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An interview with directors Sang Wook Nam and Luc Turnier

Dimitri Wing-Paul

ABSTRACT

Mosquito Bites is a short documentary of students from SUNY Geneseo. Students discussed the meanings of microaggressions, examples of microaggressions and implications of those who are targeted, specifically towards marginalized groups. They also shared their experiences of microaggressions on campus. The documentary aims to spread more awareness about microaggressions and the effect. To access the video, please visit the online publication of *The Proceedings of GREAT Day*.

What inspired both of you to do this video?

Sang Wook Nam: At first, I started because I had to film something for my class project. [To Luc] Have you taken a class with Lee Pierce?

Luc Turnier: I have not taken it, but I am going to take it next semester.

SWN: Professor Pierce said that I should submit something, and I was thinking, “Can I submit... can I make some kind of documentary film?” and then she was like, “There has not been any documentary film, so it will be really interesting to have one.” That is how I decided to make a documentary film, but I needed at least one more person to help me out because I could not do everything by myself. So, I knew [Luc] was interested in filming, editing, and film making, basically. So, I asked him and he said, “Yeah let’s do it,” and then we started meeting up together for once a week at the beginning of the semester, and we talked about what we can do. We came up with different topics, but we ended up on this one.

PGD: What made you pick microaggressions?

LT: We had a lot different iterations at first. At first, we were gonna do a short film. We were even gonna send it to a film festival before we really narrowed down to talk about microaggressions. Microaggressions are a thing on this campus that is seldom talked about. We have talked about microaggressions, and certain clubs address stuff like that. But when it comes to say the Asian community here at Geneseo, it is not really talked about a lot. So, we wanted to get a perspective that no one has actually even thought to look for. And S.K. being Korean, you know, was a perfect fit and I was actually really honored when he asked me if I wanted to help because he is like a film-making genius.

SWN: Nah! I am okay. I am okay.

LT: He is really good!

SWN: Because I know many international students on this campus. I go to Chinese culture club, and I met many international students like Chinese American students or Japanese American students. One time, the Chinese culture club had a presentation about microaggressions, and some of the members of the Chinese culture club shared their story about what kind of microaggression they experienced and how they felt. Before I met them, I never thought that microaggressions were real. I honestly thought it was not a big deal, but that people get hurt easily. But then after hearing their stories, I realized how important and how serious this could become. So, that is why I wanted to start with microaggressions.

LT: Microaggressions are things that can be easily overlooked. I mean, microaggressions could be really passive aggressive and could be a small minute thing that any other person would be like, “Oh, that is just nothing and maybe they are just having a bad day or something.” But it can be targeted, and it can be really hurtful if it is done in a really bad way.

I actually watched the video and very much enjoyed it. I think that highlighting microaggressions is super important, especially going to a PWI [primarily white institution]. Some people may not be aware about microaggressions while some people are. Were the interviews planned, unplanned, or both?

SWN: Some of them were planned. But in the beginning of the film, the people that we interviewed together were not planned. It was more like we went to the library and we went to different places to...

LT: Yeah, we went to Starbucks, we went to the library, and we just asked people, “Hey, is it okay to interview you?” and they were like, “Yes.” Some people said, “No,” but for the most part, people said, “Yes,” and we were able to get some good answers out of them. Yeah, but in the other hand, he was able to find some personal friends to talk to them and about their experiences.

SWN: Yes. Yes. So, those three people in the middle of the video—I was already planning to interview them because I wanted to hear different perspectives from international students, from Chinese American students, and from immigrants. So, I wanted to compare different types of people and how microaggressions differently, or something like that. So, about half of them were planned.

PGD: What were your reactions when interviewing some of the people?

LT: I was doing most of the interviews, especially for the random ones, and some of them I was actually kind of shocked. Some of them were like, “Oh, I don’t really care. It is not that big of a deal.” Some people were just kind of like whining or complaining. Some people really gave super in-depth answers about how they feel about microaggressions and how they affect people as a whole. So, I was genuinely surprised, especially from who they came from. It was actually a really nice surprise.

