

To fully understand my reflective piece, I think it is crucial to understand my own goals and aspirations as they most often lay the ground for choices I make within my academic career. I am a psychology student and my interests lay within the psychiatric sector, meaning I would like to improve psychological care. Therefore, not surprisingly, my research topic rests within this area, where I wanted to use demographic and clinical factors to predict treatment outcome in a sample that were receiving psychological and psychiatric treatment. However, during the summer more opportunities came up through this work, where I had the chance to practice skills that I will find useful next summer during my leadership in action project. In this reflective piece I will touch on both these topics but also discuss leadership aspects I have developed, and areas I realised that I would like to and can improve.

As I already alluded to, my initial research topic was in line with something I would like to work with in the future. However, what I did not know was how many times a research question could change over time. At first, I was most interested in looking into demographic factors that may be of use in prediction of psychological treatment response. More specifically, I was interested in looking into how factors of ethnicity could influence response to certain treatment. However, as I started looking into the data that I processed, I realised what is commonly found within research – my sample was predominantly of white ethnicity, and I did not have enough participants of other ethnicities to balance it out. Consequently, I had to change my research question. Instead, I looked closer into clinical factors where I landed in assessing whether fatigue could predict treatment response in a sample receiving internet base cognitive behavioural therapy (iCBT). Learning how to adjust and readjust your research question based on the data is something I had never done before, an experience that I will find incredibly useful for future research that I would like to conduct.

Luckily, these sorts of changes, were not overwhelming thanks to an incredibly supportive supervisor. Any questions I had she explained and discussed with me. One aspect I really appreciated is that she prompted me to come up with my own solutions. For example, when I had a question about what analysis to run, she would ask me how I defined factors and directed me to reach my own conclusions, as opposed to giving me the answer. I came to realize that such type of learning, when you are guided towards, and not given a solution is the optimal environment for me to develop.

In addition, my supervisor was also helpful when it came to any logistical issues. For example, my computer is old and did not always have the capacity to run larger codes. At some point, it started crashing when I ran the codes. I stressed this issue to my supervisor and suggested that I would put the project on ice until I was back in Dublin (I was in Sweden at the time). She was fine with the changes of my plan and opened me to access a computer in the office once I was back in Dublin. More importantly, because I had to put my project on hold, she gave me an opportunity to work for an event that the lab was hosting for the Neuroscience Ireland Conference, as it would be to my benefit – allowing me to practice skills that I will need next summer during my Leadership in access proposal.

Also, not to mention all the help I got from the Gillan Lab team. It is not even overexaggerating to mention that several people in the lab sat down with me for more than an hour discussing what approach that would be best to take regarding, for example, visualization of my data. Additionally, I also made new friends during this summer, and it did make my summer project not only less lonely, but also has made my future college life more exciting.

However, I did realise aspects of my academic skills where I could improve. I came to understand that my statistical skills were quite facile. I always enjoyed statistics and I have done well in the topic during my academic years. Though, I came to realize that interpreting results based on my knowledge was quite difficult. I performed something referred to as logistical regression to my research. I had studied and came to understand regressions quite well prior to my research but my downfall was that I underestimated the complexities of a logistical regression, coming into the topic with the attitude that “it cannot deviate too much from what I already know”. And truth is, it does not but it is dangerous, and quite difficult to not only understand but interpret results without a full understanding of the analysis. However, unsurprisingly I solved this issue with (1) much help from my colleagues and (2) put time aside to make sure I really understood what a logistical regression was before I started interpreting my results. In sum, all went well in the end, but I do appreciate this experience as I will now make sure that I **really** understand the statistical models before I apply them to my research.

