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When I emailed my second-year social psychology tutor to ask if she had any projects I could help with over the summer as part of an eight-week internship, I was not expecting her to reply “Sure - what project do you want to run?”.

The question was equally thrilling and terrifying. With support from the Rokos Awards to fund research, there were no limits – I could run any experiment I could dream up. It was a slightly daunting prospect, but with help from my social psychology tutor and now supervisor, Olly Robertson, and co-supervisor Danielle Shore, I decided on a pair of experiments that would investigate how people manage their emotions through sharing them with other people. The first experiment gathered over two hundred video testimonials from people talking about their everyday lives, some sharing events as socially painful as divorce and others activities as mundane as grocery shopping. In the second experiment, we took some of these video testimonials and used them as prompts for another group of people. Pretend this person is your friend, we told them. What would you say in response?

One of our many hypotheses was that when the original prompt video used more emotional language, such as “I feel... or “I get upset when...”, respondents would give more of what social psychologists call socioaffective support, saying things like “oh, poor you”, “I can see how that would be hard”, and “that must be so frustrating”. When the original prompt video used more thought-based language, such as “I think...” or “it makes me wonder...” we expected the respondents to offer a more practical, or cognitive, support, giving advice and potential solutions to the other person’s problems. Data analysis is still ongoing, but whatever we find it should be interesting!

Eight weeks is far shorter than the usual time frame for this kind of project – and I would have appreciated a slower pace at times – but being involved from start to finish taught me so much. Among other things, I learned how to get ethical approval for experiments with humans, build digital experiments and recruit people to take part online, and worked on coding skills to help me analyse the data we collected. I’ll be using all of these skills in my third year research project, and hopefully my future career.

The experience was equally valuable because of what I learned about working in a research group. I now feel much more confident knowing when to work through problems on my own, and when it is more efficient for everyone to go to my supervisors, or other people in the lab, for help. I’ve learned when to ask for and incorporate other opinions, and when to advocate for my own. I particularly enjoyed learning how to share my work with different audiences. Along the way, I helped write and edit a paper, presented my research in a lab meeting, have been invited to speak at another lab group in 2023 about this work, and I’m about to do a talk about psychological research at the University of Oxford for a local school. I also did many, many hours of video transcription – and learned an important lesson about how more varied workdays help me avoid burnout.

When I think about what I will take from this internship, one particular incident springs to mind. On Wednesdays, we would have lab meetings where we would discuss anything we were struggling with that week, and ask for feedback from others. One week, the meeting was made up of me and a few other female researchers early on in their psychology journey. Danielle talked with us about job applications, the gains and sacrifices that come from an academic life versus a commercial one, and how it’s okay not to have a clear idea where your career is heading – the conversation went on for so long that we had to relocate because we’d only booked the room for an hour! Throughout the internship, both Danielle and Olly have been incredibly supportive, inspirational mentors, and it

honestly wouldn't have been the same experience without them, or the rest of the amazingly patient, giving people who helped me along the way. Particular shout-outs must go to everyone in both Danielle and Olly's labs, my pilot testers, and of course the Rokos Foundation for making the whole thing possible.