Editorial

**Body Image: Celebrating the past, appreciating the present, and envisioning the future**

1. **Introduction**

In August 2003, I attended the American Psychological Association conference in Toronto. It was early in my career—I just completed my second year as an Assistant Professor at The Ohio State University, with all the pressures of securing tenure at a Research 1 university looming over my head—and I was lost. It was a massive conference, and I was literally lost wandering around the Convention Center. Figuratively speaking, though, I was also lost trying to find the journals that were the best fit for my research; the journals in counseling, clinical, and social psychology only sporadically contained articles about body image. There was no outlet that exclusively published body image research.

With this dilemma weighing heavily on my mind, I wandered into an area with publisher booths. At the Elsevier booth, an announcement caught my eye. It indicated that a new journal, *Body Image: An International Journal of Research,* was going to be published. My heart raced. At last, there will be a specialty journal for body image research! I snatched it up and saw that the inaugural issue was coming out in January 2004. I recognized many names in the author lineup, including Kevin Thompson, Marika Tiggemann, Linda Smolak, Michael Levine, Niva Piran, and of course, the Editor-in-Chief, Tom Cash. They were my idols, and their work was all in one place instead of scattered across multiple journals!

That moment was pivotal in my life, as great opportunities linked to *Body Image* would come my way. I submitted my research—two scale development papers—and they were accepted (after revisions, of course) in 2005. The Associate Editors (also my idols) requested that I review submissions for the journal. I accepted each editorial request that I received. My idols then became my colleagues. In 2007, Tom asked me to join the Editorial Board—my name would be on the journal masthead! I loved reviewing for the journal. I enthusiastically agreed. He then asked if I would be interested in becoming an Associate Editor in January 2009. What a tremendous honor—of course I accepted! My colleagues became my friends. I served as an Associate Editor for nine years, growing as a scientist, writer, editor, and collaborator with each passing year. Now, it is my pleasure to become the Editor-in-Chief of *Body Image.* I take this honor seriously, and I will maintain and uphold the scientific rigor, credibility, and relevance of the journal that Tom has established and nurtured for 14 years.

In this editorial, I celebrate critical events in the formation and development of *Body Image* (the past), appreciate its well-regarded status as a high-quality outlet for body image research (the present), and provide a vision for the journal (the future). This past-present-future theme was reflected in Tom’s inaugural editorial (Cash, 2004). I am borrowing this theme, because it serves as a good contextual framework—reminding us that there is a reason something emerges, shapes current thought and practice, and continually morphs to meet anticipated as well as unanticipated paths and demands.

2. **Celebrating the past, appreciating the present**

I would like to celebrate three significant events in the journal’s history and appreciate where we are at currently (see Cash, 2017, for a thorough discussion of the achievements and present status of *Body Image*). Importantly, Tom’s dedication to the journal laid the foundation for these events. He addressed what I and many scholars felt prior to 2004—we were ‘homeless’ and sorely needed a scholarly outlet to house our research and communicate current knowledge, ideas, and applications related to body image (Cash, 2004, 2017). Tom knew that having this information ‘all in one place’ instead of scattered among many more general journals would facilitate progress in body image scholarship and clinical practice. He therefore dedicated countless hours required to secure a publisher as well as organize and run the journal. While we see a bound collection of about 20 pristine articles appear four times a year in our mailbox, or download individual articles from ScienceDirect, we do not see or consider the work that goes into preparing each article for this final stage, of which Tom has monitored and meticulously corrected due to his perseverance to making *Body Image* a premier journal. As he indicates in his editorial, “founding and editing *Body Image* is one of the most personally and professionally rewarding opportunities of my career” (Cash, 2017, p. A1). Tom, it shows, and for that, we are eternally grateful.

I would first like to celebrate and appreciate the journal’s bringing together body image researchers across the globe, which is reflected in the geographic locations of the Associate Editors, Editorial Board members, consulting reviewers, and authors. This joining helps enhance our collaborations, advances our work by understanding cultural and contextual factors that influence body image, and makes *Body Image* a truly international journal of research.

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Second, I would like to celebrate the new and distinct areas of scholarship that were cultivated within Body Image, and appreciate the fact that these areas are now flourishing. Positive body image is one example—the first scale assessing positive body image (i.e., Body Appreciation Scale; Avalos, Tylka, & Wood-Barcalow, 2005) and the first qualitative articles on positive body image (Frisén & Holmqvist, 2010; Wood-Barcalow, Tylka, & Augustus-Horvath, 2010) were published in Body Image. These works generated much conceptualization and research into positive body image, as documented in the many empirical articles and the special series devoted to this topic published in Body Image (see Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015).

Third, the establishment of an Impact Factor (IF) in 2009, only five years after the journal’s inaugural issue, was a major milestone that needs to be celebrated. While the primary goal for authors is to research topics that hold meaning and passion for them, they also want their work to be noticed and cited. Hence, they tend to look for publication outlets with solid IFs. Furthermore, many academic departments require their faculty members to publish in journals with respectable IFs for promotion and tenure purposes. Body Image’s first IF was 2.193, which is strong for a topically focused journal and enhanced the journal’s reputation as a scholarly outlet. It has risen, with the journal’s most recent (2016) IF being 2.96. Submissions to Body Image have impressively grown alongside its IF, with almost 500 submissions in 2017, suggesting that scholars are noticing the journal and appreciating it as a home for their best work.

