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Adultspan Publication Patterns: Author and Article Characteristics From 1999 to 2009

Bradley T. Erford, Kelly H. Clark, and Breann M. Erford

Publication patterns of articles in Adultspan from 1999 to 2009 were re-viewed. Author characteristics and article content were analyzed to determine trends over time. Research articles were analyzed specifically for type of research design, classification, sampling method, types of participants, sample size, types of statistics used, and statistical sophistication.

Research regarding adult development is a critically important area of the extant counseling literature. Adult development literature informs counseling practice with diverse clientele and allows discourse on essential theoretical and professional issues. *Adultspan* is the official journal of the Association for Adult Development and Aging (AADA), a division of the American Counseling Association (ACA), and was first published in 1999. No issues of *Adultspan* were published from 2002 to 2004, but publication resumed in 2005 and continues to the present time. Past editors of *Adultspan* have included Larry Burlew (Vol. 1, No. 1) and Peter Emerson (Vol. 1, No. 2; Vol. 2, No. 1). The current editor is Catherine Roland (Vol. 2, No. 2 to the present). *Adultspan* is jointly published by AADA and ACA and primarily publishes theoretical, practice, and research articles of interest to professional counselors who work with adult clients of all ages and in all settings. The purpose of this article is to provide the first comprehensive review of *Adultspan* journal content with a specific focus on describing article and author characteristics and trends.

Erford, Miller, Duncan, and Erford (2010) identified three primary ways to understand evolutionary changes in journal content and characteristics: special sections and issues, qualitative reviews, and quantitative metastudies. Special sections and issues published by a journal can be quickly reviewed to identify the important professional or topical issues affecting a profession and society. Only

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one special issue has been published in *Adultspan*, and it focused on women's development (Vol. 6, No. 1). A second approach, ordinarily undertaken by skillful, knowledgeable scholars, involves a systematic, qualitative review of journal article characteristics to point out content-related findings and trends. The third approach, and the one adopted for this study of *Adultspan* publication patterns, is a quantitative, descriptive metastudy approach that documents author and article characteristics. Usually, research articles are of special interest, particularly the methodologies, sample characteristics, and statistical methods used. However, in a quantitative metastudy, characteristics are described numerically, collapsed into time periods, and analyzed statistically to identify trends over time. Identification of important professional, scholarly, and social justice issues and trends over time can be valuable to a journal's consumers and decision makers.

Although this is the first publication pattern review conducted for *Adultspan* articles, similar analyses have been conducted for other counseling journals published by ACA. For example, Erford et al. (2010) conducted a publication pattern review of *Measurement and Evaluation in Counseling and Development (MECD; 1990–2009)*; Crockett, Byrd, Erford, and Hays (2010) for *Counselor Education and Supervision (CES; 1985–2009)*; Charkow and Juhnke (2001) and Juhnke, Bordeau, and Evanoff (2005) for the *Journal of Addictions and Offender Counseling (1979–1998 and 1999–2004, respectively)*; and Streicher and Gerstein (1994) for the *Journal of Mental Health Counseling (1979–1992)*. Perhaps the counseling journal that has been given the greatest attention to date is the *Journal of Counseling & Development (JCD; and its previous incarnation The Personnel and Guidance Journal)*, portions of which have been analyzed by Berry and Wolf (1958); Stone and Shertzer (1964); Brown (1969); Pelsma and Cesari (1989); Weinrach, Lustig, Chan, and Thomas (1998); and Williams and Buboltz (1999), although each of these review articles focused broadly on various article and author characteristics. In more recent times, Erford et al. (2011); Bangert and Baumberger (2005); and Nilsson, Love, Taylor, and Slusher (2007) focused more on the content, design, sample, and statistical characteristics of the research articles published within *JCD*.

In this publication pattern review of *Adultspan* articles published between 1999 and 2009, two primary questions were addressed: (a) What are the characteristics of authors who publish in *Adultspan* (author characteristics)? and (b) What is published in *Adultspan* (article characteristics)? with a particular emphasis on the characteristics of the research articles. Also fundamental to this study, given the eight-volume history of *Adultspan*, was the question of whether author and article characteristics changed over time.

