NEWS | POSTED JUNE 3, 2022

Member Spotlight: Robert Marx

Assistant Professor of Child and Adolescent Development, San José State University; Secretary for the SRCD SOGIE Caucus.

AUTHOR

Robert Marx

Assistant Professor

San José State University

What interested you in becoming a developmental scientist?

I have always been curious about how we change and grow as we get older, how we are shaped by our past and contexts but are also more than the sum of our histories. As a queer kid, I never really pictured a future beyond the immediate: all the messages I received about being queer were negative, and I certainly didn't know any queer adults who were living happy, healthy lives. In some ways, I think that drew me towards education and developmental science—at first, I just wanted to help younger queer kids realize that a queer future was possible, that life as a queer adult could be fun and funny and filled with love. So, I got a Masters in Teaching and became a high school English teacher and Gay Straight Alliance advisor, and I worked to instill in all my students a love of literature and a love of themselves. After five years as a teacher, though, I came to realize that many of the problems my students faced needed bigger solutions than those I could

offer from within my classroom: I could be working to support their development, but the teacher down the hall, their family at home, or the media they consumed might be sending them deficit-based messages about all that they lacked. I decided to return to graduate school so that I could play a bigger role in shaping conversations about queer youth, and I hope that my work now contributes to a broader understanding of the strengths, assets, and gifts that queer youth bring to the world.

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?

I would say: remember that you are enough. So much of our world—and graduate school in particular—seems designed to make us feel insecure, insignificant, and unworthy. I would remind someone early in this journey that the voice in your head that nags at you, that tells you to say yes to every offer because who knows when the next one will come—that voice isn't yours. It operates from a place of scarcity and fear, and we don't have to live in that place; there is bounty and joy around us, if we find it. On a slightly more practical note, I might say something like, 'right now, write down the reasons why you want to do this. Every six months or so, return to that sheet of paper [or Notes app or whatever] and see what's still true, and what needs to be changed or updated. Then, look at your weekly calendar and figure out how much of what you're doing on a weekly basis aligns with those reasons. Try to add more things that fit with your vision and avoid a few things that don't, when possible.' Oh, and hold on to your friends and relationships—a publication will never cook you dinner or talk you through a breakup.

Who inspires you?

My paternal grandmother, who at 95-years-old is still engaged, effervescent, and curious, is a great inspiration to me. Her parents didn't allow her to go to college—even though she earned a scholarship—but she didn't let that stop her interest in learning. Even as her health has faltered in recent years, she has remained positive, joyful, and deeply committed to making her corner of the world a better place.

What is something you learned in the last month?

It's important for me to show the same compassion to myself that I show to my students. With my students, I work to understand their circumstances and situations, assume best intentions, and am generous about their mistakes—recently, I've learned that I can direct that same energy inward to be kinder to myself when I may fall short of my goals or expectations.

What does the SOGIE Caucus mean to you?

For me, the SOGIE Caucus has become my academic and social home. I feel so grateful to have a group of brilliant, thoughtful scholars who are also fun, kind, and engaged in meaningful work. Academia can at times silo us and urge us apart, and the SOGIE Caucus has been a place of togetherness, community, and growth for me.

Visit the

SOGIE CAUCUS WEBSITE

to learn about benefits, networking opportunities, and more!