3. Envisioning the future

Tom’s care, energy, mindfulness, and dedication to the journal have made it a high-quality outlet for body image research and reviews. As illustrated by the journal’s strong-and-rising IF and submission number, the formula he used works beautifully. Therefore, I will follow the old expression, “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.”

What is structurally in place will stay the same: under my direction, it will remain an international journal that strives to publish the best cutting-edge research and reviews, with the same aims and scope (see https://www.journals.elsevier.com/body-image). This is a strong backbone. That said, I do plan to enhance Body Image’s already excellent reputation in the following ways:

3.1. Virtual thematic special issues

Thematic special issues are a great way to disseminate cutting-edge research and theory about contemporary body image topics of importance and interest. While the journal has had thematic special series in the past (e.g., Neziroglu & Cash, 2008; Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015), I would like to increase their frequency to one or two a year. Elsevier now has the option for journal articles to be published and grouped virtually, which reduces overall publication times and is more efficient for both editors and authors. Our Publishing Content Specialist will regularly send out a request to our Editorial Board members for thematic special issue topic ideas and corresponding guest editors. Alternatively, if you would like to nominate a topic and guest editor, please email me (see https://www.journals.elsevier.com/body-image/editorial-board/tracy-l-tylka).

3.2. Review papers and meta-analyses

Similarly, I would like to encourage authors to submit quality systematic review papers and meta-analyses on contemporary body image topics of importance and interest. These synthesized articles tend to be well-cited and are incredibly useful for moving the research forward in the specified area.

3.3. Focus on embodiment

Body image is a multi-faceted construct that refers to attitudes and perceptions about the body, particularly its appearance. Embodiment is a broader construct that acknowledges the importance of lived-in experiences of the body and how the body engages with the world (see Piran, 2016, 2017). Embodiment explores the body in relation to structural power, and how the latter inhibits or fosters the former, depending on one’s social statuses. Body connection and comfort, the body as a source of agency and functionality, the experience and expression of body desires (e.g., sexuality, appetite), attuned self-care, and inhabiting the body as a subjective rather than objectified site are central to embodiment (Piran, 2016). Despite the more restrictive Body Image title, the journal’s stated mission has always been to publish research on the influences of human appearance on interpersonal relations and quality of life within a cultural context. Indeed, Cash (2004) mentioned embodiment four times within his inaugural editorial, and Body Image has welcomed articles on this topic (see Piran, 2016). In my tenure as Editor-in-Chief, I would like to spotlight theory and research on a more expansive definition of embodiment (see Piran, 2016) and the implications this construct has for body-related lived experiences and quality of life, giving it an even more prominent focus in the journal.

3.4. Focus on intersectionality

Individuals are an amalgamation of interlocking socially constructed identities, and the unity of identities within an individual is likely to affect body image and embodiment for that person. Traditionally, research in body image has not focused on the intersection of social identities. I would like to encourage body image research with an intersectional focus to appear in the journal, perhaps using counseling psychology as a model (see Parent, DeBlare, & Moradi, 2013; Shin et al., 2017).

3.5. Focus on weight inclusive/weight neutral approaches

Submissions that include weight as a central variable of interest should be embedded in weight inclusive/weight neutral approaches. These approaches focus on health, well-being, weight stigma, and social justice and do not focus on weight loss (see Calogero, Tylka, Mensinger, Meadows, & Danielsdottir, 2017; Tylka et al., 2014). In contrast, weight normative/weight central approaches focus on weight loss, finding a “healthy weight,” or a “healthy BMI.” These approaches often promote “health-ism,” or situating health and disease as individual responsibility without considering contextual factors. Therefore, weight normative/weight central approaches are inherently stigmatizing and should not be promoted within submissions.

3.6. Expanding the editorial board and consulting reviewers

With the increase in submissions, we have more articles to review. I will work with Elsevier production to add 1–2 additional Associate Editors. This year, I added 15 new Editorial Board members who have been providing excellent service to the journal in the form of constructive, elaborative, and timely reviews. We are also looking for consulting reviewers. If you would like to serve the journal by becoming a consulting reviewer, please contact me (https://www.journals.elsevier.com/body-image/editorial-board/tracy-l-tylka).
4. Concluding thoughts

It is my hope that these six areas of expansion, as well as other areas not yet envisioned, will lead to additional journal events to celebrate and appreciate. Before I end this editorial and begin assigning submissions to Associate Editors, I would like to express my sincerest thanks to Tom Cash, who prepared me for what to expect and has served as a consultant as I begin my new role. I would also like to thank my team of Associate Editors (in alphabetical order; Jessica Alleva, Rachel Calogero, Matthew Fuller-Tyszkiwicz, Sarah Murnen, Rachel Rodgers, and Viren Swami), Editorial Board members, and consulting reviewers, as well as the authors of our future publications. I am thrilled to begin a new role as Editor-in-Chief of Body Image, and I look forward to taking this new journey ahead with you.

References


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