METHOD

All *Adultspan* articles published between 1999 and 2009 were reviewed for selection into this analysis, and data from each selected article were coded for

specific author and article characteristics. Author characteristics included the names, number, sex, employment setting, university affiliation, and national/international domicile of all authors. Because nearly all authors were professors or graduate students, author professional position titles were not coded. Also, because of the difficulty in accurately categorizing departmental names, which are diversely configured in the modern university, departmental affiliations were not coded.

Article characteristics of interest included article type (i.e., research, theory/practice, and book review) and topic (e.g., career/retirement, multicultural issues, sexual minority issues, wellness). Research articles appearing in *Adultspan* were analyzed separately to explore emerging trends in the article characteristics of intervention/nonintervention, types of research designs (e.g., survey, comparative, correlational, descriptive, quasi-experimental), participants sampled (e.g., college undergraduates, retirees, sexual minorities, professional counselors), sample sizes, research method (i.e., qualitative, quantitative), statistical sophistication (i.e., basic, intermediate, advanced), and statistical analyses used (e.g., descriptive, correlation, regression analysis, analysis of variance [ANOVA], multivariate analysis of variance [MANOVA]). Intervention means that the independent variable of treatment was under experimental control and included true experimental or quasi-experimental designs (Erford et al., 2011). Nonintervention was defined as any other type of design (e.g., correlational, comparative, qualitative). All data were coded independently by the second and third authors, and any disagreements were adjudicated by the lead author. The overall agreement rate between coders across all 25 categories exceeded 99%.

Coded data were entered into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, aggregated into three convenient class intervals (i.e., 1999–2001 [Vols. 1–3], 2005–2007 [Vols. 4–6], and 2008–2009 [Vols. 7–8]) and analyzed using SPSS with descriptive and univariate statistical procedures (ANOVA) using weighted proportions to identify trends over time. Weighted proportion ANOVA was chosen over a repeated measures ANOVA procedure because the latter assumes measurement of the same individuals/units over time. In this study, the data consisted of different articles, authors, and units over the eight-volume period, so the assumption was violated. Type I error was established at $\alpha < .05$, and significant findings were further analyzed using Scheffé’s test. Effect sizes are reported as eta squared (η^2) using a rule-of-thumb interpretive range of .01 (small effect), .09 (medium effect), and .25 (large effect).

RESULTS

Between 1999 and 2009, *Adultspan* published 87 articles within eight volumes. Of these articles, 11 (12.6%) were excluded from the present analysis because the articles involved brief, non-research-related contributions, primarily editorials. This resulted in 76 articles coded for the present analyses. Aligned with the

research questions, the following results are categorized according to author characteristics and article characteristics.

Author Characteristics

To gauge whether *Adultspan* draws from a national or international community of scholars, we compared the domicile (U.S. or international) of the lead author. Only one article published in *Adultspan* was submitted by a lead author residing outside the United States. The main effect for variation across time periods was not significant (i.e., did not reach the $\alpha < .05$ level of significance), $F(2, 73) = 1.09, p = .34, \eta^2 = .03$.

Female authors composed the majority of lead authors and total authors of *Adultspan* articles by nearly a 2:1 margin, and these results have remained stable over the past decade: lead authorship, $F(2, 73) = 0.08, p = .93, \eta^2 = .002$; total authorship, $F(2, 134) = 0.78, p = .46, \eta^2 = .01$. A similar nonsignificant effect was noted regarding author employment setting given that nearly 95% of both lead authors and all authors hailed from university settings. These results were also quite stable over the past decade: lead author employment setting, $F(2, 72) = 0.95, p = .39, \eta^2 = .03$; all authors employment setting, $F(2, 131) = 0.17, p = .85, \eta^2 = .003$. Thus, nearly all authors (95%) of *Adultspan* articles over the past decade were affiliated with a university. The average number of authors per article published in *Adultspan* over the past decade has averaged 1.80 and has remained very stable over time.

