



Editorial: Advancing Research on Child and Adolescent Psychopathology

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Published online: 4 December 2017

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It is a great honor to take over as Editor-in-Chief of the Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology (JACP) for a number of reasons. First, JACP is the official journal of the International Society for Research in Child and Adolescent Psychopathology (ISRCAP) and it has a long history of being a well-respected outlet for research on child and adolescent psychopathology throughout the world. Second, I will follow a line of editors who built JACP's reputation, each of whom are scholars that I have admired and respected throughout my academic career. This line of succession started with Herb Quay, the founding editor of the journal, followed by Don Routh, Sue Campbell, John Lochman, and, most recently, Charlotte Johnston. Their editorships have without exception proven exemplary in promoting the mission of the journal and holding papers published to the highest scientific ideals. They will be tough acts to follow and I will strive to continue this unbroken chain of quality leadership.¹ Third, I have published 18 manuscripts in the journal since my first work was published here in 1995 (Hart et al. 1995) and I have served on the editorial board of JACP since 1998. Thus, JACP feels like a home journal for me and I welcome the chance to be a part of guiding its future.

In taking over the editorship of JACP, it is important to note that this is not my first rodeo. I had the honor and pleasure of being editor for the *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology* from 2007 to 2011. Two things that I took from this experience will be reflected in this editorial. First, I learned to be a bit more circumspect (i.e., humbled) in my view of how much impact an editor can have on the field and even on a journal (Frick 2007). The ability to significantly

advance knowledge primarily depends on the quality, work, and professionalism of the scientists in the field, who conduct the research that will hopefully find its way to the journal pages. While an editorial staff can certainly help to ensure that only the best work finds its way to print and it is presented in the most scientifically rigorous manner, editors are quite limited in their ability to promote such work. In short, I learned over the course of my previous term as editor that editors largely serve the field, rather than guide it. Second, I learned that one of the most important determinants of an editor's success takes place before the start of the editorial term: the selection of the Associate Editors. The Associate Editors who serve as action editors for the majority of the papers submitted to the journal must be top scholars whose decisions on manuscripts (positive or negative) are accepted and respected from authors from around the world. To be respected, these scholars need to be highly successful scientists with a history of advancing science through publishing high quality and innovative research. As a result, they will already be overcommitted with existing responsibilities. Thus, they must be committed to the peer review process and the unrelenting time demands this requires.²

Thus, from past experience I have a strong appreciation for the importance of recruiting a stellar editorial staff. That is why I am so thankful to have an incredible team of associate editors that have agreed to serve JACP during this next editorial term. Dr. **Jennifer Hudson** is Professor and Director of the Centre for Emotional Health in the Department of Psychology at Macquarie University in Sydney Australia. Her research focuses on understanding factors that contribute to the development of anxiety disorders in children and adolescents. It also involves the development and evaluation of evidence based treatments for anxiety and depression in young people. Dr. **Bonnie Klimes-Dougan** is Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology at the University of Minnesota. Her research seeks to explicate risk factors, especially those involving stress/emotion

¹ Unfortunately, I hear ringing in my ears the phrase “You are the weakest link, good-bye”.

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² In short, a journal never wants an editor or an associate editor who actually has the time to do it. The journal needs an editorial staff that is willing to make the time to do it because it is critical for the field.

regulatory systems, associated with early stages of depression and suicidal risk in an effort to more effectively intervene. Dr. **Joshua Langberg** is Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology at Virginia Commonwealth University. His work focuses on improving the behavioral and academic functioning of children, adolescents, and emerging adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and on the dissemination and implementation of evidence-based interventions for youth with ADHD into school and community settings. Dr. **Abigail A. Marsh** is Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology at Georgetown University. Her work investigates emotional development and social perception, especially as they relate to empathy and aggression, using multiple approaches that include functional and structural brain imaging, as well as neurocognitive, genetic, and pharmacological methods. Dr. **Essi Viding** is Professor of Developmental Psychopathology in the Division of Psychology and Language Sciences at University College London. Her research combines cognitive-experimental measures, twin model-fitting, brain imaging, and genotyping to study different developmental pathways to persistent antisocial behavior. Dr. **Gregory Wallace** is Assistant Professor in the Department of Speech, Language, and Hearing Sciences at the George Washington University. His work focuses on neuropsychological and structural brain development in autism spectrum disorder and other neurodevelopmental disorders across the lifespan and their impacts on real-world outcomes. As you can see, this is an international editorial team that covers a wide range of expertise in child and adolescent psychopathology and includes expertise in a diversity of methods used in psychological and neurocognitive research.

