I want to share with you some observations and “things I would like to see” in submitted manuscripts that are based on my experience over the last two years as incoming editor of the *Journal of Pediatric Psychology* (JPP), previous experience in editing and providing reviews, and feedback from JPP’s associate editors. The second in a series of editorials, this one focuses on suggestions to enhance the quality of an introduction to a manuscript. My hope is that this will be useful to authors as well as reviewers in evaluating the quality of manuscripts.

Authors face a formidable challenge in crafting a convincing introduction. In a few pages authors need to clarify the relevance of their research to the field of pediatric psychology, specify the focus, primary question, hypotheses, and framework, and establish the significance and new scientific contribution of their work relative to previous research.

**Clarify the Relevance of Research to the Field of Pediatric Psychology**

In order for research to be considered for publication in JPP, it needs to be relevant to research and practice in the field of pediatric psychology. Pediatric psychology encompasses a broad range of topics as well as highly specialized areas of scientific and clinical knowledge (Roberts, 2003). For this reason, it may be difficult for authors to identify and address the most significant scientific questions in this field. Authors who are new to the field of pediatric psychology or submitting to JPP for the first time may not appreciate the research questions that are most important and/or relevant to the field and its mission. Topic areas of greatest relevance are those that pertain to child health, illness, and pediatric conditions and are described in the mission statement in the front matter of each issue JPP right after the table of contents. Authors may also wish to review recent issues of JPP to identify relevant topic areas.

The fact that the field of pediatric psychology overlaps and integrates with the fields of child development, pediatrics, and child clinical psychology complicates an author’s task of discerning specific relevance of their work for the field of pediatric psychology. Authors should carefully consider whether their top priority is to reach an audience of pediatric psychologists. Alternatively, do they want to reach an audience of general pediatricians, pediatric subspecialists, behavioral-developmental pediatrics, child development researchers or psychologists who work with children primarily outside of pediatric settings? If it is the latter, JPP is probably not the best outlet.

**Specify the Focus of the Research**

A convincing introduction should have clear and consistent focus (Brown, 2004). For optimal impact, the literature review, and hypotheses should be selective, highly focused, and integrated rather than discursive or diffuse. An unfocused presentation can confuse reviewers and hence detract from the significance of a study. When disparate areas of research are cited as is often the case in the field of pediatric psychology, authors should establish a clear rationale for reviewing research in the specific domains and integrate them within a guiding framework. Moreover, the components of the introduction should be presented in a logical sequence culminating in the research question and hypotheses as relevant.

**Present a Clear Research Question and Explicit Hypotheses**

Reviewers need to understand and appreciate the question that is being addressed in the research in order to
appreciate its significance. For this reason, the primary research question needs to be clearly described and derived from previous research, theory, and/or clinical practice.

A surprising number of submitted manuscripts do not contain explicit hypotheses. I recognize that there are some areas of research that are so exploratory that authors may believe that hypotheses are premature or unwarranted. Nevertheless, by omitting explicit hypotheses, authors put their work at a significant disadvantage. Hypotheses not only help reviewers to understand the logic of study aims and predictions but provide a critical function in organizing the data analyses, thus reducing the likelihood that analyses will reveal spurious findings (Drotar, 2000).

Establish the Significance of the Work to Pediatric Psychology and Child Health

Assuming that authors have managed to run the gauntlet of establishing the relevance of their work to the field of pediatric psychology, their next task is to convince reviewers that their work is scientifically significant and, if at all possible, clinically significant. Various strategies of establishing scientific and clinical significance of research were described in my initial editorial (Drotar, 2008) and by others (Sternberg & Gordeeva, 1996). For the purpose of this discussion, the most important take home message is that authors should never assume that reviewers share their views of the work's significance. In fact, authors would do well to assume that reviewers may be lukewarm or indifferent to the significance of their research. Consequently, they need to convince reviewers that their research not only addresses a relevant, important question in the field of pediatric psychology but does so with innovative methods, theory, and/or findings that advance the state of science. Moreover, it is highly desirable that research also has significant relevance to clinical care in the field of pediatric psychology and/or public health.

Scientific significance is not the same as novelty of approach. For this reason, the central question for authors to address is not simply whether their research has been done before but whether it addresses a significant question in a way that advances scientific knowledge (Sternberg & Gordeeva, 1996). The clinical significance of the research topic and relevant findings are also important (Kazdin, 2000).

In reviewing previous research and articulating the significance of their research, authors need to describe how their research fits into yet also builds upon previous research on the topic yet transcends previous research with respect to scientific or clinical significance (Drotar, 2008). A selective review of research that is most relevant to and sets the stage for the author's research coupled with a focused critique that highlights the “transcendence factor” (e.g., how the current research addresses and surpasses previous work) are critical ingredients of an effective introduction. Authors should err on the side of self promotion (within the limits of taste, ethics, and reality) in order to make sure that reviewers fully appreciate the significance of their research (Drotar, 2008).

Use a Framework/Theoretical Model to Guide Research

Research questions and hypotheses are often derived from previous research. Where it is relevant, a conceptual framework or theoretical model can help to guide research and frame hypotheses. Wallander (1992) described the following advantages of theory building and testing to the field of pediatric psychology: (1) organizing and planning new research; (2) facilitating communication among investigators about the rationale and purpose of research; (3) developing a coherent plan and rationale for research design, especially for data analysis and interpretation, and; (4) relating study findings to other research and improving the power of inferences (Platt, 1964).

My reviews of manuscripts submitted to JPP over the past 2 years indicated that despite these above advantages many authors did not present a clear framework or theory to provide rationale. For maximum clarity and scientific impact, authors should not only mention a theory or framework relates demonstrate empirical tests of theory or competing theoretical models can be valuable the explicit connection of their work to the theory. The field of pediatric psychology has a rich array of theoretical models and frameworks for authors to choose from. For example, some of the theoretical models cited by authors in articles published in 2008 included the following: developmental, social environmental, neurobiological, biopsychological, stress and coping, behavioral risk, cognitive/learning, social role, and family process.

By now, I hope it is clear that an effective introduction is a critical, albeit challenging cornerstone of successful publication in JPP. Nevertheless, judging from the quality of published work during the past year, I know that many authors are ready for this challenge and that our associate editors and reviewers are well prepared to help them meet it.
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