

Family Relations

**Translational Science as Core Identity for Family Science: It was There All the Time**

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Review

TRANSLATIONAL FAMILY SCIENCE

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Running Head: Translational Family Science

*GUEST EDITORS' NOTE*

Looking Backward, Around, and Forward: Family Science Has Always Been Translational  
Science

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Family science is at a turning point in its development. For some this turning point is part of a broader cycle, whereas others characterize it as a “code red” call to arms to save family science before it becomes dismantled and lost (Gavazzi, Wilson, Ganong, & Zvonkovic, 2014). As cogently described in a 2014 *Family Relations* special collection, family science lacks a common nomenclature and identity, and family scientists lament underappreciation of the broader scientific community and policymakers (Hamon & Smith, 2014; Hans, 2014). A commonly occurring thread across diverse recommendations for moving the field forward was the creation of a framework and associated strategies for establishing family science’s unique features relative to other fields in which family is a topic of study (Gavazzi et al., 2014). Some recommendations involved building identity on substantive grounds, such as clearly differentiating family-focused science from family-related science, and others suggested focusing on how family science is conducted rather than the focus of our science.

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The goal of this special issue was to codify a framework and associated strategies for advancing the unique identity of family science. To achieve this goal, we followed Zvonkovic's (Gavazzi et al., 2014) vision of building from the zeitgeist of translational science. More specifically, this special issue was designed to (a) demonstrate the utility of the translational science framework for advancing family science's unique identity and relevance, (b) illustrate exemplary family science at each stage in the translational science continuum, and (c) articulate implications of key translational science concepts and models and associated actions for training the next generation of family scientists. This special issue is the outworking of this lofty goal and subsidiary aims.

Translational science taps into a fundamental core identity of family science. Even a casual review of departmental overviews or mission statements for those units bearing *family studies* or *family science* in their program label reveals a clear and cogent commitment to making a positive difference in human lives. The primary or focal population for making a difference (e.g., children and adolescents in the context of families; impoverished families) varies from program to program based on institutional history, interests of faculty, or developed infrastructure. Nevertheless, the vast majority shares a common goal of improving quality of life. Moreover, virtually every program bearing *family studies* or *family science* in its program name, particularly those with graduate programs, explicitly state a commitment to building the scientific foundations needed to solve problems affecting the quality of life. Again, the problems of focus (e.g., quality of marriages, parenting practices, navigating everyday work and family life) vary widely depending on the program's academic forerunners, the composition of the faculty, and available resources; nevertheless, there is a clear commitment to evidence-based practice and applied research, or what some refer to as *research to practice*. These observations

