



Leaders in the History of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology Past Presidents Series: Wendy Silverman (2006)¹

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Leaders in the History of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology Past Presidents Series: Wendy Silverman (2006)¹

Professional Biography

Dr. Wendy K. Silverman served as the President of the Society of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology (SCCAP), Division 53 of the American Psychological Association (APA) in 2006. Between 2002 and 2006, she served as the editor of the *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology* (JCCAP). The journal and the division were making the transition during this time from using the word “child” exclusively to add “adolescent” to more accurately reflect the interests and foci of its readership and members. Dr. Silverman has a strong history of service to the field, serving as both a chairperson and member of federal and nonfederal grant review panels as well as Editor and Associate Editor of clinical psychology journals for over two decades. She was an associate editor of *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology* (1996–2001), the predecessor of JCCAP, associate editor of *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* (2006–2010), co-editor of *Clinical Psychology Review* (2011–2017), and associate editor of *Cognitive Therapy and Research* (2022–2024). In addition to her Division 53 presidency, Dr. Silverman served on many committees relating to division or convention activities. Dr. Silverman also serves on many editorial boards and as ad hoc reviewer for dozens of journals. With over 400 scientific publications, Dr. Silverman and her collaborators have prolifically contributed to the field of child psychology and clinical psychology broadly. This article profiles some of her many contributions to the field of clinical child and adolescent psychology.²

Dr. Silverman received her A.B. in Psychology (with honors) at Binghamton University (State University of New York) in 1977. She received her M.A. (1979) and Ph.D. (1981) in Clinical Psychology from Case Western Reserve University. Among her positions, Dr. Silverman was assistant professor and associate professor in the

Department of Psychology at SUNY Albany where she first began working in the area of childhood anxiety within the Center for Stress and Anxiety Disorders (co-directed by Drs. David Barlow and Edward Blanchard at the time) before moving to Florida International University (FIU) in Miami, where she was promoted to full professor. There, she founded and directed the still thriving Child Anxiety and Phobia Program within the Department of Psychology (now directed by Dr. Jeremy Pettit). Dr. Silverman was also instrumental in establishing the master’s program in mental health counseling, which was followed by her establishing the doctoral Clinical Science Program in Child and Adolescent Psychology (2010–2012) and serving as its initial clinical director. Dr. Silverman was recruited by Yale University in 2013 to serve as an endowed professor in the School of Medicine’s Child Study Center and to direct the Anxiety and Mood Disorders Program. She is a licensed psychologist in Florida and Connecticut and is certified in Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology by the American Board of Professional Psychology since 2003.

Emphasis on Mentorship

During her tenure as SCCAP president, Prinstein and Roberts (2006) emphasized – in addition to the importance of the continued evaluation of evidence-based treatments – the importance of the development of trainees in specific child and adolescent practices. In a similar spirit, Dr. Silverman has valued her mentors as well as her opportunities to mentor others in the field throughout her career. Dr. Silverman has received awards for excellence in graduate mentorship and research, including FIU’s Outstanding Faculty Award in 2010. Dr. Silverman’s excellence and commitment to

¹This article is part of the special series entitled “Leaders in the History of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology: Past Presidents Series” edited by Matthew A. Hagler and Michael C. Roberts

²Dr. Silverman provided information and perspective to this piece during a personal interview and follow-up correspondence with the author, conducted in April 2025.

mentoring is further evident by her being awarded a National Institutes of Health (NIH) midcareer development mentoring award (K24) from 2005 to 2010. She has similarly served as the primary sponsor of many early-career development awards (K23), as well as other NIH trainee awards (e.g., F31, F32, NIH minority supplements) and other private agency grants and awards. Dr. Silverman herself received incredible support and encouragement to pursue her academic interests, especially during a time when women were few and far between in academia. She noted that for the first 7 of her 8 years at SUNY Albany, she was the only female faculty member in the clinical psychology program, despite the preponderance of (sometimes only) female graduate students. Her K24 mentoring award and several publications and symposia participations have focused on the particular challenges of women in academia.

Professional Interests and Emphases

Dr. Silverman's research has focused on taxonomy, assessment, etiological/maintaining factors, and treatment of child emotional and behavioral problems, particularly anxiety and its related disorders. She has thus published widely on topics relating to measurement development and evaluation, constructs or topics such as worry, school refusal, anxiety sensitivity, parenting factors, and related problems such as obesity and suicidal ideation, and biomarkers and genetics. Dr. Silverman has further fostered relationships with key collaborators and engaged in cross-cultural research, international effectiveness clinical trials, as well as research in anxiety-related problems across a broad range of populations (e.g., Jastreboff et al., 2018; Jeppesen et al., 2021; Pina et al., 2003). She has long believed that active collaborative work highlights that clinical science is not a one-person sport, but a team effort.