Finally, it should be noted that some authors and university faculty have been prominent contributors to *Adultspan*. Using a method for weighting author contribution according to author order (i.e., first author receives three points, second author receives two points, and third or subsequent authors receive one point; Juhnke et al., 2005), we determined that the top three individual contributors to *Adultspan* from 1999 to 2009 were Jane E. Myers (15 points), Susanne Degges-White (14 points), and Andrew P. Daire (nine points), with approximately eight additional authors tied for fourth place with six points each. In addition, universities with authors publishing most frequently in *Adultspan* included Montclair State University (six articles), University of North Carolina at Greensboro (five articles), and the University of Central Florida (four articles).

Article Characteristics

Over the past decade, the *Adultspan* editorial board categorized articles according to a typology: (a) reports (research), (b) articles (practice and theory), and (c) book reviews. Inspection of the typological classification over time indicates a transition as more book reviews were published; however, given the sample size, no statistically significant differences can be documented at this point, $F(2, 73) = 1.80, p = .17, \eta^2 = .05$. An average of approximately 35% of all articles appearing in *Adultspan* over the past decade were research articles, whereas 55% were practice/theory articles. Display of the content topics appearing in

Adultspan is presented in Table 1. Although the small sample size made statistical analysis unreliable, a quick inspection indicates that most of the content categories were relatively stable over time. Exceptions include slight increases in percentages of articles related to caregivers and counseling techniques, and concomitant slight decreases in career/retirement counseling and aging issues. Again, the small sample sizes related to frequency of topic occurrence require great caution when interpreting potential microtrends.

The remainder of this section focuses exclusively on characteristics of the 27 research articles published in *Adultspan* between 1999 and 2009. The data in Table 2 indicate that the proportions of types of research designs remained relatively stable over the review period, $F(2, 39) = 1.23, p = .30, \eta^2 = .06$, as did studies using intervention within the design, $F(2, 24) = 1.36, p = .28, \eta^2 = .10$; only approximately 18.5% of all research articles in *Adultspan* involve an intervention within the design. Approximately 25% of the research articles used a qualitative methodology, and this proportion has been stable over time, $F(2, 25) = 0.52, p = .60, \eta^2 = .04$.

Proportions of types of participants used in *Adultspan* research studies have remained relatively unchanged over the past decade, with nearly 20% of the total number of samples composed of undergraduate students and an additional 20% composed of older adults (60 years or older). An additional 16% of samples were composed of retirement community residents, and another 16% were composed of adult participants not easily classified elsewhere. Only one out of 27 studies (3.7%) used a randomized design, meaning that

TABLE 1
Summary of Content Topics in *Adultspan* Articles From 1999 to 2009

Content Topic	1999–2001		2005–2007		2008–2009	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Aging issues	5	83.3	1	16.7	0	0.0
Career/retirement counseling	4	57.1	2	28.6	1	14.3
Caregivers	0	0.0	4	50.0	4	50.0
Counseling techniques	0	0.0	1	20.0	4	80.0
Death and dying, grief, loss	1	16.7	3	50.0	2	33.3
Interpersonal relationships	6	50.0	3	25.0	3	25.0
Mental health issues	3	30.0	5	50.0	2	20.0
Multicultural	1	12.5	6	75.0	1	12.5
Physical health issues	1	14.3	3	42.9	3	42.9
Psychosocial issues	7	53.8	0	0.0	6	46.2
Sexuality	0	0.0	3	75.0	1	25.0
Sexual minority issues	4	57.1	3	42.9	0	0.0
Spirituality	1	20.0	3	60.0	1	20.0
Wellness	2	13.3	9	60.0	4	26.7

Note. Many articles contained more than one content topic and were multicoded. Therefore, the total values may exceed the actual number of articles accepted into the analysis. Percentages may not equal 100% because of rounding.

