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Short Term Scientific Mission Final Report

Funded by COST IS1210 “Appearance Matters: Tackling the Physical Psychological Consequences of Dissatisfaction with Appearance”

COST S.T.S.M. Reference Code: COST-STSM-ECOST-STSM-IS1210-030515-056169

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Place: Raanana, Tel Aviv, Israel

Title of STSM visit: A Cross cultural study of appearance matters in Higher education and workplace, as related to CB.

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

Being a faculty member of Aristotle University and also of the board of the Social Pediatrician Union of Greece, I am very interested in students' health. According to the definition given from the World Health Organization, with the word health we mean body, mind and psychological health as well as social well being too. The "social health" of the students, is connected among others, with appearance matters

perception and bullying victimization. These issues have always been very important in real life, but have recently become very urgent, due to the rapid development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). Nowadays, we have 'the appearance' in social media and in social networking sites and we are also dealing with the fact, why people in cyberspace choose for their profile an appearance that it is perfect, according to the fashion standards, but it is not their real one. A lot of times they have different profiles due to the different social networking groups they want to belong. This means that we have to add all the digital traces in order to decide for one's 'virtual appearance'. It is not unusual for somebody to be appearance-related victimized, of cyberbullying, which is according to Belsey, a new type of bullying taking place by means of ICTs. There are many studies examining cyberbullying characteristics in relation to behavioral and socio-emotional aspects (e.g., Smith, et al., 2008), but very few studies dealing with the relationships of cyberbullying and body esteem (Frisén, Berne, & Lunde, 2013).

Purpose of the S.T.S.M.

Appearance perception and dissatisfaction have been main issues in human lives, especially under the influence of the media and fashion industries. In the last decade they have taken a new dimension, because of globalization. In a study in United Kingdom (Diedrichs, 2011b) among 77,000 adults, 60% of them reported feeling ashamed of how they look, and 73% felt pressure from the media to have a perfect body.

A scientific survey in appearance matters in Greece is in a very early stage. The purpose of this study was the cooperation between Israel and Greece, in an interdisciplinary research about appearance matters in Higher education with the use of a common questionnaire and the collection and comparison of the data from the two countries. Even at a first glance some differences seem to appear, our countries have a lot in common, both of them being Mediterranean with European culture. Human body occupies a central position in Greek art and sculpture. The general idea had been that “a perfect mind lives in a perfect body” with Aphrodite of Mylos having the perfect analogies for a woman, far from today's thin woman models with anorexia. In Israel there is a debate among scholars and theologians in the question "How did the ancient Israelites look physically?", even though the scriptures and other historical documents, have left a lot of evidence that

confirm the physical appearance of the Israelites, much of this information is still unknown to the masses.

We were interested in discussing the research findings concerning the relationship between age, gender, studies, religion, partnership and appearance, found both in Greece and in Israel.

1. Discuss the findings of the questionnaires in Greece.
2. Examine and correlate the findings in both countries, both in appearance matters and cyberbullying victimization.
3. Try to propose a model for prognosis and prediction both for students and adults.

Description of the work carried-out

The work carried out in the host institution can be divided into 3 parts.

1.A cooperation between Israel and Greece, in an interdisciplinary research about appearance matters in Higher education with a common questionnaire.

After exchanging emails and ideas for a future cooperation, Dr Tali Heiman, Dr. Dorit Olenik-Shemesh and I had an opportunity to have a meeting in Kristianstad. Studying bibliography in our countries, we have found out that there is no systematic research for appearance perception and dissatisfaction concerning South Europe. The bulk of research has been carried out in the US, Australia and the UK.. It is also very important to point out the novelty of our research in the age of the participants, which are students in Higher Education, since the majority of surveys have been made for students in Elementary and High schools.

In order to have comparable and reliable measurements, we had made a common questionnaire for the two countries in English. It was divided into 2 parts. In the first, there were ten questions, five of them, concerning body perception and five for body awareness. In the second part someone has to fill in the gender, the age, the religion, the existence of a partner, the university department, the number of the semesters and if the participant is working or not. They were translated into our mother languages and were distributed to students in Greece and Israel. We knew in advance that since students in Israel join the army before entering the university, they are expecting to be older than the Greek ones. All the 400 questionnaires were distributed to students from different disciplines, in order to have a more reliable

sample. After they have been filled in we collected them and were translated into English. The data were accessed in Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and the sample was reliable according to Cronbach's Alpha.