Research in Assessment and Diagnosis

When Dr. Silverman began her career, there was not an accepted approach to phenotype anxiety problems in youth, which prompted her, along with collaborators, to create the Anxiety Disorders Interview Schedule for Children and Parents (ADIS-C/P), the most commonly used semi-structured diagnostic interview for anxiety in children and adolescents, used in the U.S. and many countries abroad (Creswell et al., 2021). In addition to the ADIS-C/P, Dr. Silverman co-created and validated the Childhood Anxiety Sensitivity Index (e.g., Silverman et al., 1991; Silverman, Ginsburg, & Goedhart, 1999).

Dr. Silverman also co-created, with one of her early graduate students from SUNY Albany, the School Refusal Assessment Scale (Kearney & Silverman, 1993). Other measures Dr. Silverman helped create and/or validate include the Anxiety Control Questionnaire (Weems et al., 2003), Family Accommodation Scale – Anxiety (Lebowitz et al., 2020), and currently the Suicide Risk and Ideation Scale for Kids (S-RISK; Pettit et al., 2025). She also worked to help define worry as a construct in children and its relation to anxiety with Annette La Greca, another past-president (Silverman et al., 1995). Her evaluative summaries of evidence-based assessment activities include her articles with past-president Thomas Ollendick (Silverman & Ollendick, 2005) as well as with her colleagues at Yale focusing on youth and parent rating scales (Etkin, Lebowitz, et al., 2021; Etkin, Shimshoni, et al., 2021), providing practical and clear guidelines for clinicians and researchers alike.

Research in evidence-Based Treatment and Treatment Mechanisms

Dr. Silverman was one of the early pioneers exploring the efficacy of cognitive-behavior therapy (CBT) in treating childhood anxiety, and she acknowledges the importance of NIH funding for providing the necessary research support to support this work. With the capability to phenotype participants' clinical problems with the ADIS-C/P, Dr. Silverman conducted the first group CBT study (Silverman, Kurtines, et al., 1999) as well as the first dismantling study investigating the treatment of childhood phobias (Silverman, Kurtines, et al., 1999), attempting to examine which components of CBT "work" in producing positive outcomes. Dr. Silverman's primary research foci have since been on understanding mediators or mechanisms of change in youth anxiety treatment involving parents and caregivers – a particular issue of importance to the field given the longstanding challenge in showing that including parents/caregivers in child anxiety CBT enhance outcomes (e.g., Lebowitz et al., 2020; Silverman et al., 2019; Silverman, Rey, et al., 2024), as well as enhancing CBT through evaluation of attention retraining computerized protocols (e.g., Pettit et al., 2020).

Advocacy for Research into Mechanisms

Apparent from Dr. Silverman's own research emphasis, during her tenure as SCCAP president (and journal editor), Dr. Silverman similarly called on the field to emphasize not merely the *how* but also the *why* of mechanisms to allow for adaptation of evidence-based

procedures across populations, contexts, problems, or conditions (Silverman, 2006b). Recently, Dr. Silverman and colleagues once again noted that understanding psychotherapeutic mechanisms became a cornerstone to building a science of clinical psychology, evidenced in-part by federal funding priorities (Silverman, Pettit, & Jaccard, 2024). This emphasis on mechanisms was evident too when in her role as SCCAP president, past-president, and editor, Dr. Silverman co-edited the 10-year update on evidence-based psychosocial treatments for children and adolescents (Silverman & Hinshaw, 2008). In this issue, they called not just for developing and evaluating treatments, but for developing and evaluating explanations of treatments. Dr. Silverman's call on programs and researchers to test systematic theory driven interventions is a hallmark of her presidential columns that she wrote for the Division's newsletter, *InBalance* (Silverman, 2006b, 2006c).

Advocacy for Strong Methodology

In addition to Dr. Silverman's emphasis on role of theory and understanding parent mediators and mechanisms of change, during her time as president and editor of *JCCAP* she emphasized the importance of strong methodology. Toward this end, she commissioned a series of articles by renowned methodologists and statisticians on topics such as analysis of variance frameworks (Jaccard & Guilamo-Ramos, 2002a, 2002b; Wilcox, 2002), multiple regression (Jaccard et al., 2006), and qualitative research methods (Nelson & Quintana, 2005), to name a few. These articles remain largely relevant today. Her recent article discussing the role of per protocol analysis as well as intention-to-treat analysis as a Future Directions piece in *JCCAP* highlights Dr. Silverman's continued interest in and commitment to methodology, particularly with regard to randomized controlled trials, with her collaborators (Silverman, Pettit, & Jaccard, 2024).

