

## **Summer 1 Reflective Report - Kyle Ginsberg**

This summer, I conducted a research project entitled 'Quarantine on Twitter: How did the digital LGBTQ+ community use nostalgia and social media to cope during the Covid-19 pandemic?' to investigate social media, mental health, and isolation within the LGBTQ+ community online. Alongside the main research question, I followed four sub-questions to guide my research and analysis: What are the trends in quarantine habits and coping mechanisms among LGBTQ+ Twitter accounts; what are the most popular posts from the March-August time period about quarantine habits; what coping mechanisms do COVID-19 mental health posts promote surrounding queer communities; and is there a focus in posts centered around nostalgia-inducing products/media. By conducting a content analysis on tweets publicly posted from March - August 2020 with these questions as guiding principles, I was able to successfully gain a greater understanding of some impacts of social isolation and social media on the digital LGBTQ+ community. My position as a queer transgender man within this project allowed me to personally investigate a wider community beyond my own experiences; moreover, I have been able to explore the manifestations of the consequences of social isolation that have affected myself, the queer community, and the greater population.

My research proposal and outline submitted with my Laidlaw application was primarily developed on my own, then shaped with guidance from my supervisor. The idea for the project was founded from my own interest in how media was being consumed over the height of lockdown and how isolation affected LGBTQ mental health. These retrospective questions were best translated to content analysis research by looking through personal accounts and experiences in a public setting such as Twitter. To adapt to the limitations of social media research, such as inaccessibility, vagueness, and potential misrepresentations, I conducted a thorough literature review on online mental health within the LGBTQ community as well as studies regarding COVID and media consumption. This review took place in Autumn 2020 and was the primary reinforcement of the topics covered in the application. My application also outlined a schedule for the six-week research period and how I would structure my process, notably promising a further, more in-depth literature review to be conducted in the Summer of 2021 before my six weeks of research began to have a fresh view on the relevant studies published. This literature review delved further into how social media and online media consumption impacts the LGBTQ community as well as the leisure and coping habits common in social isolation. The work done in advance of the research period, both during and after the application process, greatly aided my understanding of the relevant fields of research, allowing for

the independent collection and analysis of the data to run smoothly over the six-week research period.

Over the course of the six-week research period, a content analysis was performed to answer the main research question: how did the digital LGBTQ+ community use nostalgia and social media to cope during the Covid-19 pandemic? With guidance from the previously conducted literature review, the first step of the research process was to create a pilot test for coding the tweets to ensure reliability and consistency throughout data collection. Upon completion of the pilot test and correction of any categories within the coding scheme, data collection took place over two weeks. To access the full scope of tweets surrounding mental health and isolation in the online queer community through isolation, a systematic random sample of tweets publicly posted during the months of March - August 2020 including any of the relevant keywords (LGBT[Q], gay, mental health, COVID[-19], isolation, and quarantine). The coding scheme for data collection highlighted basic socio-demographic information, such as age or gender if provided in their profiles, as well as data based on the content of the tweets, such as media and mental health relation. After finalising data collection, data analysis took a two-pronged, mixed-methods approach to synthesising the findings. First, the quantitative analysis consisted of descriptive statistics of the sample from the coded data through SPSS Statistics ver 26. By having access to various cross tabs and frequency tables, the crossover between the socio-demographic information and the content relation could be analysed. The qualitative analysis focused more on the sub-questions and their relevance to the sample. The tweets, all copied anonymously, were first colour coded based on relevant categories and tone indicators. The categories included media related, mental health related, COVID concerns, positive tone, negative tone, mutual aid resource, trend/popular content, and LGBTQ related. Due to the many overlaps in categories in each sample tweet, the sample was then split up into separate lists based on the categories. This separation made in-depth analysis more efficient for switching between categories and themes. Once organised, thematic analysis was conducted surrounding the sub-questions and main research question. To thoroughly synthesise the findings and complete the research project, the final week of the research period was devoted to research outputs, primarily the write-up and poster. The entire process ran relatively on schedule and the findings contributed towards an interesting perspective of social media and social isolation.