Scope

Under this editorial team, the scope of JACP will not change greatly. It is provided here:

“The *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology* brings together the latest innovative research that advances knowledge of psychopathology from infancy through adolescence. The journal publishes studies that have a strong theoretical framework and use a diversity of methods, with an emphasis on empirical studies of the major forms of psychopathology found in childhood disorders (e.g., disruptive behavior disorders, depression, anxiety, and autism spectrum disorder). Studies focus on the epidemiology, etiology, assessment, treatment, prognosis, and developmental course of these forms of psychopathology. Studies highlighting risk and protective factors; the ecology and correlates of children's emotional, social, and behavior problems; and advances in prevention and treatment are featured.”

All manuscripts will be reviewed for how well they fit within this scope by me and only those that clearly fit will be considered for publication and undergo peer review. The key question that will determine whether a manuscript is appropriate for JACP will be whether the results have the potential to significantly advance knowledge of psychopathology from infancy through adolescence.

Clearly, this scope covers a very broad domain of research on the epidemiology, etiology, assessment, treatment, prognosis, and developmental course of psychopathology from infancy through adolescence. However, this scope does suggest that certain types of studies would likely not be appropriate for publication in JACP. Specifically, studies that focus solely on adult samples without clear and convincing indications of how the results advance knowledge of psychopathology prior to adulthood would not be appropriate for submission to JACP. Also, studies whose primary focus is on scale development would also not likely be appropriate, unless the results advance knowledge of psychopathology beyond how it is measured by a single instrument. Finally, JACP encourages research on interventions that advance knowledge on the prevention and treatment of psychopathological conditions in children and adolescents. However, pilot studies that focus largely on treatment development would likely not be accepted for publication, unless there is clear indications of how the results would have a substantial impact on the field without any data on the treatment's effectiveness or efficacy.

Goals

Again, I view an editor's role as more of a service to the field, rather than as a vehicle for promoting paradigmatic changes in how research is done. Within this context, I do have a few modest goals for my term as editor of JACP.

Encouraging Innovation As the premier journal for research on psychopathology in children and adolescents, the journal must maintain the highest scientific standards for papers that it publishes. However, I feel strongly that just because reviewers can find nothing wrong with the methods used in a manuscript, this does not mean it should be automatically accepted for publication in JACP. Such an editorial policy would slow innovation in the field. Thus, during my term as editor, the most important criteria for deciding whether a manuscript should be published in the journal is whether it **contributes substantially to existing research**. Further, I believe that the threshold for substantial impact should be quite high for JACP. I recognize that judging the contributions of a manuscript's results can be more subjective than evaluating its design and methodology. However, this is why the journal must have an editorial board and use reviewers who have published

extensively and are in the best position to not only judge the soundness of the theory and methods described in the manuscript but to also judge the significance of the manuscript's contribution to the existing literature. As a result, all reviewers for JACP will not only be asked to comment on and rate the soundness of a manuscript's theory, methods and interpretation of results, but they will also be asked to rate all manuscripts on the following scale of the "significance" of the results:

- 4 Major contribution
- 3 Important new lead
- 2 Some effect on field
- 1 No effect on field

Action editors for the journal will use this evaluation, and their own evaluation of the manuscript's innovation and contribution, as a critical criterion for final decisions on acceptance.

Encouraging a Diversity of Theories and Methods To advance knowledge on child and adolescent psychopathology, I feel very strongly that this is best accomplished through the use of a diversity of theories and methods. Studies must have sound research designs but this can include experimental, correlational, and longitudinal designs. Samples need to be appropriate for the research questions addressed. However, this can include human and animal participants; infants, children and adolescents; community, clinic-referred, inpatient, and forensic samples; to name a few. Similarly, the statistical analyses need to be appropriate for addressing the specific research questions but this often can be accomplished in a number of scientifically acceptable ways, each with certain strengths and limitations. In short, the JACP encourages papers that use a diversity of methods to make unique and innovative contributions to research.

