**Short Term Scientific Mission Report**

**The purpose of the STSM:**

In April 2015, I conducted a Short Term Scientific Mission (STSM) within the Department of Psychology, at the University of Oslo, Norway. I worked under the supervision of Professor Ingela Lundin Kvalem, whose research interests include body image, obesity, and cosmetic surgery. She is also a member of the COST Action Task Force Group ‘Appearance in Mid and Later Life’, a topic within which my PhD is based, and therefore offering the opportunity to discuss potential collaborations and contribute towards the group’s task force.

**Description of the work carried out during the STSM and the main results obtained:**

***1. To learn about the research conducted by Professor Kvalem and colleagues, particularly in the areas of cosmetic surgery, obesity, and body image among young people.***

The week was comprised of several discussions with Prof. Kvalem and her colleagues regarding the different topics of research within which they are involved. Whilst already a little familiar the area of cosmetic surgery, I was very keen to learn about the longitudinal research Prof. Kvalem had carried out with her colleague, Prof. Tilmann von Soest, and others. Using a sample of more than 1000 women in midlife, motivations for undergoing cosmetic surgery were explored. Body image and social acceptance of cosmetic surgery in the individual’s environment were identified as the strongest predictors of surgery motivation. They then went back to examine the psychosocial impact of the cosmetic surgery 6 months and 5 years later. Body image evaluation was found to have significantly improved 6 months following surgery and did not differ from that of the comparison group. Interestingly, whilst this positive effect on appearance satisfaction was maintained 5 years later, there was no identified improvement in self-esteem and mental health. This suggests that whilst cosmetic surgery may be effective in improving one’s body image, it may in fact be inappropriate for targeting other psychosocial factors. Furthermore, an exploration of the role of personality traits in cosmetic surgery revealed that extraversion was higher in women who underwent cosmetic surgery, compared with a control group who had no experience of cosmetic procedures. This research is particularly relevant to my PhD research area, as increasing numbers of women in midlife are undertaking cosmetic procedures, so it is important that we increase our understanding of the motivations involved.

I was fortunate to meet with Prof. Bente Træen, who specialises in the research area of sexology. I learnt about an interesting longitudinal study herself and Prof. Kvalem (and other colleagues) had conducted to explore the relationship between body image and coital onset among adolescents, whereby 12-15 years old were followed for 13 years and assessed at four different time points. Whilst the data revealed complex patterns, the findings suggested that satisfaction with appearance may have been associated with early sexual behaviour among adolescent boys, whilst potentially serving as a protective factor among adolescent girls. This research emphasises the importance of promoting positive body image among adolescents, particularly among girls, in order to protect them from potentially risky sexual behaviour. I also heard about an additional collaboration exploring the relationship between pornography use, genital appearance satisfaction, and sexual self-esteem. Findings identified that men who perceived pornography use to have a positive impact on their sexuality, were more likely to report higher sexual self-esteem, which was partially due to greater satisfaction with their genital appearance. On the other hand, women who were more satisfied with their genital appearance were more likely to report higher levels of sexual self-esteem, but this was not associated with possessing a positive view of pornography use. I found this research very thought-provoking as whilst the relationship between media use and general body image has been well studied, the impact of viewing sexually explicit media upon genital appearance satisfaction has been scarcely explored. This area warrants further research, particularly given its association with sexual self-esteem, which has the potential to impact upon relationships and intimacy.

I had the opportunity to talk with Ms. Irmelin Bergh regarding her PhD research examining the psychosocial processes which predict behaviour change and weight loss before, and following, bariatric surgery. This research is important as bariatric surgery is an effective weight loss method for individuals who are obese. Pre-operative weight loss has been associated with improved surgical outcomes and greater post-operative weight loss, and potentially indicates a better degree of patient compliance with post-operative recommendations regarding healthy eating and physical activity. Thus far, Irmelin has identified psychosocial predictors of pre-operative weight loss in bariatric surgery patients, which include a high weight loss goal, frequent weight monitoring, and being at the highest lifetime weight when applying for surgery. I found this research extremely interesting, particularly since obesity is not studied at the Centre for Appearance Research (CAR). Prof. Kvalem told me that many patients report feeling dissatisfied with their appearance following bariatric surgery, due to loose, sagging skin. Evidently, there is huge scope to explore body image within this field.

I was also very lucky to attend the weekly ‘health psychology group’ meeting. This provides an opportunity for Prof. Kvalem and her colleagues to discuss their work and exchange advice regarding their research within different areas of health psychology. I gave a PowerPoint presentation about my PhD research to the group, of whom all offered extremely useful feedback which I will be incorporating within my analyses and discussion.

