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# Member Spotlight: Naila A. Smith, Ph.D.

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**How did you choose developmental science as a career?**

I went to college in Jamaica, where I grew up, and majored in psychology. At the time, the psychology department focused heavily on social psychology, so I took the only developmental psychology class offered—and fell in love with the discipline. In my final year, I completed an honors thesis in psychology on parenting practices and academic achievement, and I have never looked back! I fell in love with research and with...

**Is there a mentor or mentors who have been instrumental to your career path so far, and, if so, who and how?**

Several senior colleagues and peers whom I count as mentors have been instrumental to my career in different ways. I don't have the space to name them all, but I will give a special shout-out to Dawn Witherspoon. She was my mentor while I was at Penn State on a research fellowship from the Africana

Research Center and the American Association of University Women from 2020 to 2022. I continue to connect with Dawn for advice and feedback on grants, the tenure process, and other important aspects of my career.

What I appreciate about Dawn's mentorship is that she offers critical insight and feedback that help me think more deeply about the matter at hand.

**What advice would you give to a prospective graduate student thinking about beginning their Ph.D. studies in the developmental science field?**

A key piece of advice I would offer to someone considering a career as a developmental scientist—especially if that person is from an underrepresented, minoritized group in academia—is to build a strong mentorship network. Your mentorship network should include peers, senior colleagues, people inside and outside your institution, individuals outside academia, family, friends, and even books.

You can be brilliant and have amazing ideas, but without support in navigating the hidden curriculum of academia, you may not achieve the impact you desire or find the success and fulfillment you seek in an academic career.

**What is your best SRCD memory?**

My first academic conference in grad school was the SRCD Biennial in Montreal in 2011. I remember attending back-to-back sessions because so many amazing scholars were presenting incredible work that shifted the way I thought about my research. To me, SRCD will always be a place where I can immerse myself in cutting-edge sociocultural research that pushes our field ever closer to equity and justice.

**Why did you join the Black Caucus? How does being a caucus member benefit you, and how does the experience facilitate connection among members?**

The SRCD Black Caucus has been at the forefront of ensuring that developmental science is equitable, justice-oriented, and inclusive for half a century. I have benefited greatly from the tireless work of those who came before me. From the theories I use to frame my research to the empirical studies I cite to the people I call mentors, peers, and friends, my commitment to advancing equity, justice, and inclusion in developmental science and academia at large would not be what it is today if I had not connected with the Black Caucus early in my graduate training.

Furthermore, my professional trajectory has been supported in both tangible and intangible ways by Black Caucus members, who have served as formal and informal mentors. I have deep respect for them and seek to emulate their innovation, particularly in the questions they ask and the critical perspectives they bring to every conversation.