New Vanier Scholars lead the way in research

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Photo by Eric Brousseau

Amanda Shamblaw, current doctoral student in The Mood Research Lab in the Queen’s Psychology Department and 2015 Vanier Scholarship recipient, has had a strong interest in depression focused research ever since she took her first psychology course at the University of Western Ontario. Amanda started her M.Sc. at Queen’s University in 2013 where her research has been focused on the relationship between maternal depression and children’s theory of mind. Amanda states, “I was drawn to Queen’s University so that I could work under the supervision of Dr. Kate Harkness, a leading researcher in the area of depression.”

When I asked Amanda if she always knew she wanted to pursue a Ph.D. in Psychology, she said no with a slight chuckle. She started her undergraduate degree in Nursing, but said that it wasn’t until she took psychology electives in the 2nd year of her undergraduate degree that she decided to do a 2nd undergraduate degree in psychology – remarkably, while simultaneously working full-time as a nurse. Amanda knew she “enjoyed nursing”, but having been galvanized by undergraduate psychology research and statistic courses she knew she “loved research much more”.

Amanda’s research interests centre on the intergenerational transmission of depression. Her master’s thesis focuses on the relation between maternal depression and the social-cognitive development of preschool children. She is examining how physical touch, vocal characteristics, and talking about the minds of others contribute to this relation. For her Ph.D. project, set to start in the fall, Amanda will be extending her research to focus on infants, in particular how postpartum depression affects infant attachment through both reciprocal attachment and infant neurological factors.
One thing Amanda particularly loves about her research is the rewarding feeling that comes from developing and running her own study, “to have questions and then be able to answer them”. In addition, Amanda is optimistic that her research will help both fill a gap in understanding the effect intergenerational transmission of depression, and provide a basis of knowledge for developing effective interventions that can be targeted at a very young age.

Accordingly, “excitement” is the way Amanda described how she felt upon first hearing she was a Vanier Canadian Graduate Scholarship recipient. When Amanda was asked what she felt it was about herself that enabled her to qualify for such a prestigious scholarship, passion was at the forefront of her response. “I love what I do, and I think that is really important. For me [research] doesn’t feel like work; I really enjoy it”. In general, Amanda is also a strongly motivated individual, simultaneously working in research, engaging in clinical work, promoting interprofessional practice by acting as Co-President for Queen’s Health Interprofessionals Society, and volunteering for organizations like Loving Spoonful. By keeping involved in the community, Amanda feels she is becoming a “well-rounded scholar, allowing [her] passion for helping people to drive [her] work.”

Finally, Amanda mentions, “the Vanier scholarship is an incredible honour and affords me the opportunity to disseminate my work more broadly.” Amanda explains, “Psychologists are conducting ground breaking mental health research and it is the recognition of this research that will ensure future investment and funding in the area of mental health.” Long term, Amanda is optimistic about her future as a researcher, “I want to conduct research that will help the lives of many.” She hopes to obtain a long-term career as a researcher and eventually use her skills to advocate for policy change in the area of mental health care. One can only imagine how far her intellect and astounding diligence will take her.