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Member Spotlight: Jennifer E. Lansford, Ph.D.

AUTHOR

Jennifer E. Lansford, Ph.D.

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Bio:

Dr. Lansford earned her Ph. D. in developmental psychology from the University of Michigan in 2000 and is now the S. Malcolm Gillis Distinguished Research Professor of Public Policy and Director of the Center for Child and Family Policy at Duke University. Her international research has been groundbreaking in demonstrating how culture and family-level factors interact to influence human development. Her research focuses on the etiology of health-compromising and risky behaviors from childhood to adulthood and is used to promote child wellbeing worldwide. Dr. Lansford leads the Parenting Across Cultures Project, a longitudinal study of children, mothers, and fathers from nine countries (China, Colombia, Italy, Jordan, Kenya, Philippines, Sweden, Thailand, and United States). She also leads a team

investigating intergenerational impacts of two different interventions (unearned cash transfers and social-cognitive skill building) in which the original child participants have been followed into adulthood and are now parenting their own children. She has consulted for UNICEF on the evaluation of parenting programs in several countries and on the development of a set of international standards for parenting programs. She is currently President of the Society for Research in Child Development and Editor of the *International Journal of Behavioral Development*. She previously chaired the U.S. National Committee for Psychological Science of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine and the NIH Psychosocial Development, Risk, and Prevention Study Section. She is a Fellow of the American Psychological Association, the Association for Psychological Science, and the International Society for the Study of Behavioral Development.

Q: Why did you decide to choose developmental science as a course of study or career?

A: *I was drawn to developmental science because of its potential to understand and improve human lives at a large scale. As an undergraduate student majoring in psychology and cultural anthropology, I worked in psychology research labs that were leading to fascinating new understanding of the basic science of children's socioemotional and cognitive development. I also volunteered in clinical settings that tried to help children with severe externalizing behavioral disorders and substance use problems. These experiences led me to want to focus on the science of human development to advance understanding of risk and protective factors that hinder or foster positive development to be able to apply this knowledge in preventive interventions and policies to improve the lives of children and their families. Developmental science offers the unique opportunity not only to help individual children but also to think about systems and social structures that can help all children to thrive.*

Q: What advice would you give to a student beginning their Ph. D. studies in developmental science or related?

A: *I would advise students on the importance of perseverance, saying yes to new experiences, and taking positive risks. In terms of perseverance, earning a Ph. D. inevitably comes with setbacks that are hard for everyone. Analyses don't show the results you were expecting, manuscripts are rejected by journals, grant applicants are not funded. When you encounter setbacks, get feedback from trusted mentors on how to strengthen your work, and try again. In terms of saying yes to new experiences, you will sometimes receive invitations to do things that you haven't done before. Say yes, and you might be surprised at the doors these new experiences open for your future work. In terms of taking positive risks, even if the odds of receiving a grant or having a manuscript published in a top journal might seem small, the odds are zero if you don't try, but better than zero if you do.*

Q: Why did you join SRCD and how does it facilitate connection among members all year long?

A: *I joined SRCD as a graduate student in 1995 and have been a member ever since. I originally joined SRCD because I was attending a Biennial meeting along with my graduate school mentors and other students. I remember how exciting it was at my first Biennial to hear speakers who felt like celebrities to me because I had read their work present their latest findings. I have remained an SRCD member for over 30 years because SRCD has become my main professional home. SRCD's Student and Early Career Council (SECC) provides professional development and networking opportunities all year long. SRCD's six Caucuses facilitate connections among members who affiliate with or study specific populations. SRCD's Child Policy Hub connects members with policymakers who are eager to make evidence-informed decisions. SRCD's Committees work year-round to help members connect with other members and content to improve their teaching, research, and impact.*

For more information about Jennifer E. Lansford, Ph.D.:

https://childandfamilypolicy.duke.edu/person/jennifer-lansford/