

Peter G. Swanborn Prize jury report 2018

In 2006, the Faculty of Social Sciences created the Peter G. Swanborn Prize with funding from the *Stichting Empirisch-Theoretisch Onderzoek in de Sociologie* (Empirical-Theoretical Sociological Research Foundation - SETOS). The prize was created to encourage students to conduct high-quality empirical social sciences research characterised by attention to both the theoretical and empirical components, creativity, and the breadth of the possible applications.

In 2018, prizes will be awarded in three categories: one for Bachelor's theses, one for Academic Master's theses and one for Research Master's theses. The winners are students whose thesis displayed an exceptional insight into the theoretical principles and the empirical methods (the 'E' in SETOS) used in social sciences research. The nominations may be guided by a concrete problem or by a question based on the methods and techniques used in social sciences research.

The jury for 2018 was composed of the following persons: Prof. Irene Klugkist (M&S, chair), Prof. Paul Boelen (PSY), Dr. Jorg Huijding (PED), Prof. Kees Koonings (CA), Prof. Willem Koops (PSY), Dr. Vera Toepoel (M&S), Prof. John de Wit (ASW) and Prof. Theo Wubbels (OWK).

The educational directors of the faculty's study programmes were asked to nominate a limited number of theses in July and August 2018. This means that the initial selection round took place within the study programmes themselves. The nominated theses were then each read by two members of the jury, who were asked to select the theses that stood out from the pack due to their quality. The jury then discussed these jury reports in a closed session, in order to select the winners. In their considerations, the jury explicitly weighed an absolute criterion that if the quality of the best thesis was in the jury's opinion insufficient, then the Swanborn Prize for the relevant category would not be awarded that year. Fortunately, this situation did not arise in 2018.

This year, the jury received eight nominations for the Bachelor's thesis (for twelve students), four for the Academic Master's and three for the Research Master's. In total, 15 nominations were submitted for 19 students. The quality of the nominated theses was on average high. In all categories, the final decision was made only after considerable debate and weighing various arguments during the jury meeting, which illustrates how close some of the theses were in quality. For 2 of the 3 categories, the best 2 theses were evaluated again after the jury meeting by additional jury members, because agreement on the winner was not yet reached based on 2 readers. In the end, the jury agreed on one winning thesis per category.

All in all, 3 prizes will therefore be awarded this year for one bachelor thesis, one academic master thesis and one research master thesis.

WINNERS AND JURY REPORT

Bachelor

Joukje Willemsen

Decision Qualities of Bayesian and Frequentist Hypothesis Tests

The thesis from Joukje Willemsen addresses an intriguing, important, and timely topic. As a brief introduction: We, social scientists, including psychologists, sociologists etc., like doing statistics. We even like to do complex statistics. But in the end, we often particularly want to know whether a finding is statistically significant or not – and most of us consider a p-value that is smaller than .05 as an almost sacred, holy threshold to consider a finding as statically significant. In the last one or two decades, there is this rise of the Bayesian statistical movement; fans of Bayes claim that the p smaller than .05 religion is the cause of sloppy science and publication bias and that it is better to rely on other indices, including the Bayes factor. We social scientists are rather compliant and cooperative – so many of us went along with this Bayes movement and started relying our conclusions on Bayes factors and started using Bayesian hypothesis testing as a better alternative for the use of the p-value in hypothesis testing

And now Joukje did her thesis. Through simulation studies she showed that the two ways of hypothesis testing can provide similar results under certain conditions. This is an important result that addresses a topic that is relevant for a broad area of social sciences, namely—loosely speaking—the relative strengths and weakness of 2 alternative statistical approaches. And in many ways this is a wonderful, outstanding bachelor thesis. Joukje performed most of the work on her own—under supervision of course, from Dr Dave Hessen; she designed the study herself and wrote the statistical program for simulations all by herself.

It is a great pleasure to hand over this year's Swanborn award for the bachelor thesis to Joukje Willemsen for her great thesis "Decision Qualities of Bayesian and Frequentist Hypothesis Tests"

Academic Master

Joshi Verschuren

De rol van mindset in het basisonderwijs

In her thesis Joshi focuses on "mindsets". Mindset refers to the beliefs a child has on whether or not their basic abilities are fixed, or whether they can grow. Mindset theories propose that this mindset has a causal effect on children's IQ and academic achievements. Children with a growth mindset would see challenges as a, ... well... a challenge and an opportunity to grow, while children with a fixed mindset would avoid challenges, and have trouble receiving negative feedback. As you can imagine this idea has received a lot of in education, and is adopted in many places in the form of mindset trainings for children and teachers. However, empirical evidence for all this is limited and mixed. This raises the questions whether mindsets and their effects are a myth or not.

Like a true myth buster, Joshi investigated in a large group of primary school children whether a growth mindset is indeed related to more effort and better achievements than a fixed mindset. She found that this is not the case, and calls for more research into the validity of the mindset concept.

The Jury was impressed by the quality of this thesis not only because of its societal relevance, timeliness and practical implications, but also because of the quality of the design and the clarity of the writing. Importantly, Joshi achieved this very independently, needing little feedback and guidance.

Research Master

Laurien Meijer

Trauma Symptom Trajectories in Children Exposed to Intimate Partner Abuse

Laurien investigated the longitudinal development of trauma in children exposed to intimate partner abuse. In her thesis, she first presents a theoretical framework from which she derived the hypotheses. With three waves of data she examined the development of traumatic symptoms over the course of 1.5 years using latent class growth analysis, also taking individual factors and social contextual factors into account. The results reveal 5 trajectories which aligned with trajectories identified in the existing literature. In the discussion of the results Laurien describes possible limitations of the research and relates her findings to both theoretical and practical implications.

The jury praises the strong theoretical foundation of the study where different theories are combined and a niche in existing research on this topic was identified. The approach taken is both adequate and original. Also, advanced statistical techniques were used and both the methodology and the results of these relatively complex analyses are explained in a very clear and pleasant way. The research is innovative and executed very independently. Finally, we want to praise Laurien for a very clear and pleasant writing style.