TABLE 2

Types of Research Designs Used in *Adulthoodspan* Research Articles From 1999 to 2009

Research Design	1999–2001		2005–2007		2008–2009	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Survey	7	50.0	4	30.8	5	33.3
Interview	2	14.3	0	0.0	1	6.7
Case study	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	13.3
Correlational	1	7.1	5	38.5	4	26.7
Comparative	3	21.4	1	7.7	3	20.0
Quasi-experimental	1	7.1	2	15.4	0	0.0
True experimental	0	0.0	1	7.7	0	0.0

Note. Some articles used more than one type of research design and were multicoded. Therefore, the total values may exceed the actual number of research articles accepted into the analysis. Percentages may not equal 100% because of rounding.

the use of nonrandomized study designs predominated and remained stable over time, $F(2, 24) = 1.21, p = .32, \eta^2 = .09$. Likewise, sample sizes remained stable over time, $F(2, 24) = 1.40, p = .27, \eta^2 = .10$. It is interesting that large samples (100–499 participants) accounted for the majority of sample sizes over the years.

Statistical sophistication in this study was identified by assessing the frequency of usage of basic, intermediate, and advanced statistics in *Adulthoodspan* research studies and has remained very stable over time, $F(2, 30) = 0.43, p = .66, \eta^2 = .03$. Not surprisingly, the data in Table 3 indicate that there have not been significant shifts in usage of specific types of statistical procedures represented in *Adulthoodspan* research studies over the past decade, $F(2, 42) = 0.47, p = .63, \eta^2 = .02$.

TABLE 3

Types of Statistical Procedures Used in *Adulthoodspan* Research Articles From 1999 to 2009

Statistical Procedure	1999–2001		2005–2007		2008–2009	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Descriptive statistics	4	36.4	2	12.5	6	33.3
Correlation	1	9.1	3	18.8	4	22.2
MANOVA	2	18.2	3	18.8	2	11.1
<i>t</i> test	1	9.1	2	12.5	0	0.0
ANOVA	1	9.1	3	18.8	2	11.1
Regression analysis	1	9.1	3	18.8	4	22.2
Nonparametric	1	9.1	0	0.0	0	0.0

Note. Some articles used more than one type of statistical procedure and were multicoded. Therefore, the total values may exceed the actual number of research articles accepted into the analysis. Percentages may not equal 100% because of rounding. MANOVA = multivariate analysis of variance; ANOVA = analysis of variance.

DISCUSSION

Adulthoodspan has maintained a consistent standard of quality across all variables assessed in this metastudy of publication patterns, while responding to professional issues and societal challenges. In the following discussion of findings, we address the two primary questions of author and article characteristics, all of which demonstrated stable frequencies over the 8 years of publication.

Author Characteristics: Who Publishes in *Adulthoodspan*?

Counseling has become an international profession over the past few decades, so it was of interest to determine whether *Adulthoodspan* is developing an international audience. To do so, one could assess whether international *Adulthoodspan* subscriptions and AADA membership are on the rise, or one could look at the number of international submissions to the journal as another method. Surprisingly, only one *Adulthoodspan* article has been published over the past 10 years from a lead author domiciled outside of the United States, thus indicating that *Adulthoodspan*'s reach is primarily domestic. It is interesting that several other ACA-published journals also have U.S.-domiciled lead author rates of approximately 95% that have been stable over time (i.e., *CES* [Crockett et al., 2010] and *JCD* [Erford et al., 2011]), whereas a third counseling journal formerly published by ACA (*MECD*) has experienced a substantial increase in international articles, rising to nearly 20% in recent years (Erford et al., 2010). It will be interesting to continue to track this demographic over the next decade to see if *Adulthoodspan*'s audience broadens to a more global impact, thus attracting an international audience of scholars and expanding the reach of the journal to international university libraries and international adult development specialists.

