

In Memoriam Barbara Fish

Neuropsychopharmacology (2016) 41, 3118; doi:10.1038/npp.2016.206



Barbara Fish was the singular child psychiatrist among the founding members of the ACNP and a lead researcher of new psychotropics in children in the NIMH Early Clinical Drug Evaluation Units program. She remained a clinician researcher in a full-time academic career, treating the more severely ill children and training many of today's active child psychiatrists.

Early in her career, she assembled populations of young children of schizophrenic mothers and matching normal children at New York's Bellevue Hospital to follow their growth and development for many years, reporting the persistent impact of maternal illness on their growth and maturation. Her mentor Laretta Bender had defined a childhood schizophrenia syndrome viewed through a prism of brain pathology, and had applied amphetamines, phenytoin, and ECT for the relief of aggressive psychotic behaviors. In long-term follow-up studies, these treatments had little impact on the psychotic behaviors encouraging Barbara to track the delayed social, physical, and language development, one of the first to recognize the developmental roots of childhood-onset schizophrenia.

Barbara studied many medications—a random controlled trial of chlorpromazine, diphenhydramine and placebo, thyroid hormone, the early antipsychotics thiothixene, molindone, and trifluoperidol and others. The agents varied in sedation and stimulation, inhibited aggressive behaviors and outbursts, but influenced little the courses of the illnesses, childhood growth, weight, EEG, vestibular responses, or psychological tests.

Assured of the impact of maternal illness on the children's lives, Barbara characterized schizophrenic spectrum disorders, searched for a schizophrenic genotype, and described a vulnerability as a pandysmaturation syndrome. Her collaborators included Ted Shapiro, Gabrielle Carlson, and Kenneth Kendler, each a leader in defining childhood disorders.

When she began her studies, the disciplines of pediatrics and child psychiatry were led by men. She has been a mentor of many of the present cadre of women leading both disciplines. She was an honored leader in the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry.

Barbara was bred in New York City, attended city schools in the Bronx, graduated from the Barnard College *summa cum laude* and Phi Beta Kappa, was admitted to my class at New York University School of Medicine graduating in 1945 recognized as the first in the class and Alpha Omega Alpha. At the time, admission of women and Jews to medical school was under limited quotas, so her life course reflects an intense drive. After residencies in medicine, pediatrics, and psychiatry, she joined the NYU faculty. She was also trained in psychoanalysis, graduating from the William Alanson White Institute after mentoring with Frieda Fromm Reichmann, Janet Rioch, and Clara Thompson. In 1972, she was invited to UCLA to establish a child psychiatry fellowship program.

Her colleagues and students are the leaders of today's disciplines of childhood psychopharmacology and psychopathology, and of the studies of genetic influence in the behaviors of psychotic children. We were medical school classmates and ran parallel academic careers, she in the study of children and I in adults; she reflected the enthusiasm for clinical care, emphasis on patients, and the importance of biology that we were taught in an intensive training during World War II years.

Max Fink, MD¹

¹*Psychiatry and Neurology Emeritus, Stony Brook University School of Medicine, Stony Brook, NY, USA
E-mail: Max.Fink@stonybrookmedicine.edu*