

My LiA project aimed to deliver an exhibition that would increase the understanding of the complexities of postnatal depression. Namely, there are different paths to depression (Fried & Nesse, 2015; Keers et al., 2016), and how they are influenced by individual experiences and genetics (Keers et al., 2016). Specifically, I wanted to engage individuals with my research from my first Laidlaw research project, where I assessed if a set of clinical and psychological factors could explain variability in and predict treatment response of internet-based cognitive behavioral therapy (iCBT) and antidepressant treatment.

To achieve the aim of this project, I hosted a week long exhibition. I initiated collaborations with a number of partners to deliver this project: (i) CREATE–REACT, a volunteer-based organization that focuses on public engagement in science and art; (ii) The Gillan Lab, a team of researchers focusing on cognitive neuroscience; (iii) Maria Sjöö, a photographer who has done work on her experience of postnatal depression, (iv) and two local organisations with an interest in mental health, NVB, and Blå Bandet.

The focus of the exhibition was the lived experience of postnatal depression through photography. Accompanying the artworks, I created cards that included questions and information that guided the audience in gaining a better understanding of depression and treatment responses to postnatal depression. Feedback from visitors and collaborators suggested this approach was both emotionally impactful and relatable. Specifically, this work provided an emotional connection that could be used to explore the research behind the lived experience – making research more relatable.

The aims of the project included three impacts. First, understanding why treatments fail can increase the chances of trying a new treatment. This experience is depicted in Maria's art. However, with my contribution to how we understand variability in treatment response, the project conveyed a more comprehensive picture with an aim that individuals feel less alone in their experience of failed treatment response and encourage them to continue to try a new treatment. In short, one impact of the project was to increase the understanding of failed treatment responses and encourage individuals to try new treatments at times when they have failed.

Second, Reducing mental health stigma. Depicting psychological research through the medium of art provided a framework for education and experience. Meaning it created a safe space where the audience was able to reflect on their own and other experiences of postnatal depression. Moreover, it allowed them better identify patterns common to postnatal depression in themselves and others in the future, allowing them to intervene and seek treatment. Moreover, social support is key and functions as a protective factor against several mental health disorders.

Understanding the experience of postnatal depression and treatment for it can create better social support networks for those who are suffering from it.

Third, the project opened a two-way communication between science and art. I spent a substantial amount of time discussing Maria's experiences. Understanding her experience benefitted my scientific career. Namely, her experience through her art allowed me to think and engage differently in my own work – which I will continue to do in the future. Secondly, my understanding of mental health through research impacted how Maria thinks about her – and others' experiences of mental health. Thus, her future work will also be impacted by this collaboration, where she has been given an opportunity – just as I have – to understand the same concept from a different lens. Conversations with lab members (see: [‘Smutsiga Glas: A photographic expression of postnatal depression’](#)) and the artist confirmed such benefits. In short, I have decided to use this type of collaboration to utilize interdisciplinary approaches, to enhance my own and others' appreciation of mental health – a topic I care deeply about.

A secondary outcome of the project, and an essential aspect of two-way communication, was how collaborating with an artist and external partners impacted my practices. Specifically, my perspective on what constitutes a good leader has changed. Previously, and similar to my current leadership style, I believed that a good leader is someone who identifies good qualities in people and brings them together. However, in a real-world setting, it is not always possible to identify individual qualities and bring them together to maximize the project's potential. For example, I have often thought that the more people that are partly or directly involved in a project, the better the output will be. However, relatively late in the project, I realized that the collaboration with the local communities actually complicated my

process (see: ['Challenges and Learnings of Ethical leadership'](#)). As such, I think an additional component of a good leadership style is to be able to identify what does and what does not benefit the outcome.

I have realized that most collaborations have a transaction where it sometimes is unlikely that people collaborate without personal gain. Not realizing this early on did cause issues for me during my LiA. The two local collaborators were really interested in the project and were more than happy to collaborate, given they could include some marketing for their own companies. However, I was not aware that they wanted to give presentations during the exhibition. Personally, I did not like the idea of two companies doing marketing in this manner as I believed that it would distract the audience from the actual work. However, the companies had provided a venue free of charge, and I, therefore, felt like I had no right to refuse this request. As such, we compromised and agreed that they could hold a one-minute talk each about their companies. Having conversations early on about these requirements would have allowed me to plan for what they needed in advance. A positive from this experience is the fact that I was able to improve my ability to press my point, which subsequently has made me more confident as the lead.

In relation to the program as a whole, I have got to know myself better, which has been of great value. I used to think that I did not enjoy 'being in charge. However, I think my strengths lie in a leadership position now. My reasoning around it used to be that I viewed leaders as authoritative, but the Laidlaw program has made me realize that a leader can be much more than that. For example, I did lead my LiA project, but the decisions were often made together with my supervisors and the artist. While issues did arise because of this leadership style, they were rare and minor. My development throughout the program made this leadership style and collaboration possible when I grew more confident in arguing my point without the authority to listen to others' ideas and go for them when it provided a more significant benefit for the outcome.

Perhaps my newly developed skills in conversations of compromise stem from reflections triggered by the conflict resolution lecture. His models of how conflict develops and how to resolve them are still on my mind. Even though I was fully

aware of perspective and that 'no one is right but only acts according to one's needs, his model of resolution added a component. Namely, he was able to visualize the competing needs and where the solution could be identified. Even though I never had conversations based on this model, initial and current reflections of the conflict resolution lecture were present during the whole program. For example, when I was in a situation where I was not happy for the collaborators to present on their companies, I also understood that they had provided us with a venue. For them, I owed them this in return, while for me, I felt like they had never mentioned it and that it would distract from my work. However, understanding my needs and their needs, we came to a solution where my work was not distracted, and they got the marketing they had hoped for.

In summary, I now know myself better, enjoy working with people more, and feel more confident in creating, producing, and delivering ideas that I find great value in. In fact, I have enjoyed it to the extent where I am planning to take my LiA project further, where the next step is to secure funding to be able to host the exhibition in Dublin.

References

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