NEWS | POSTED JUNE 3, 2022

Member Spotlight: Laura Baams, Ph.D. (she/her)

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Who inspires you?

There are lots of scholars who have inspired me or my research over the years, but I find most inspiration in meeting young people and hearing their stories. I enjoy talking to youth in focus groups or meetings with youth organizations, but I also learn about youth's experiences from social media or documentaries (co-)created by youth. I also enjoy talking to teachers about their experiences in school. A few weeks ago, after a talk at a symposium for school boards two teachers came up to me with a very practical question: they could

not keep up with their student's changing pronouns and wanted advice on how to keep track. Their intention was to support and protect the student, and within minutes we found a solution that would affirm their student's identity without outing them to their parents. Hearing about these day-to-day struggles inspires me to improve my research practices and address what youth, parents, and teachers experience and need.

Do you have a mentor or mentors who have been instrumental to your career and, if so, whom and how?

There are a lot of wonderful mentors who have supported my career and development in many different ways. Some of them in official mentor roles, others in collaborations or quick conversations at conferences. When I was working on my Master's degree at the University of Amsterdam, I reached out to my first mentor, Henny Bos. She became an advisor for my Master's thesis and has mentored me ever since. An important lesson she taught me was to look for opportunities in every new situation, and not focus so much on limitations. My Ph.D. advisors at Utrecht University were Marcel van Aken, Judith Semon Dubas, and Geertjan Overbeek. The three of them formed a team and supported my academic and professional development. Most importantly, they encouraged perspective-taking whenever I took academia or myself too seriously. It was my advisor Marcel who encouraged me to reach out to Stephen Russell. Now, I know that Stephen is very kind and welcoming, but at the time it was scary to go up to a professor I admired. A couple years and many emails later, I was granted a Fulbright scholarship to work with Stephen at the University of Arizona, and in 2016 Stephen became my postdoc mentor at the University of Texas at Austin. Stephen taught me the importance of building a lab where everyone feels included and appreciated, and that this is something that requires time and energy. He is a fantastic mentor to me and many others at SRCD.

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?

In academia, nothing is definite. Make use of that when you want to switch direction or you suddenly find a new topic you're passionate about--changing your mind is good! Use every opportunity you get and be kind to yourself in the process.

What is a typical day like for you?

My days start with the typical scroll of social media, news, or a quick work email. After that, it all depends on whether I'm going into the office or not. Working from home means a slow start with a good breakfast. If I'm

going into my office in Groningen, I have to rush and it’s an early start. On those days, I will bike to the train station, have breakfast on the train, enjoy some coffee, and start work. I have a two-hour commute each way, so there's usually a list of things that I'll try to get done on the train. Lunch by noon and more work in the afternoon. I try to finish work by 6.30pm, but given the difference in time zones between the Netherlands and international collaborators, I often have another online meeting around this time. Then dinner, a walk, and finally some time to catch up on my favorite shows or chat to friends and family.

What does the SOGIE Caucus mean to you?

The SOGIE Caucus offers a welcoming community to a wonderful group of people. It also offers the opportunity to advocate for SOGIE-related issues in SRCD and beyond, and to build a network of scholars from different backgrounds and disciplines. The Caucus offers a space to talk to each other about research, find friends and collaborators, and share struggles that are often more difficult to address in our departments or universities. Although we're a young Caucus and the pandemic made it difficult to meet, we have grown into a large and active group of people. I'm excited to see the Caucus develop further, and feel honored to be the current chair-elect.

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SOGIE CAUCUS WEBSITE

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