

The purpose of the STSM:

I spent my short term scientific mission (STSM) working at the Istituto Miller, in Florence, Italy under the supervision of Professor Davide Dettore a specialist in body dysmorphic disorder, body image and obsessive compulsive disorder. The purpose of the STSM was to achieve the objectives listed in italics below. Additionally, the STSM was an opportunity to discuss and plan potential research collaborations between the Centre for Appearance Research (CAR) and the Istituto Miller.

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

I was pleased to have successfully achieved all my objectives during my time at the Istituto Miller;

1. To learn about the day to day work and research carried out at the Istituto Miller and to explain the work that I am involved in at the Centre for Appearance Research.

During the initial group meeting to discuss the week's agenda I was given numerous papers and chapters to read. In addition to topics I am already familiar with (such as body dysmorphic disorder and body image) I also had the opportunity to read papers on less familiar, but related, areas including obsessive-compulsive disorder and gender dysphoria. This group meeting was a great opportunity to meet the team and to discuss in greater detail the aims and objectives of the STSM.

I had many opportunities to talk with and learn from the psychologists/ researchers working at the Istituto Miller who specialise in many different and interesting areas including gender dysphoria, gender identity disorder, eating disorders and obsessive-compulsive disorder. We discussed the overlap of our work and in particular noted the similarities between gender stereotypes and appearance stereotypes.

I found it particularly useful to discuss the interventions that we both conduct in school settings. I spent time learning about the gender stereotype interventions the team have developed and evaluated with children aged 11-14 years. The interventions are designed to educate students about stereotypes, gender stereotypes, gender roles and to prevent homophobic bullying. The activities and format of the sessions (e.g., role plays, work sheets, group discussions, use of multi - media) are similar to the body image interventions we conduct in the UK. I was particularly interested to find out about the activities they use in their interventions and believe that some of the activities could be tailored to help us teach children about appearance stereotypes. For example, the 'post it note' activity involves a volunteer having a post it note stuck on his/her back with a word such as 'footballer' or 'model' etc written on it. The rest of the group have to describe the characteristics of that person and the volunteer has to guess who they are. The children use stereotypical words to describe the person, for example, they often describe a footballer as 'rich' and a 'womaniser'. Following this they would then, deconstruct the stereotype and describe how stereotypes are cognitive shortcuts and generalisations and draw on examples of people who do not conform to this stereotype. I found this particularly interesting because it overlaps with the work members of the Centre for Appearance Research have been conducting over the years to develop an interactive exhibit that challenges appearance stereotypes in a very similar way to the 'post it note' activity. The exhibit is now based in a busy science centre in Bristol.

We also discussed the different measures we use in our research. I was shown a copy of the Body Image Scale (Lindgren & Pauly, 1975) which is specifically used as part of the assessment for gender dysphoria. The measure includes a comprehensive list of 30 body features (e.g., Adams apple, penis, height, forehead, breasts, chest, arms etc) and clients have to rate how dissatisfied – satisfied they are with each body part. Interestingly, for each body part there is an additional question about

whether they would like to *change* that body part and during the clinical assessment the psychologist would ask the client how he/she would like to change that particular body part. I think the additional question about whether or not a client would like to change a particular body feature (and how) is interesting and potentially worth including in some of the research I conduct.

The day to day running of the Instituto Miller involves an important mix of research, private clinical practice (assessments, formulations and therapies), research collaborations, supervision, teaching, writing, publishing, delivering and evaluating interventions to non-clinical populations (e.g. school children in local towns across Florence) among other important things. I definitely got the opportunity to learn about the research carried out at the instituto Miller.

2. To learn about the cross cultural body image projects members of the Instituto Miller are involved in.

I am particularly interested in cross-cultural body image research. It was therefore interesting to talk to Professor Davide Dettore about the cross cultural study he has been involved in. The researchers have recruited large samples of participants from China, USA and Italy and are using a range of different measures to compare their body image. We discussed the results and the potential to recruit a British sample.