The STSM took place in the Open University of Tel Aviv in Raanana. Having in advance inserting all of our data in the computer and accessing them first in Excel and then with SPSS, and looking thoroughly in all the details of our questionnaires, a large part of my time has been spent in front of a computer conducting analysis. During my stay in Tel Aviv and thanks to the opportunity it was given to me from this STSM, Dr Tali Heiman, Dr. Dorit Olenik-Shemesh and I were able to have a fruitful cooperation and make our plans for our future cooperation. Starting first with descriptive statistics, we worked further using SPSS with regression analysis. Making also Anova analysis, we accessed first the sample from Israel which was larger and then the one from Greece. With the final results in our hands we started pointing out the differences and similarities between the two groups. At a first glance we had to omit the factors of the number of semesters which played no role and the religion since had no diversity and all the Greeks being Christian Orthodox and from Israel we had only a few Arabs. Each factor was analyzed by itself regarding to appearance, for example if the gender or the existence of a partner plays any role. Also we worked in combining factors e.g. gender and country with appearance etc.

At a second level we will process the findings with data mining. After regression analysis we were glad to realize that we can also proceed to a prognosis for both countries. During my stay we worked together in writing a paper to be published in a journal.

I also participated in the research group meetings at the host institution. During these meetings, also from the point of view of different disciplines, we discussed the findings of this appearance questionnaire from different ethnic groups. In Greece we had the answers of Gypsies-ROM, whose education level is very low and have a partner usually when they are teenagers. In the near future we will cooperate in this field too.

2.Appearance matters in Higher education as related to cyberbullying.

During the STSM I have presented in the host Institution the results of my survey in Greece about cyberbullying in tertiary education, the profiles of victims and perpetrators in relation with body appearance, and discipline.

Bullying is an intentional behavior to harm another, repeatedly, where it is difficult for the victim to defend himself. The most recent type of bullying is cyberbullying, which is a systematic abuse of power which occurs through the use of ICTs

We started investigating the problem among freshmen students of Aristotle University by giving them an anonymous detailed questionnaire to fill in. They were asked if they had been victims, perpetrators or bystanders in the 7 different types of cyberbullying. The survey was held for two different groups of Greek students. The first one among students of the Physics Department, who spend more time working in front of a computer and don't usually care about their appearance, and the second one of the Physical Education Department, because the majority of them are athletes and spend most of their time in stadiums and usually are stronger and take care of their appearance, their bodies and health. Comparing the results in the two groups, differences concerning the incidence of the phenomenon of cyberbullying, the percentage of the victims, perpetrators or bystanders and the types of cyberbullying were found. The percentage of the students who have been victims is remarkable, that of the perpetrators is smaller, but the one of the “friends” who are involved is extremely large. This means that the category of witnesses or bystanders is the most common one and must be handled very carefully. One of the greatest problems of those dealing with bullying is that adolescents don't talk about their problem to anyone and if they do so, they share it with their friends. In cyberbullying parents cannot help their children because they do not know as much as their children about new technology and perhaps they are not even aware of the extent of the new problem. Since cyberbullying is a rather new concept and research especially in Greece is still in its initial phase, the purpose of this survey had been to write down the results, make teachers aware of the rapidly growing problem concerning their own students, and warn the students and their parents for the dangers they may face in the future.

During the STSM I was informed for the work done by the team in Israel. This had been a very interesting and rewarding experience and our aim is to present our results in a conference.

3.Appearance matters as related to working place bullying

Cyberbullying victims are not only adolescents, but also people at their

workplaces and especially educators. After making qualitative analysis in work places via interviews, we discussed the results of the role of appearance in victimization and the significant role of body image for the two genders in workplace.

Practical results

- I. A comparison study
 1. Comparison and examination of the results concerning appearance matters of Greek students with those of the students in Israel.
 2. Make a further qualitative analysis for victimization concerning appearance and a data mining procedure. The data will be analysed and compared between the two countries.
 3. Organize schools for parents for appearance matters in social media and in cyberspace and guidelines for prevention of possible children victimization in cyberbullying concerning appearance.
- II. Assimilation
 1. Participating and presenting our findings in future conferences.
 2. Publication. Publishing papers in peer reviewed journals.
 3. Sharing the appearance matters and cyberbullying phenomena and their correlation in Higher education and in working-place (mobbing) and in virtual life (griefing) with other colleagues.

Confirmation by the host institute of the successful execution of the STSM

I declare that Vasiliki Gountsidou stayed at The Open University of Israel, Raanana, Israel, during her STSM period and participated to all above described activities. I also confirm the successful execution of the Short Term Scientific Mission of Vasiliki Gountsidou.

Place: The Open University of Israel

Date: 03/05/2015 to 9/5/2015

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