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Hispanic Heritage Month Spotlight: Fantasy Taína Lozada, Ph.D.

AUTHOR

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Bio:

Fantasy Taína Lozada, Ph.D. (SRCD Membership Committee Co-Chair), is an Afro-Latina developmental psychologist, Associate Professor of Psychology at Virginia Commonwealth University, and Director of the S.H.I.E.L.D. Lab. Drawing upon her African American and Puerto Rican heritage, she studies how culture, families, and communities shape the emotional development and well-being of Black and Latine children and adolescents. Her research examines racial and cultural emotion socialization, emotion regulation and flexibility, socioemotional development and learning at home and in schools, and the role of emotion in

young people's sociopolitical development. Dr. Lozada earned her Ph.D. in Lifespan Developmental Psychology from North Carolina State University in 2013 and subsequently completed an NSF Postdoctoral Research Fellowship at the University of Michigan. She received an NSF CAREER Award in 2021 and the Presidential Early Career Award for Scientists and Engineers (PECASE) in 2025. As a developmental scientist and community-engaged scholar, Dr. Lozada uses family-based, psychophysiological, observational, and youth participatory action research methods. She developed Youth Voices, a culturally grounded socioemotional learning initiative that partners with schools and communities to strengthen young people's emotional development, civic engagement, and capacity to influence the conditions affecting their lives. Dr. Lozada is deeply committed to mentoring the next generation of scholars, particularly those whose cultures, communities, and questions have historically been overlooked. Across her research, teaching, and service, she works to advance a developmental science that recognizes culture as foundational, families as sources of knowledge, and communities as essential partners in meaningful change.

Read here for more information about Fantasy
Read here about Fantasy receiving the Presidential Early Career Award for Scientist and Engineers

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

A: I chose developmental science because I wanted to understand how children come to know themselves, navigate their emotions, and make meaning of the worlds around them. As an African American and Puerto Rican woman, I was especially drawn to questions about how culture, race, family, and community shape emotional development—questions that as a graduate student, I struggled to find adequate answers to -- especially regarding the experiences of Black and Brown youth and families in the U.S..

Developmental science gave me a language for examining emotional development in context and particularly for understanding the extraordinary adaptive capacity of youth and families related to emotion skills. It also gave me tools to challenge deficit-based narratives about Black and Latine children and families. My work is grounded in the belief that emotions are never culturally neutral and that children develop within sociocultural histories, relationships, institutions, and communities. I remain in this field because understanding development can help us do more than describe children's lives; it can help us transform the conditions in which they grow.

Q: What are you most proud of in your career?

A: I am most proud of creating spaces in which young people and emerging scholars can recognize the power of their own voices. Through the S.H.I.E.L.D. Lab and community-engaged programs such as Youth Voices, I have watched students and adolescents move from seeing themselves primarily as research participants or trainees to understanding themselves as knowledge producers and change agents.

I am also proud that my scholarship centers the intersection of cultural and emotional processes that developmental science has too often overlooked. However, the accomplishments that matter most to me are not captured fully by publications or awards. They live in my students and trainees who discovered that they belonged in science, the young people who learn to see themselves as emotionally capable and powerful change agents who can advocate for their communities, and the families who partner with us to share their experiences. Building emotional development scholarship that is rigorous, culturally grounded, and accountable to communities is the work of which I am proudest.

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

A: Do not confuse becoming a scholar with becoming disconnected from yourself. Your experiences, cultural knowledge, relationships (especially your familial ones), and questions are not obstacles to rigorous science; they may be the very things that allow you to see what others have missed. When you walk into spaces that may not have been made for you, know that you don't walk into them alone -- you carry with you the family, friends, and community that raised you and brought you to this point. And whenever you get the chance, invite those people to take up space with you as you celebrate your milestones (like your thesis and dissertation defenses or when you receive honors or awards for your work) -- sharing that moment with your people in your academic world is meaningful for both you and them -- don't underestimate this!

Also, learn the methods and theories of the field, but do not be afraid to question their assumptions or imagine better ones. A Ph.D. is of course an exercise in learning systematic methods for creating and critiquing knowledge -- it will teach you persistence, but persistence should not require abandoning joy, family, community or rest! (Especially rest -- I'm reminding myself as I say it to all of you!)

Q: Outside of developmental science, what hobbies or activities do you engage in or enjoy?

A: Outside of developmental science, I enjoy traveling, singing karaoke, reading a good horror novel (my current favorite author is Silvia Moreno-Garcia), long walks in nature, co-constructing countless adventures in playtime and imagination with my son, supporting my husband's strongman endeavors (I'm writing this from Scotland where he qualified to compete for the world title!), and gathering with my favorite people over delicious, carb-y desserts!