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3 suggest that the end goal of translational science—that is, enhancing life through the generation  
4 and application of scientific evidence—is fundamental to family science.  
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8 This special issue was exceedingly difficult to realize despite the fact that translational  
9 science is at the core of family science and, perhaps by extension, central to every family  
10 scientist. A concrete example of this difficulty is that which the authors faced in writing the  
11 contributions to this special issue. The first manuscripts submitted in response to the  
12 commissioning of articles were strong, coherent papers describing how the authors' work was  
13 translational or could be translated. But not one original submission explained why the presented  
14 work was translational. In talking about this issue with the invited authors, we realized the  
15 difficulty did not occur *despite* the fact that translational science is a core to the discipline, but  
16 rather *because* it is at our core—that is, the translational element of the work was taken for  
17 granted. Across contributed papers, authors had to isolate and resolve their own assumptions and  
18 taken-for-granted views underlying their particular topic or approach to science to tease out how  
19 their work was translational in nature. This was evident across the focus of authors' work,  
20 whether they were addressing basic issues of study design (e.g., are results from general  
21 probability samples always the gold standard?) or the meaning of evidence (e.g., are certain  
22 features of sample design, measurement, and analysis needed for study results to be labeled  
23 *evidence?*). In other situations, authors had to resolve assumptions about the best strategy for  
24 locating and selecting evidence relative to a particular question or study population, and still  
25 others had to consider the implications of the relative merits of alternative forms of aggregated  
26 evidence (e.g., qualitative reviews vs. meta-analyses). All of the issues the authors grappled with  
27 ultimately boiled down to philosophical and epistemological assumptions often inculcated during  
28 graduate school and reinforced through continued application.  
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3 The task of writing about *how* translation actually works was also a formidable one.  
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5 Perhaps owing to the discipline's long-standing value for evidence-based practice, most of the  
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7 authors could articulate how results from discovery science might be translated to practice (in the  
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9 form of education, policy, or direct therapy). However, in the original drafts most of these  
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11 descriptions were written at the most general levels—essentially, any kernel of knowledge was  
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13 described as being useful to practitioners or as being essential for informing practice. This basic  
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15 premise follows from a positivist philosophy of science suggesting that accumulated empirical  
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17 findings contribute to the advancement of society (Niiniluoto, 2015). Through the revision  
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19 process, the authors were forced to take a proverbial step away from the process and deliberately  
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21 think about how the work contributes to translation of discovery to practice. Several authors  
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23 privately expressed how difficult this process was and how it opened their eyes to large gaps in  
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25 the translational process and associated steps needed to move their findings forward. Even more  
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27 formidable for most authors was thinking about how the science of practice could translate into  
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29 the next best steps for discovery science. Perhaps the selected authors were steeped in traditions  
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31 of academic freedom, the hegemonic advantage of research over practice, or the perceived value  
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33 of investigator-initiated research. Regardless of the explanation, the idea that the basic germ for a  
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35 study or program of research could come from outside the realm of discovery science was  
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37 difficult to fathom for several of our authors.  
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46 Difficulties notwithstanding, we believe this special issue achieved its goal. We believe  
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48 the works in this issue, and particularly the introductory articles by Hamon and Smith, Fincham,  
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50 and Grzywacz and Allen, demonstrate the utility of the translational science framework for  
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52 advancing family science's unique identity. The next set of articles provides clear examples of  
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54 family science at each stage in a translational science continuum. The contributions by Smith et  
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3 al., Perry-Jenkins et al., and Henderson et al. each provide a different perspective on how to  
4 move from basic discovery to possible applications for improving quality of life. Shreffler et al.,  
5 Middlemiss et al., and Sheridan and Wheeler take on a second stage of translation in which  
6 applications in family science are moved to guidelines for practice. McWey and Cui, Schramm et  
7 al., and Cox then provide very different examples of family-focused topics in which research-  
8 based guidelines are moved to different types of practice alternatives. Letiecq and Anderson as  
9 well as Darling et al. illustrate the translation of practice alternatives to population impact  
10 through policy initiatives and family life education, respectively. The special issue then closes  
11 with an illustration of the implications of translational science for undergraduate (Mills) and  
12 graduate education (Sabatelli).  
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27 This special issue responds to the deliberate call for the creation of a framework and  
28 associated strategies for establishing family science's unique features relative to similar fields  
29 (Gavazzi et al., 2014; Hamon & Smith, 2014; Hans, 2014). This issue lays a plausible framework  
30 and illustrates that framework through a collection of articles. Although the proposed framework  
31 will undoubtedly need refining, it is one that resonates with the evolving scientific paradigm.  
32 Perhaps most compelling to a discipline in need of identity is the unmistakable reality that  
33 translational science is a core feature of family science. This historical and ongoing reality  
34 positions family science as a potential leader in this emerging area of thought, discovery, and  
35 practice. The only remaining question is whether the issue and the preceding ideas (Gavazzi et  
36 al., 2014; Hamon & Smith, 2014; Hans, 2014) contributing to its formation were successful in  
37 galvanizing the discipline to embrace its translational science proclivities, or will other  
38 disciplines adapt and assimilate the strengths of family science while family scientists search for  
39 an alternative identity. Only time will tell.  
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