Female authors have consistently composed nearly two thirds of all authors and all lead authors from the inception of *Adulthoodspan*. This result reflects the prominence of women in both the gender demographics of AADA and among faculty members in counseling programs across the United States. Also, more than 95% of all authors and all lead authors were employed or primarily affiliated with a university setting, which also reflected a stable result over time and mirrored recent trends noted in other counseling journals (Charkow & Juhnke, 2001; Crockett et al., 2010; Erford et al., 2010; Erford et al., 2011; Streicher & Gerstein, 1994). In some ways, this is an expected result, because university faculty live in a "publish or perish" environment and are expected to contribute to the extant literature. In some ways, however, the result is troubling, because the voices of field-based practitioners, whose knowledge and expertise often place them at the forefront of practice and supervision, have become diminished. Have practicing counselors specializing in adult development become divorced from the research efforts that form the scientific foundations of their practice? Have practitioners curtailed their interest in searching for new practice methods and knowledge, focusing exclusively on the provision

of fee-based services? Have scholars stopped reaching out to and collaborating with field-based practitioners? Are counselor educators failing to instill in new counselors the passion or capacity for conducting field-based research? These and other questions merit exploration as a way of engaging practitioners, who could provide rich sources of expertise and field access, in the inquiry process.

A consistent result over the past decade is that approximately 1.80 authors contributed to each *Adultspan* article. This result does not seem to reflect the growing trend of multiple authorships evident in other counseling disciplines or other more varied disciplines within academia. For example, this trend toward more authors is easily seen in medical and psychology journals where five to 10 authors from a single research team often collaborate on a published study. Evaluations of other counseling journals have revealed that as the number of research articles increases, so does the average number of authors per article, probably because authors are collaborating as research teams. For example, Erford et al. (2010) reported that the average number of authors in *MECD* increased more than one whole author during the 1990–2009 time period, and Crockett et al. (2010) determined that average per-article author contributions to *CES* increased 0.71 authors between 1985 and 2009. Given the prominence of university contributors to *Adultspan*, perhaps as faculty authors reach out to collaborate with field-based practitioners and continue to provide mentoring opportunities to junior faculty and graduate students, the average number of authors per article will increase.

Article Characteristics: What Is Published in *Adultspan*?

Over the past decade, *Adultspan* has published a relatively consistent proportion of research articles and slightly decreasing proportion of theory- or practice-related articles, whereas the proportion of book review articles has steadily increased. The small sample size of articles makes it difficult to analyze likely trends, but it seems that the *Adultspan* editorial board has maintained a commitment to balance the scientific foundation of the adult development discipline with the needs of field-based practitioners and counselor educators for effective treatment methods. Analysis of content topics published in *Adultspan* (see Table 1) shows a well-balanced attempt to provide important topic coverage, and no significant shifts in content categories over time were noted. The *Adultspan* editor has provided a well-balanced approach to essential adult development issues over the years.

Visual inspection of the data in Table 2 indicates that nonexperimental research designs (i.e., survey, interview, case study, correlational, comparative) predominate, accounting for approximately 88% of research studies published in *Adultspan* compared with only 12% for experimental designs. These results are highly similar to reports by Erford et al. (2010), Erford et al. (2011), and Bangert and Baumberger (2005) that 15% of the recent *JCD* research articles were intervention articles. A similar percentage (12%) was reported

for *CES* experimental designs (Crockett et al., 2010). It is important to note that increased publication of articles with these more robust experimental designs helps build a foundational understanding of effective counseling interventions, because they allow greater generalization to the populations under study. It is also noted that only approximately 18% of *Adulthoodspan* articles were intervention-based studies, and more of these types of articles would likely be of great interest to practitioners, students, or educators. Also, nearly 25% of all research studies used qualitative methodology. Qualitative inquiry is quite likely to play an important role in *Adulthoodspan* research articles in the near future because it answers important “how” questions; generates theory based on rich, thick description; and allows the application of inductive models to scientific inquiry.