Although, something that did surprise me during the summer was that I was quite unconfident in not just my academic ability but on a more general level as well, during the summer. Usually, I would describe myself as a quite confident person, I

will happily speak to people I do not know, to the extent that I have built new friendships with a cab driver, or neighbours that often walk their dog outside my house. However, during the summer – which I think is due to my lack of confidence within academia - I felt a bit estranged to myself. Instead of believing in what I know I often found myself pretending that I knew less than I did, for the benefit of no one. For example, I could have something explained to me which I clearly already knew about, but instead of just expressing my knowledge I decided to make it seem like the information was new to me. However, over time I changed this attitude and my confidence got closer to what it normally is like. However, it was a crucial experience for me to have, because now I can work on a new approach which is to own my work and my knowledge!

The situation I just mentioned I would rate as the thing that I enjoyed least about the project, my reduced confidence. However, I can with certainty say that I enjoyed more aspects than I disliked. As I have already alluded to, I really enjoyed the social aspect of the project, and the opportunity to discuss routes I could take within my research. Furthermore, I am extremely grateful that I had the opportunity to learn how to code and using coding to processing data. It was not only incredibly enjoyable to code, but it also gave me a new way of looking at data. Often within coding you must restructure the data to execute the codes, to reach a desired outcome. At first, this was intimidating but once I started to understand how to look at the data and knew what to look for – it suddenly became slightly addictive.

One of the most useful experiences I had during my research project in relation to leadership abilities was that I came to realise that my way of explaining things can at times be convoluted. This often occurred when I phrased questions. For example, instead of just asking “How are you today?” I tend to phrase questions like “I woke up this morning and I realised that you told me yesterday that you were worried about not feeling great today, so I guess I am just checking now, how you are doing today?”. I came to realise that the answers I often got were quite vague which was not surprising because my phrasing made it incredibly difficult for anyone to understand what I was asking. Therefore, I created a strategy that forced me to be clearer – I started to reflect on what I was actually asking. I am aware that it can seem like an obvious solution but until this summer, it was not to me.

However, I would like to emphasise one experience from my research project that did not only allow me to develop new skills, but also made me view leadership

abilities differently. I have always appreciated the impact of external circumstances could have on my work. However, this time I changed my approach of dealing with such circumstances. This time, I acted according to my abilities rather than what I thought I **should** be able to do.

During the summer I encountered issues in my personal life that could not have been avoided. Usually, I would ignore such instances and keep on going as normal. For this reason, I used to view myself as an incredibly resilient person. However, keeping going as normal usually came at a cost of my mental state. Therefore, I tried a different approach this time – I contacted my supervisor who I had been working closely with and explained that I wanted to work as normal but that the process may take longer than usual. Of course, she was understanding but what surprised me the most was that, not only did I perform **just as well**, but I also felt fine working during this period. Instead of not stressing my circumstances and feeling overwhelmed that the work that I am producing is not on the level I wanted it to be, the pressure was now off, with no impact on the work. From this experience I now view resilience differently. It is not only how much pressure you can take and go through, but also admitting the impact of external factors. For this reason, I believe that my view of a good leader has changed slightly over the summer.

. However, the workshops that have been running over the summer also added to that change. I already knew I did not appreciate authoritative leaders, but I do understand that things can become difficult if too many people's opinions are involved in a project. For example, when I took the lead on the Neuroscience Ireland event that we were launching, I appreciated inputs from the whole team, but realized that I would have to call the final shots. Previously, I had never really reflected on the value of that in a leader, but after experiencing it myself, I do consider it an important attribute of a leaders.

Even though I mainly joined the Laidlaw program to develop my research skills, I value the leadership inputs that we have been exposed to. For example, the speaking in public workshop we had in September was enjoyable but also useful. I am usually quite confident speaking in public but feel like my abilities have developed further. I now understand that a great public speaker requires more than not feeling overwhelmed by speaking in front of people, but that it also requires you to be structured in your speech for your message to be clear.

To sum up, summer 1 of the Laidlaw programme has been challenging, enjoyable and insightful. I have got to know new people, gotten to know myself better and developed skills that are useful beyond an academic context. This summer has undoubtedly set me up for the coming year and I genuinely cannot wait for next summer when I will be putting these newly developed and former but enhanced skills into practice.