***2. To plan collaborative and cross-cultural research whilst also contributing towards the output of COST Action Task Force Group ‘Appearance in mid and later life’.***

Prof. Kvalem and I discussed findings from our separate research conducted with women in mid and later life; hers from Norway and my own from the United Kingdom. It appeared that we had both used the same three subscales from the Multidimensional Body Self-Relations Questionnaire (MBSRQ; Cash, 1990) to measure different aspects of body image: Appearance Evaluation, Appearance Orientation, and the Body Areas Satisfaction Scale. Collaborating and comparing our findings will contribute towards cross-cultural research and consequently towards the COST Action Task Force Group ‘Appearance in mid and layer life’.

I was enthusiastic to learn about the different types of research being conducted by Prof. Kvalem and her colleagues. From our discussions, it became apparent that body image was likely to play a role within these different research areas (e.g. following bariatric surgery for obesity), and was consequently worthy of study alongside other psychosocial factors. I would be very excited to collaborate in research to examine the role of body image within these areas.

***3. To learn from Professor Kvalem’s experience of developing and evaluating psychosocial interventions.***

**­**Prof. Kvalem talked about the use of intervention mapping when designing interventions, and particularly the need for evaluation at every stage of development. We also discussed the importance of conducting a process evaluation, in order to identify the cause-and-effect relationships between components of the psychosocial programme and its outcomes. This allows us to identify the aspects which are driving the anticipated changes in outcomes. When discussing alternative methods to evaluate the effects of a psychosocial intervention, Prof. Kvalem spoke about the benefits of using the Solomon four group design. This design contains two extra control groups in order to reduce the influence of confounding variables. This allows the researcher to check that the pre-test itself is not having an impact on participants and consequently influencing the findings, rather than the intervention. I will definitely keep this evaluation design in mind for future research exploring the effectiveness of interventions.

Within my PhD, I am designing a psychosocial programme to improve the body image of women with breast cancer. Based on her expertise, Prof. Kvalem mapped out a potential theory regarding how variables may interact with one another to affect the body image of women who have been treated for breast cancer. These variables overlapped with those which are being targeted in the provisional programme, which was very interesting. We then discussed the issues which may arise, not only from the focus group methodology which will be used to assess the acceptability of the proposed programme, but additionally within the actual running of the group programme itself. She offered insightful advice regarding the format and different components of the programme. It was extremely useful to have the input from someone who is outside of my PhD and consequently offers a new perspective.

***4. To learn about alternative methodologies used to conduct body image research, with a particular focus on the measures employed.***

The primary research design employed by Prof. Kvalem and colleagues are longitudinal quantitative studies. These usually have very impressive sample sizes, as they are often based on data provided by adolescents and adults in Norway, who are required to complete annual national surveys. For example, findings from the longitudinal study examining body image and coital onset were taken from “Young in Norway”, a large national representative survey initiated in 1992, which follows 12,287 students from 13 to 19 years of age. Whilst this design is methodologically superior to that of cross-sectional studies with smaller sample sizes, it was surprising to hear that Prof. Kvalem and her colleagues nonetheless perceived several drawbacks with this method. For example, they would prefer to collect the data themselves.

We had several discussions regarding our perceived strengths and limitations of existing scales to measure different aspects of body image. Prof. Kvalem and Prof. Træen were keen to identify a measure which accounts for the psychosocial impact of appearance evaluation upon intimate situations. I recommended the Royal Free Hospital and Centre for Appearance Intimacy Scale, which is comprised of 12 items to examine the extent to which an individual feels their appearance has affected their sexual behaviour and intimate relationships. Additionally, we discussed alternative measures to the MBSRQ’s Appearance Evaluation and Appearance Orientation subscales (Cash, 1990). I suggested considering the Centre for Appearance Research Salience Scale (CARSAL; 5 items) and the Centre for Appearance Research Valence Scale (CARVAL; 8 items), both of which have been psychometrically validated (Moss and Rosser, 2012).

**Final comments:**

Overall, the STSM was an extremely valuable experience. I anticipate this trip to be followed by future research collaborations between CAR and the University of Oslo. I thoroughly enjoyed spending time with other researchers at the university and learning all about their work. They were extremely welcoming and invited me to attend a seminar alongside other PhD students about post-doctoral career opportunities. I am particularly grateful to Prof. Kvalem who organised a very interesting STSM and was enormously hospitable during my stay. I very much look forward to seeing her at the Appearance Matters 7 conference in 2016.

**Confirmation by the host institution of the successful execution of the STSM:**

**I hereby confirm Helena Lewis-Smith´s STSM in Oslo, Norway.** I declare that Helena Lewis-Smith stayed at the Department of Psychology, University of Oslo during 27 April-2 May 2015 and participated in all the above described activities.

Signed (Host): ......*Ingela Lundin Kvalem*......

Date: 20 May 2015

Name (HOST): Ingela Lundin Kvalem.

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