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# Member Spotlight: Melinda Gonzales-Backen

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**What interested you in becoming a developmental scientist?**

My interest in ethnic-racial identity and related processes stems from my personal experience. I am Choctaw and Mexican American so navigating multiple ethnic-racial backgrounds was salient to me growing up. In college I discovered this was an area of research – I think sometimes undergraduate students don't realize the breadth of topics that are studied empirically in developmental science.

**What words of wisdom might you pass on to someone on their very first day after deciding to get a Ph.D. in developmental science or related?**

Incoming students' energy and ideas are always so inspiring and remind us why we are working in developmental science in the first place. So I would tell them to hang on to that. Write down what drew them to developmental science and their specific research area and why is it important. Keep a notebook with ideas you have. I would also tell them to never forget that they earned a seat at this table and their voice matters. Developmental science needs voices of scholars from diverse backgrounds. I'm always telling my students that while we need to ultimately do the empirical work, our personal experiences are valuable. When we don't see ourselves in formal theories, sometimes the best ideas come from those experiences. Our strength lies in diversity in experience and helps us identify influences, contexts, and paths of child development.

**What's your favorite aspect of SRCD membership?**

The best part of SRCD is the connections. The conferences bring so much energy and inspiration. I can't wait until we can be together again in person, but honestly, even the virtual conference was great.

**Who inspires you?**

My students inspire me. They are so passionate and often better able to see the big picture. They also remind me of myself as a student and I think about that girl who tried so hard to get where I am today and remember to appreciate that. Also, although I'm a quantitative researcher, I'm always so inspired when I read qualitative work. It really brings the voices of the adolescents and families we work with to life and reminds us of the "why" in our work that we can't lose sight of.

**What is a typical day like for you?**

A typical day has changed so much in the past two years! Right now I work primarily from home. So my day starts rushing by two kids out the door and getting them to school. Then I usually go back to my house to work from my home office. I try to structure my week so some days are more teaching-heavy and others are more focused on research. I try to always reserve at least one entire day per week that has no hard commitments like classes or meetings so I can focus on research. Being at home can be distracting but a benefit is that I can integrate self-care throughout my day. Specifically, I might take a break to go for a walk or play guitar. Those things are important!