3. To learn about and participate in the work conducted at the 'Unity for Eating Disorders'.

I spent a few days working with the institute's expert on eating disorders. She showed me some of the measures that she uses in her assessments with clients. I was familiar with a number of them including the EDE-Q and the EDI-3 which we have used in our own research. She also showed me measures that I am less familiar with, such as, the BCQ (body checking questionnaire) and the BIAQ (body image avoidance questionnaire). These measures are particularly relevant to the work that I do within the area of cosmetic surgery and I will definitely consider using them in future research projects. We also discussed in detail theoretical models and risk factors for the development of eating disorders.

I spent this time explaining the work that I have been involved in at the Centre for Appearance Research, in particular describing the cognitive dissonance based positive body image and eating disorder prevention programmes that we have been implementing and evaluating at the University of the West of England. I described some of the activities we use in these sessions (for example, the 'perfect women' activity, the costs of pursuing the thin ideal and the role plays). She was less familiar with cognitive dissonance based approaches so I agreed to send her some of the materials we use which are based on *The Body Project* (<http://www.bodyprojectsupport.org>)

The team were busy developing a protocol for mindful eating for clients. They were in the early stages of the programme development but it was really interesting to hear about their plans for the project and plans to recruit volunteers to eventually evaluate their protocol. One of the facilitators used me to practice a mindfulness based eating exercise and I also helped translate a few sentences from the English manual. It is interesting to note that mindfulness based eating is becoming increasingly popular across Europe.

During my discussions with the team, noticeable similarities and differences between the two countries emerged, for example, cultural differences in regard to religion and the role of food, and similarities in relation to the media portrayed beauty ideals. Indeed we discussed and compared the role and appearance of Italian and British men and women in the media. The team believed that in comparison to other European countries, Italian media is still very gender stereotypical. I was shown

a video that they use in their interventions to show children how gender stereotypes are depicted in cartoons, films, TV programmes and other forms of media in Italy. The film clip was very similar to the images we use in some of our interventions, workshops and lectures when explaining media depicted ideals of beauty and appearance stereotypes.

4. To help the team with psychological screening (if appropriate).

Although it was not possible to help with psychological screening (language barrier, confidential reasons etc.), I did explain to some of the team the work that we have been conducting in the UK around psychological screening and auditing for cosmetic surgery patients within the private sector. They believed that it would be important and useful to have something similar to a psychological screening tool in Italy where cosmetic procedures are very popular.

Furthermore I was grateful for the opportunity to sit in on a supervision session which I found really thought provoking. Professor Dettore, who was providing supervision to his trainee clinical psychologists, discussed a number of important clinical conundrums, which kicked off some interesting and stimulating debates.

Future collaboration with the host institution:

Over the course of the STSM we discussed the potential for research collaborations within the area of eating disorders. We decided that as a preliminary study it would be useful to look at levels of common risk factors for the development of eating disorders between Italian and British women. We spent time discussing how we could do this and examined potential measures that we could use ensuring they had been validated with both Italian and English samples (e.g., EDE-Q). The findings from this preliminary study could have important implications for cross-cultural prevention efforts.

Final comments:

Overall, I found the STSM to be a very useful experience. We used this valuable opportunity to begin to develop exciting and important research collaborations. I am very grateful to the hosts, in particular Professor Dettore, who organized a varied and interesting STSM for me. I have gained some new insights and experiences from spending time with members of the Istituto Miller and I hope they enjoyed hearing about the work that I do at the Centre for Appearance Research. I look forward to our future research collaborations.

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

I declare that Nicole Paraskeva stayed at our Miller Institute during her STSM period and participated to all the above described activities. Her stay with our group was very satisfying both from the scientific and personal point of view. We programmed researches in collaboration and I wait for meeting her again in Bristol in the future for further cooperation. Best wishes.

Prof. Davide Dettore