What sample characteristics are noted in *Adulthoodspan* research studies? An even spread of participant types was noted across undergraduate students (20%), adults 60 years and older (20%), retirement community residents (16%), and adult participants not better classified in other categories (16%), together accounting for nearly three quarters of all participant samples used in *Adulthoodspan* research studies. The trend analysis indicated no significance over time, meaning that the types of participants composing *Adulthoodspan* research samples have been quite stable over time. The sample sizes used in *Adulthoodspan* research articles have also remained relatively stable across time, and the median sample size across all studies was 125 participants. Although this median sample size is consistent with those reported for other counseling journals, such as *CES* (Crockett et al., 2010) and *JCD* (Erford et al., 2011), it is interesting to note that *Adulthoodspan* research articles have a higher percentage of large sample sizes (59%) than do either *CES* (36%) or *JCD* (46%). Larger samples tend to have better generalizability to populations sampled. On the other hand, less than 4% of *Adulthoodspan* research studies used some sort of randomization procedure, a result that tends to limit the generalizability of findings. As a result, it is important that *Adulthoodspan* authors using convenience samples stress the preliminary nature of these studies until the results are confirmed with more robust and generalizable experimental designs using randomization procedures. By extension, counselors should exercise caution in applying findings from nonrandomized studies to clinical work. Researchers publishing in *Adulthoodspan* are encouraged to use randomized designs and large, representative samples and to report effect sizes and power analyses to increase the generalizability of findings and inform readers as to the veracity and applicability of results.

The final facet of analysis included the sophistication of statistical analyses and types of statistics found in *Adulthoodspan* research articles. In general, the proportion of basic, intermediate, and advanced level statistics remained unchanged between 1999 and 2009, as did the specific types of statistics. Approximately half of *Adulthoodspan* research studies published between 1999 and 2009 used some type of basic statistic, 30% used an intermediate level statistic, and 20%

used an advanced statistic; these figures are consistent with results from other counseling journals (Crockett et al., 2010; Erford et al., 2010). Correlation and regression analysis occurred in nearly 35% of *Adultspan* studies over the past decade, approximately equivalent to the use of statistics determining group differences (*t* test, ANOVA, MANOVA). As new procedures and technologies develop over time, it is not unusual for some statistical procedures to become more or less prominent. However, because most *Adultspan* readers are master's-level practitioners and students, it is critical that authors communicate the statistical analyses and implications of the findings in understandable terms so that practitioners can apply the findings judiciously in the practice setting.

Limitations of This Metastudy

This metastudy is subject to a number of important limitations, because it involved the coding of approximately 20 distinct variables appearing in a set of 76 articles occurring over an eight-volume set. Perhaps the biggest limitation related to the interpretation of results is the lack of power in determining significant trends over time because of the small number of articles reviewed in this metastudy ($k = 76$) and composing each convenient class interval ($k = 24, 31, \text{ and } 21$ for 1999–2001, 2005–2007, and 2008–2009, respectively). The study sample sizes used in analysis of the research article set were even smaller ($k = 11, 8, \text{ and } 8$ across the three time periods, respectively). As sample size decreases, so does statistical power ($1 - \beta$) and the researcher's ability to reject a false null hypothesis (α). As the number of studies published in *Adultspan* increases over the next decade and as larger "viewing windows" (e.g., 5-year periods rather than 2- or 3-year periods) are used, a clearer picture of *Adultspan* publication trends across myriad variables will likely emerge.

Even though the data were independently coded by two authors and any disagreements adjudicated by the lead author, some classification errors may have occurred. Some variables and categories were more subjective and difficult to code than were others, requiring greater degrees of expertise. Also, other researchers may have chosen to code different variables and categories than did the current research team. We developed broad-based categories to reach general conclusions over time, whereas others may be more interested in narrower, more specific categories useful in analyzing microtrends, which are usually less replicable and more subjected to random variations in characteristics over time.

It is essential to note that because the data presented in this metastudy were descriptive, no cause-and-effect relationships can be inferred from the results and analyses. Indeed, we attempted to avoid overgeneralizations and unfounded conclusions. Also, we sought to avoid biased or judgmental statements so as not to diminish the accomplishments of dedicated volunteer journal editors and editorial board members.

A metastudy of publication review articles is meant to offer a periodic insight into the professional issues, priorities, and values of a profession by identifying

addressed and neglected topics and occurrences in the extant literature. We hope that the information included in this review is helpful to *Adultspan* readers, editorial board members, and potential authors in the discipline of adult development and aging.

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