While the six weeks of research were generally successful in conducting independent, online research, there were some obstacles that required fast problem-solving and adaptability due to circumstances. The first and most prominent challenge occurred in the first week of research. I had

originally intended to use Twitter's API index for sampling and coding the data, as they give full archival access to academic researchers; however, I was denied academic access due to my status as an undergraduate researcher. This required me to formulate a new sampling method that would not affect the planned sample population or methods of analysis. I chose to manually use Twitter's advanced search feature to filter tweets including specific keywords and posted within a specific period of time. Though this process was lengthier and required more precision in coding, it ultimately provided a successful replacement method for data collection. At first, this experience jostled my confidence in my preparation for the project, but I took time to reflect on my prior knowledge alongside some further research into Twitter's search features to develop my new plan going forward. A different challenge I faced came just before the final week of my project: I had to move temporarily. Due to some scheduling conflicts, I had to move for two weeks at the end of August before settling into my accommodation for the school year. This unexpected move greatly disrupted my schedule, as I had to take time over multiple days to move my belongings and work out administrative details. Because of this, the end of my project did not end at the end of the planned six-week period. Though I only went over a short amount of time to conclude writing my research outputs, I had to adapt to unforeseen circumstances and adjust my working schedule. Both challenges, work-related and personal, affected my research process and allowed me to reflect and think under pressure, a reality of research that can only be practised through experience.

Despite the challenges that arose during the research process, there were also many successes. As this was my first time conducting any research, the entire project seemed very daunting and overwhelming to think about all at once, but by staying organised and on schedule I managed to accomplish all of my tasks and fulfil my goals. A primary focus of mine throughout the project was to stay motivated and on task to not get overwhelmed by the prospect of conducting highly independent research. A large portion of the process was dedicated to data analysis, a task much less straightforward than data collection and one that I have never done before. There are many ways to approach data analysis, especially in a mixed-method research project, so to take the most efficient and applicable approach I applied the most common quantitative method for content analysis, statistical analysis, with a direct qualitative focus with the research sub-questions. This combined method approach allowed for great flexibility within the analysis and a broader view on the sample's general standpoint. Furthermore, I initially thought covering mental health, isolation, and media consumption in relation to the LGBTQ community might be too much and at times unrelated, but the interconnections between the topics were highly relevant to the research, confirming some expectations based on prior literature. These successes throughout the data analysis process, though

minor and insignificant, made a large impact on my morale going through the project, as I did not want to allow my uncertainty from the beginning of the project to affect my motivation throughout the process. Moreover, the successes of this project have reaffirmed my affinity towards research and have inspired me to further challenge myself going forward with my research ambitions.

When I first learned about the Laidlaw Program, I was mostly intrigued by the research aspect and considered the leadership portion something that would be beneficial but not my main focus. To me, leadership is personal dedication combined with collaboration and mutual respect; foremost, leadership comes from experience and adaptability within familiar and unknown situations. I have considered myself a leader for many years for my perseverance and dedication to my goals, no matter how unconventional, and for guiding others who have similar desires but are unsure of how to begin. As a transmasculine individual, much of my later teenage years were spent unlearning societal conventions and rebuilding myself with the most aligned version of my identity. I had no mentor or personal guidance outside online resources, and I am very grateful to have the opportunity to share my experiences with my younger transgender peers. The growth of my personal tenacity has expanded after years of practice and application throughout many aspects of my life beyond my gender identity. Through my outlined experience this summer with problem-solving and challenge management within my project, I have solidified another aspect of my individual growth and outreach; however, my view of leadership hinges on more than just leading but also collaborating. Though I am proud and confident with the progress I have made over the past years on my individual perseverance, I still have much to learn in terms of positive collaboration and group working.

Moving towards the Leadership in Action Experience in Summer 2 and the rest of the leadership workshops, I want to focus more on collaboration as an aspect of team leading. This past summer, I have successfully achieved many of my goals surrounding individual progress and leadership, but to continue my growth as a leader, I must transition to challenging my collaborative skills. I firmly believe that true mastery and success must be supported by experience and active development, and with the opportunity to concentrate on these principles in the upcoming year I can build upon my achievements from this past summer and apply them to a broader setting. While I still have much to learn and experience as a leader in different circumstances; however, the Laidlaw program thus far has given me the tools to cultivate my strengths and recognise my weaknesses in a relevant and encouraging environment. Furthermore, I hope to take my positive growth from the research and workshops over the past months and continue to apply them in my journey as a Laidlaw scholar and

beyond in my professional career, as they have been extremely beneficial in my personal and professional development.

Reflecting upon my experiences and experiences this past summer, I have been taken out of my comfort zone, developed individually and began to apply my growth professionally. I have always been extremely self-motivated and professionally driven, and the first half of the Laidlaw program has exceeded my expectations in challenging and encouraging my development as a leader. Moving forward, I understand that collaboration and team leading experience are more difficult to cultivate in one year, but I am motivated by the positive impacts of the program thus far and hope I continue to grow and succeed with the tools I have been given.