Critical Issues During the Presidential Term

As noted, during Dr. Silverman's tenure as Division 53 president, Dr. Silverman focused on dissemination and the importance of theory in guiding research and clinical work. She noted the importance of speaking on treatments that work as well as treatments that are not working, understanding what the reasons for their effectiveness (or ineffectiveness) are, and to speak out and be visible as experts in the media and popular press (e.g., Bragg, 2025). Relatedly, given that the APA convention in 2006 took place in New Orleans within a year of Hurricane Katrina, in the division's *InBalance* newsletter, Dr. Silverman noted how attendees could make

a difference in the lives of children who were affected by the hurricane (Silverman, 2006a). For example, she pointed out initiatives organized by APA to donate school supplies to New Orleans public schools and opportunities to participate in volunteer work, also initiated in conjunction with Habitat for Humanity (Silverman, 2006a).

During Dr. Silverman's presidential term, Division 53 and its members continued to be engaged in a number of operations and initiatives supporting dissemination of empirically supported research and practice, policy- and practice-related child and adolescent advocacy (e.g., Children, Youth, and Families Wingspread Conference), as well as responsible fiscal resource management. Of note, in 2006, the SCCAP Board of Directors established both a \$50,000 reserve fund as well as a permanent endowment. Additionally, the division spent \$102,000 on grants, awards, as well as journal and newsletter costs (Abidin, 2007). In supporting Division 53 members with disabilities, a motion was unanimously passed at the 2006 APA SCCAP Board Meeting to waive membership dues for any member recognized by the APA as disabled. Another unanimous motion in 2006 allowed for no-charge membership for graduate students in their first year of training, a policy which is still in place today.

Again, with an eye toward ways to benefit public health, Dr. Silverman, along with Dr. Samuel Spencer, recently wrote a commentary for a special issue of *Research on Child and Adolescent Psychopathology* about understanding the role of harm in treatment for youth mental health concerns, reflecting on how harm has been conceptualized in youth mental health treatment, both historically and contemporaneously (Silverman & Spencer, 2025). The authors offer insightful commentary on the state of the field and future directions amid uncertain times, noting the importance of transparency as a field when discussing both benefits and potential harms of treatment. This thoughtfulness and reflection are demonstrative of the forward-looking approach that Dr. Silverman embodied during her term as Division 53 president as well as during her career broadly, wherein she emphasized the importance of international collaboration, mentorship, appreciation of coauthors, and the slow but sure march of progress in pursuit of helping children.

Other Contexts in Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology

In addition to Dr. Silverman's childhood anxiety research, she – along with her Miami-based collaborators at the time, particularly Annette La Greca –

published several seminal studies on the sequelae in children following natural disasters, including 1992's Hurricane Andrew and 2004's Hurricane Charley (La Greca et al., 1996, 1998, 2010; Vernberg et al., 1996) and explored how caretakers and social contacts may be able to help with coping following a natural disaster (Prinstein et al., 1996; Silverman & La Greca, 2002). This early work was important in laying a conceptual framework for studying reactions to natural disasters – all the more important given dramatic increases in climate-related disasters with regard to both frequency and intensity (Summers et al., 2022) – and provided early insights into the coping and recovery process of children following disasters, including the development of a modular intervention for children impacted by hurricanes (Saltzman et al., 2007).

Perspectives for Trainees and Rising Professionals

Underlying Dr. Silverman's advice to rising professionals and trainees in the field has always been a deep passion for helping children thrive and advance in their lives and relying on that passion to advance knowledge and drive progress. She recommends that researchers and teachers – when trying to communicate concepts – be able to explain these concepts to people not familiar with the field. She recommended not to hide behind jargon and to have the requisite conceptual clarity to explain complex theory and methods, keeping in mind that teaching and communication are a keys part of science, she noted that in her opinion “muddled thinking is muddled teaching, and muddled thinking is muddled writing.”

Conclusion

Dr. Silverman's current work looks toward the future, reflective of her optimism and belief that there is room for the field to grow in terms of treatment. Dr. Silverman views herself as an optimist and anticipates that mental health treatment will likely advance rapidly, given recent technological innovations. In particular, she sees digitized interventions and artificial intelligence as promising vanguards for increasing availability and accessibility of interventions, both of which she is currently delving into. Ultimately, she hopes that the field will continue to be driven by psychologists who care deeply and are passionate about helping children and their families in the most effective and efficacious manner. While progress can

sometimes seem incremental, looking back from where we came 50 years ago, the future seems bright. A viewpoint that Dr. Silverman acknowledged two decades ago as well through her Presidential Address in 2006, which was titled (a reference to Frank Sinatra) *The Best Is Yet to Come: Advancing Research and Practice in Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology* (Silverman, 2006a).

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