on mentorship. The most common type of information shared was theme analysis or coding. Counselor Education and Supervision, Journal of Counseling and Development, and the Journal of Humanistic Counseling published the most amount of research-based mentorship articles with two publications each from 1996-2017.

### **Limitations**

This study includes several limitations. Limitations of this content analysis include the inclusion criteria of the journals examined. Content analysis, as a research method, examines current published research in a particular set of professional journals but does not examine research which may be in progress or rejected for publication in this professional field. Therefore, trends in mentorship publication may not necessarily reflect trends in mentorship interest or current research. Additionally, some journals allowed online access only after a certain point in time--this may have reduced our results, and we did not examine one journal (VISTAS) due to the announcement that publication would no longer continue.

Another limitation includes coding methodology. Although two authors independently coded each article, with a separate author reviewing for both inter-rater agreement and adherence to the agreed-upon definition of each coding area, subjectivity may be present. The chosen codes were intended to be broad, but are likely not all-encompassing, and other research teams may break them into separate categories.

A third limitation includes the window of years examined (1996-2017). Counselor education mentorship has been a topic of literary interest for many years. Expanding the years included in the content analysis could have increased the description of the longitudinal trends in publications. Future research may want to examine both past and present publications on mentorship, using this article as a starting point.

### **Implications for Counseling Mentorship Research**

Former editors of the Counselor Education and Supervision Journal, in the 50th-anniversary issue, encouraged "potential contributors to engage in research mentoring partnerships" to enhance the "scholarly voice of our profession" (Black & Helm, 2010; p.3). This sentiment was echoed by the authors of the ACES Guidelines for Research Mentorship (Borders et al., 2012), adding, "...to all counselor educators to further embrace research mentorship" (p.171). Since the publication of the initial call to counseling professionals and subsequent delineation of professional research mentorship guidelines, there has been a gradual increase in mentorship publication in the professional counseling journals examined through this content analysis.

In the reviewed publications, student mentorship was the most frequently published content area. So much so, that the authors feel that student mentorship could be a separate research agenda compared to the other subtopics found in the literature. However, the authors would also argue that including the mentorship of faculty in future research due to its implications on counselor educators' wellness and job satisfaction is essential to the

field (Xu & Payne, 2014). Counselor development does not cease upon graduation from a Master's program; counseling mentorship should also continue as a counselor encounters new goals and issues through their work.

Overall, we found the majority of research mentorship publications belonging in the non-research category (80%). Professional journals may wish to sponsor special issues related to effective, outcome-driven mentorship. Also, researchers can begin to look at instrumentation that captures the qualities of the relationship between mentors and mentees, similar to the therapeutic working alliance. In essence, this article serves to answer the call for what effective mentorship looks like, as captured by publications in the field.

Future research directions may benefit from an increase in research-focused topics and studies (Black, Suarez, & Medina, 2004). The areas of "mentorship of students," "obituaries or articles to honor a mentor," and "guidance or best practices" were the most commonly recognized themes for publications. Research focusing on the application of guidance or best practices within the focus of mentoring students may provide insight into whether the counseling profession is utilizing stated guidelines in their mentorship practice. Finally, the impact of junior faculty mentorship by senior faculty can increase awareness of the benefits for those involved in the relationship, and for the counseling profession (Atieno Okech, Astramovich, Johnson, Hoskins, & Rubel, 2006; Briggs & Pehrsson, 2008). The goal of this content analysis was to provide an overview of the research published in professional counseling journals over the past two decades, mainly focusing on the role of counseling mentorship in higher education. Rheineck and Roland (2008), in the peak year of mentorship publishing, stated, "the developmental and professional growth that has emerged from positive and fulfilling mentorship relationships has proven through the years to be essential to career success and satisfaction" (p.91). This content analysis intends to parallel the statements of counseling professionals over the past 10 years, which urge us to enhance the professional identity and scholarship of counselors and their mentees, across the field.

This article was written to answer the call for research on mentorship in counselor education. The authors examined the trends of publication and found little empirical support for how we envision effective mentorship. This study was a starting point for future researchers to help identify the gaps in the literature. These findings support the need for more outcome-driven mentorship studies. We could add to the competency of counseling programs in providing those relationships by increasing empirical literature on what is effective in mentorship across the counselor education field. As a profession, responding to the call for additional research mentorship through the use of qualitative and quantitative studies seems imperative to continued success for future counselors and counselor educators.

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