NEWS | POSTED JUNE 17, 2025

# Member Spotlight: Shixin Fang

AUTHOR

Shixin Fang

Doctoral candidate at the Department of Human Development and Family Studies;
SRCD SOGIE Caucus Steering Committee Student Representative and Programming Committee Member
Pennsylvania State University

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

I have always been fascinated by the heterogeneity of within-person developmental pathways and curious about the contextual factors that shape individual development. Having been nurtured and empowered by the queer community since adolescence, these formative experiences have fueled my passion for studying queer youth and family development—particularly how minority stressors, both independently and in interaction with general stressors, influence individual well-being, couple dynamics, and family functioning in daily life.

Through my training in the Human Development and Family Studies program at Penn State, I've gained theoretical foundation and methodological tools to examine intraindividual variation in developmental processes. I hope to further integrate this developmental perspective to illuminate the diverse developmental trajectories of queer families and inform personalized, health-promoting interventions that support their well-being.

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

I've been fortunate to be guided and supported by a group of incredible mentors. My undergraduate advisor, Dr. Hongjian Cao, first introduced me to the field of developmental science and supported me to pursue my dream research topic on LGBTQ+ family dynamics. My Ph.D. advisor, Dr. Samantha Tornello, has been exceptionally encouraging, supportive, and patient. She has taught me so much about conducting research with LGBTQ+ families and navigating professional development more broadly. She is also the most compassionate mentor I know—deeply attuned to the unique challenges faced by international students—and has been a consistent source of support as I expand my work on global queer families.

I'm deeply grateful to Drs. Meg Bishop, Eric Layland, and Rachel Farr for their generosity in sharing resources and their kindness in helping me grow as an early-career scholar. I also want to thank Drs. Emily Ansell, Cara Exten, and Lauren Forrest for their mentorship as I broaden my research into sexual and gender minority health more generally. Through working with them, I've come to appreciate how collaboration can be a powerful and fulfilling way to do better science.

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

I'm always a bit hesitant to give advice, as one of the most valuable lessons I've learned in this field is that everyone's developmental trajectory is uniquely their own—which, in itself, is an important perspective to carry into a Ph.D. program. That said, I believe it's essential to find a topic that genuinely excites you—something that makes you want to get up each day with curiosity and purpose. Just as importantly, seek out people you enjoy working with and who support your growth. It may take time and patience to find both the right focus and the right community, but one of the most rewarding aspects of the journey is recognizing the small ways you grow each day, compared to who you were yesterday.

**What is your best SRCD memory?**

The 2025 Biennial Meeting in Minneapolis brought me so much joy and warmth. I was thrilled to see such a wide spectrum of work centered on queer youth and families. After a particularly difficult start to the year, it was incredibly encouraging and inspiring to witness so many colleagues continuing to lead innovative and meaningful research. I cherished every moment—listening to powerful presentations, sharing my own work, connecting with SOGIE Caucus members, and meeting SOGIE scholars I've long looked up to.

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

Joining the SOGIE Caucus felt natural to me, as a sense of community has always been a vital source of motivation in my work, and I was drawn to the opportunity to connect with others who share similar scholarly and personal commitments. I wanted to learn more about the diverse range of SOGIE scholarship, understand how SOGIE scholars navigate their careers, and find ways to get more involved.

The SOGIE Caucus offers many avenues for fostering connection throughout the year. I've personally benefited from the community meetings, where members come together to share updates and support one another. One especially meaningful experience was participating in the queer mentoring program, which pairs mentors and mentees for a year-long journey. I was fortunate to be matched with Dr. Meg Bishop, who has been incredibly supportive and generous in sharing resources and guidance. Another way I've deepened my connection to this community is by serving on the caucus leadership team. In 2025, I'm excited to begin my first term as the student representative. I'm eager to help other early-career SOGIE scholars feel welcomed and supported, and to spread the message that there's a vibrant, caring community here committed to nurturing both professional and personal growth.