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An interview with student author Anni-Ming Larson

Dimitri Wing-Paul

What inspired you to write this paper?

I am adopted from Shanghai, and my mom is White. I have always been interested in why I did not really care that much about being adopted. I was having this moment—I think it was in my junior year at Geneseo—when I was like, “Woah! I still think very positively about being adopted but I realized how it has definitely shaped my identity.” I had a professor, Dr. Harrigan, who studied the narratives of adoptive parents, and Dr. Harrigan also adopted a child. I thought this was perfect because I think that there are not enough narratives from us, as adoptees, about adoption so we started to work together and brainstorm about the topic. The paper sorta came up because of the people that I know that was adopted. Also, I thought if I had an “ah ha” moment in college, I wondered how many other people would have that “ah ha” moment in college so I wanted to explore that.

How did you present your work at GREAT Day?

Actually, I just did a poster which is hanging in the Communications department. I only did a poster because the paper was not ready at the time for GREAT Day. It was a directed study that I was doing. So, I just did a poster, and I did not have a formal presentation or anything. I presented in one of the poster sessions.

Did people just walk around and view your poster?

Yeah! People just kinda walked around. Oh, I was also asked to present to the Presidential Board and that happened a couple days after GREAT Day. There were about twenty of us or less. Maybe about fifteen or sixteen of us that brought our posters to show people on the Board. So, I think a lot of people saw my poster that way.

How was your experiences in presenting during GREAT Day and on the Presidential Board?

Those experiences were really cool. I was really proud because most or every other poster was about biology or STEM-related topics, and my poster was the only one on qualitative research. I think there might be one or two others [of qualitative research]. I had a lot of people that came up to me and asked questions about my poster. The amount of people that sort of felt connected to my work, even if they were not adopted, if they had adopted kids, or knew of an adoptee, was really awesome. I wanted

that to happen. I wanted people to say that this is a work that is grounded in as an example of visibially adopted people. I wanted to develop a vocabulary or [provide some] information to audiences of how adoptees think about and want to talk about adoption, their relationships with their parents, how they think about themselves, and how they identify themselves in those challenges. I absolutely did that. I think that there are so many other things going on in our world right now. We are trying to build vocabulary, such as LGBTQ+ terms and transgender rights. We are talking about race and socioeconomic class. Even though adoptees are quite a large community, we are not talked about as much. So, that is why I wanted my work to do, which is to be able to have my voice attached and have a casual conversation surrounding [adoption]. So, I feel like this was actually powerful for me and for many other people.

Do you think your GREAT Day presentation was in some way helpful in preparing you for the demands of work after graduation?

Yeah! Right now, I am working at a domestic violence courthouse in Chicago. In the legal clinic, I am interviewing and getting people's stories, and drafting them into affidavits. The work that I did in terms of the interviewing process for GREAT Day was incredibly helpful for me and for this project. I think that this project is difficult for me to work on at times and to get on the swing of things, now that I have graduated. But, it is so important to me and I know that I will continue to do this work in my life. So, the emotional maturity that it took me to do this as well as the basic skills, such as doing structured interviews, transcribing interviews, typing, and doing certain amount of hours for research, helped me immensely in my job now. I am really thankful that Geneseo gave me the ability to be creative with something.

In retrospect, do you think your GREAT Day project was an essential part of your experience at Geneseo?

I actually think that it was! It was a long time coming and I have never been around for previous GREAT Days. I transferred to Geneseo as a sophomore. In my sophomore year, I went on a trip during GREAT Day. In my junior year, I was studying abroad. So, senior year I was not actually thinking about it. But then, my teacher [Dr. Harrigan] said "You should really submit this. Just submit it. It will be accepted and just submit it as a poster. Number one, it would force you to do a poster and that would be great. Number two, it is such an important and different work. Number three, you will get to experience GREAT Day, which is wonderful." So, on that day I did my presentation, and I also went to many other presentations and panels. I loved it. It was great and that is something that I am really proud of Geneseo for. I am really proud that they have something like that. It was really a positive memory in my mind and it was a good professional experience. You have the support of your friends, who may or may not know what you do in a different context,[and] your dorm friends, who may be like biology majors [and they] might not know what people in the Communications department are studying. I am really happy that I got to show my work.