In psychological research, there have been very important discussions recently about the overreliance on p values (Cumming 2014; Morey et al. 2014) and the failure to replicate findings (Lilienfeld 2017; Maxwell et al. 2015). These discussions have led to a number of important recommendations for how to enhance the importance of manuscripts published in journals, including the importance of reporting confidence intervals and effects sizes, in addition to statistical significance. These recommendations will be followed by the journal. However, one issue that is often underappreciated is the failure to provide strong theoretical models to guide study hypotheses, selection of measures, choice of analyses, and the interpretation of results. Statistical tests should be viewed as tools for making inferences about theoretical predictions but too often, these theoretical predictions are unclear and inadequately justified, leaving interpretations to rest solely

on the level of significance found for a particular analysis. Multiple findings that fall just below standard levels of significance that are consistent with a strong theory are likely to be more important and replicable than statistically significant findings that were not predicted. Thus, a critical consideration to the contribution of papers submitted to JACP will be whether the research questions, study methods, and the interpretation of results are embedded in a clear and well-supported theoretical model.

Prompt, Fair, and Scholarly Reviews Finally, the only way that JACP can fulfill its mission to advance knowledge of psychopathology in children and adolescents is if authors are willing to submit their best research to JACP. This goal is accomplished by providing authors with fair, scholarly, and professional reviews; timely decisions on publication; and a short lag time to publication. Possibly the most important way to accomplish this goal is by having an editorial board with top scholars in a diversity of areas of research on psychopathology. As you will see from our journal masthead, we have a stellar editorial board. The editorial staff is committed to continuously evaluating and enhancing this board throughout our term. We are also committed to ensuring that manuscripts have the best peer reviewers possible, even when expertise is needed outside of the editorial board. Finally, the journal staff has set up a number of procedures to ensure that authors receive decisions on a manuscript in a timely manner, with the goal of having decisions to authors within 2 months of submission.

Finally, a point of emphasis for JACP is that all reviews provided to authors will be professional. They should provide a scholarly critique of a paper and provide constructive feedback to authors without needless personal attacks. I have encountered (both as editor and as author) the view that it is a rite of passage and a healthy learning experience for authors to experience harsh criticism of their work. Further, this harsh criticism is often viewed as being necessary for protecting the quality of science being published by weeding out those thin-skinned researchers who cannot handle scientific skepticism and vigorous scholarly debate.³ Such a perspective gets promulgated by reviewers who find it cathartic to heap criticism on a paper they are reviewing that is comparable to what he or she has experienced from other reviewers. My view is that this type of peer review is not good for scientific process. Rather than holding papers to high standards, they reduce the integrity of the review process. Rather than subjecting papers to careful consideration of the scientific merit of the findings, they reduce the review process to biased personal attacks. Rather than encouraging and promoting better research and

³ I had a colleague in psychiatry once comment to me that he no longer published in psychology journals because psychologists liked to "eat their young" by providing harsh criticisms to authors on their work.

better researchers, it leads to hurt feelings that motivates revenge and leads promising young scholars to give up research careers. Thus, at JACP reviews that are not professional in tone will not be sent to authors and reviewers that refuse to provide scholarly and professional reviews will not be part of the peer review process at the journal.

Summary

Again, it is an honor to take over as editor-in-chief of the Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology and to serve authors who have devoted so much time and energy to conducting their research and preparing it for publication. I look forward to working with an incredible team of Associate Editors who are all top scholars in the field and who are also zealots in their commitment to the scientific process. I also look forward to working with the editorial board of JACP who all share these same traits. We are all committed to continuing the long tradition of the journal in providing an outlet for the best research using a diversity of methods embedded in strong theoretical frameworks to advance knowledge of psychopathology in important and innovative ways.

Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of Interest The author declares that he has no conflict of interest.

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