PGD: So, microaggressions are really prevalent in Geneseo. At the end of the video, one of the questions appeared, “How can microaggressions be stopped?” and there was a common theme such that majority of the interviewees said, “Education.” Do you think that there are other ways to stop microaggressions? How can we educate people?

SWN: I think, I think it just really a hard question to answer because it really depends on education but I do not think we can really... people cannot really control their environment and how other people were born in different areas, you know what I mean? It is really hard.

LT: Yeah.

SWN: Education is the key, but it is almost impossible to change in short periods of time. It is going to take a long time to spread this message: microaggressions exist. You know, people should care about their people’s background or just be careful when they are talking.

LT: Some people really do not want to learn.

SWN: Yeah, we cannot control it.

LT: Education has a lot of different formulas and there are different ways to educate people. I feel like one of the best ways to educate people is just to have conversations, talk to people and have them ask you questions and answer them. But, people are not willing to have conversations, and people are not willing to talk about it. But if people are willing to have an open mind, because sometimes microaggressions can be unintentional but they happen still. Those people who may have just made a mistake and they just actually wanted to learn, we can definitely talk to them. The more people we talk to, the more we could spread the message.

PGD: How was the video presented at GREAT Day?

SWN: So, we were assigned in one of the classrooms in Welles.

LT: Yeah.

SWN: And many people were there. We basically showed [it] to people through a projector, and I just told them what is the video going to be about. I just answered their questions after the video. Yeah, that is just about it, I think.

LT: There were a lot of people, too.

SWN: Yeah, there were a lot of people.

LT: Yeah, a lot of people were sharing too.

PGD: What type of people were asking questions and making comments?

LT: I think professors did.

SWN: Yeah professors did.

LT: I think professors were asking a lot of the questions.

SWN: They asked a lot of questions like, “How did they make this?” I think they basically asked many things about “How did we come up with this idea?” and “How did you film this?”

LT: It was kind of hard to remember what they asked at the top of our heads. But, I felt that a lot of the students who were there... I mean we go to like a liberal arts college and everyone was like, “Oh, yeah yeah, I already knew about this,” or something like that. So, I feel like that is what contributed to students not asking a lot. I feel like professors really took the forefront. I feel like professors asked the most because they have a lot of power that students do not have. I could brush a student off, but I have to see a professor at least once or twice a week. So, that is why I feel that they really were engaged with it.

SWN: I think students were just watching the documentary film and they were like “Ooooh,” and then after the film, they were like “Oooh!” [Laughs] Yeah, they were like that.

LT: You killed it with the graphics too!

SWN: Nah.

LT: I saw those graphics come out the screen, and I was like, “Ohhh, my, son.” You had some after effects in there and I was like “Okay!”

SWN: Nah it’s okay.

PGD: Do you both remember any comments that stood out?

LT: The people that we interviewed?

PGD: Yeah, or the day of the presentation as well.

LT: I think I was surprised the amount of people who did not know what microaggressions were and [people who] kinda downplayed them. There were people who were kind of like, “Toughen up!” you know what I mean? Also, because we did interviews with a variety of people from different backgrounds and seeing and hearing their different explanations. We interviewed two different African-American girls, and they were like, “Yeah, I know what microaggressions are and this is what this is.” We, I think we interviewed one or two Asians, and they were kind of just like in the middle about it. And one Latino, I think?

SWN: Yeah.

LT: And he was also a little down about it. He was like aware of it, but he just also I just feel like, from what I can recall, he was a little like, “It is what it is,” and just kind of like, “We are gonna get through it.” But that one white lady in the interview, she went hard.

SWN: She was serious about it. She was with it.

PGD: Are you both planning to do something like this for the next GREAT Day?

SWN: I am actually graduating this semester [Fall 2018]. If I was staying here, then I would have work with it again. But, I am leaving.

LT: Since I am taking the class that he took, I might be able to continue that line. I might try to add a little more focus to it. Maybe instead of microaggressions, just do general campus culture and stuff like that. Just interview a few people and see how that goes. I would be definitely willing to kind of continue it on and see where it goes. It kinda has to be a one man solo show, you know? But we will see what I can do.