Representation of self-image among obese persons and stigma

The impact of stigma (Goffman, 1963) on individuals is an effect often described in the literature, whether it regards sexual orientation (Frost & Meyer, 2009), illness (AIDS: Herek & Glunt, 1988), mental health (Corrigan & Kleinlein, 2005), intellectual disabilities (Werner, Corrigan, Ditchman, & Sokol, 2012), etc. Stigmatization is also a key aspect of obese person’s life (De Brún, McCarthy, McKenzie, & McGloin, 2013). Stigma has been approached mostly in the literature through verbal descriptions, by the observer or the individuals themselves. This research explores non-verbal and behavioural aspects of stigmatization, with novel techniques using image and video. This enables us to enlighten how, and at what behavioural and representational levels the obese persons actively contributes to reinforce their stigma.

Among the surprising results is the demonstration that obese persons have a body image about 30% larger than their real corpulence, and severely obese persons about 45% and how this impacts their daily behaviour. Data have been collected by obese persons (women and men) using subcams (miniature video cameras worn at eye level) to get a first-person perspective of their ordinary life. Following the SEBE (Subjective Evidence-Based protocols, Lahlou, Nosulenko, & Samoylenko, 2009) these participants have commented their own films as they watched them. Data on body image have also been collected by the Body-Distorsion technique (Docteur, Urdapilleta, Defrance, & Raison, 2009; Urdapilleta, Aspavlo, Masse, & Docteur, 2010) which enables assessing how corpulent persons (sixty women) see themselves by asking them to adjust a distorted photography of themselves. This study is a preview of a larger research investigating how gastric surgery (which dramatically changes the actual weight of subjects) also changes their representations.

References