

Deciphering the Brain Before Birth

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In independent commentaries in this special issue of *Biological Psychiatry*, Drs. Bruce McEwen and Jill Goldstein discuss and summarize the prenatal window of brain development, the focus of this special issue. As Guest Editors, we thank them for their sage insights and skills in highlighting the importance of this period in brain development. We also thank the authors who committed to writing for this issue and who were timely in their submissions. We decided that our commentary introducing this special issue would focus on revealing how this special issue was conceived and why we believe that our longstanding collaboration as basic and clinical scientists has benefited this issue of *Biological Psychiatry*, and more broadly, translational research outcomes in this area.

Typically, once special issue themes have been conceptualized and the guest editors have been identified, the process moves forward to determine the content. It was clear that the editorial team at *Biological Psychiatry* wanted translational viewpoints to be emphasized to address the topic of prenatal programming of neuropsychiatric disorders. With one of us a basic scientist and the other a clinical researcher, we quickly concluded that instead of having each review tackle animal models and human studies, we would instead have parallel preclinical and clinical reviews of the evidence that programming of lifelong risk and resilience for neuropsychiatric conditions begins in utero.

However, what may not be apparent regarding our pairing as special issue editors is that we have worked together in a highly translational fashion for many years—and we plan to do so in the years to come. We were lucky, blessed, or maybe just prepared to be able to submit a competitive (and successful) application for the P50 mechanism sponsored by the National Institutes of Health Office of Research on Women's Health in 2010. This grant mechanism supports interdisciplinary research programs focusing on sex and gender issues impacting women's health. What we brought to the proverbial table was the concept of pairing basic science and clinical research at

every juncture possible—creating studies designed to address mechanisms in rodents and clinical relevance in humans. This may seem obvious, but it was not simple. We had both worked in our respective bubbles of basic and clinical research for decades before we were given the opportunity and challenge through the Office of Research on Women's Health P50 mechanism to build an interdisciplinary line of research examining the mechanisms underlying the female bias for affective disorders across the lifespan. While the focus of our grant application is not particularly topical here, what we are highlighting is the “bit of cushion” the P50 mechanism provided us to begin to think outside the box in developing interdisciplinary research designs. Preparing for and then managing the grant provided the impetus to strive to find common ground: research that could bridge the basic and clinical aspects of our respective study designs. We hope you will find within this special issue some of these same perspectives across the preclinical/clinical divide, focusing on the importance of translation in revealing how the prenatal environment is a critical early window in brain development that sheds light onto neuropsychiatric disease risk and resilience across the lifespan.

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Article Information

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