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Member Spotlight: Michael Sladek, Ph.D.

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Who or what inspires you and why (and/or who/what inspired you to go into your chosen field of study)?

Currently I am inspired by queer youth who show remarkable resilience growing up and being themselves in a world filled with oppressive societal messaging and inequitable policies (e.g., bans on gender-affirming care, threats to reproductive rights, threats to productive dialogue about systemic racism in education) that we know are harmful to healthy development and definitively anti-science. As an adult with the background in developmental science that I have, I am inspired every day by the ways in which queer youth survive and THRIVE despite the current hostility of the sociopolitical climate that furthers marginalization. This

inspiration fuels the urgency with which I feel compelled to use theory, methods, and evidence from developmental science as a platform to build community with scholars within and across disciplines, speak out, and show up.

Is there a mentor or mentors who have been instrumental in your career and, if so, who and how?

Mentorship has been absolutely essential for my career and the primary reason why I am able to be in my current position. I have always tried to prioritize working with and learning from experts who are advancing important critical issues of equity and justice in their work, while being warm, supportive, and dedicated to student professional and personal development. My mentors have been and continue to be Dr. Renee Engeln and Dr. Emma Adam of Northwestern University; Dr. Leah Doane, Dr. Nancy Gonzales, and Dr. Linda Luecken of Arizona State University; and Dr. Adriana Umaña-Taylor of Harvard University. There are also too many peers and professors to count who also mentor and support my learning and development as a scholar. Those of you in this family - you know who you are!

What is your best SRCD memory?

My best SRCD memory is everything that was the "Construction of the 'Other'" Special Topics Meeting in Puerto Rico (2022). Major thanks are due to the Latinx Caucus leadership, meeting organizers, and senior scholars who put together the best conference I have attended. From the keynote addresses (Dr. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, Dr. Robert Sellers, Dr. Adriana Umaña-Taylor, to name a few) to the late-night poolside chats, and everything in between - I know I will always remember and be motivated by the place and space we were gifted to share.

What publication or book would you say is a must read in the field (and why)?

Dr. Cynthia García Coll and colleagues' (1996) Integrative Model for the Study of Developmental Competencies in Minority Children should be required reading for all scholars in developmental science. From when I first read the article, to anytime I revisit the text to inform current research, the model has had a monumental impact on me and on the field for elevating culturally informed strengths-based research within an understanding of the sociohistorical context of racism and its symptoms that shape human development.

Why did you join the SOGIE Caucus and how does it facilitate connection among members all year long?

I joined the SOGIE Caucus for personal and professional reasons. I am a White cisgender gay man and queer person; when the SOGIE Caucus was founded I saw myself reflected in a very profound way and saw a place for queer scholars to gather in community to support and learn from each other in our diversity and affinity. I also joined to build relationships, learn about best practices, and keep up with the most recent updates from experts for supporting LGBTQ+ youth in our science and in practice. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we held monthly Zoom community meetings that were important for facilitating connection among our members. More recently, we have been able to return slowly but safely to SOGIE gatherings at in-person SRCD meetings, which are irreplaceable!

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