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A positive complement

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ABSTRACT

This brief editorial article introduces the special series, *Positive Body Image: Avenues for Assessment, Application, and Advancement*. This special series serves as "a positive complement" to help round out the body image literature, which has been heavily slanted towards understanding, measuring, preventing, and treating negative body image. More precisely, this special series offers a guide for conceptualizing, assessing, and promoting positive body image; highlights expressions of positive body image among various social groups; and articulates numerous directions for future research. This editorial describes the need for this special series and its development, and provides a synopsis of the six articles of the series, written by world-renowned positive body image theorists, researchers, clinicians, and change agents.
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Introduction

It is with great pleasure that we, as guest editors, introduce our special series, *Positive Body Image: Avenues for Assessment, Application, and Advancement* to the readership of *Body Image: An International Journal of Research*. This special series will help researchers, clinicians, and change agents understand the positive body image construct, including: its contributing disciplines and leaders, how it is assessed, how it can be used to foster well-being via prevention and treatment efforts, how it operates among individuals across a range of social identities and special populations, and how our knowledge of this construct can continue to grow using innovative research methodology and designs.

The Need for a Special Series on Positive Body Image

The need for a special series on positive body image is timely for several reasons. First, there has not been a single resource (e.g., text, special issue) devoted to summarizing, integrating, and unfolding the burgeoning scholarship on positive body image. Second, body image theory, research, and practice have been skewed toward a focus on negative body image with less attention offered to the positive aspects of body image. A special series on positive body image could thus serve as a "positive complement," to help balance and enhance the body image literature. Third, a special series could provide guidance on how to integrate positive body image into prevention efforts, psychotherapy, and medical settings to enhance professionals' work with individuals experiencing a wide range of expected and unexpected changes in their bodies' appearances and functions. Fourth, a cohesive unit of recommendations for future positive body image research and application could direct this area forward in meaningful and novel ways. In short, this special series is for professionals who wish to move others towards flourishing relationships with their bodies, and for academics who wish to understand how this process can be best investigated.

Development of the Series

This special series is embedded in our professional partnership, which unfolded in 2002 in the Counseling Psychology program at The Ohio State University – Tracy then an assistant professor and Nichole a doctoral student. Independently, we realized that there was a lack of theory and scholarship on positive body image, and we were passionate about contributing to this area. Upon learning each other's interest in positive body image, we met to outline our ideas for investigating this construct. Since our first meeting, we have collaborated on projects which culminated in the development and publication of the Body Appreciation Scale (BAS; Avalos, Tylka, & Wood-Barcalow, 2005), a model detailing and organizing positive body image themes and processes (Wood-Barcalow, Tylka, & Augustus-Horvath, 2010), and the recently updated BAS-2 (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015a). While Tracy remains in academics and Nichole engages in clinical work, we continue our goal of advancing the positive body image literature together. Given the need for a comprehensive resource that integrates positive body image assessment, applications, and areas for advancement, we identified this special series as our collaborative "next step."

For this special series, we identified six primary themes that we believed would interest readers and add to the growing body of research on positive body image: (a) its definition and conceptual foundations, (b) how it can be assessed within research and practice, (c) its incorporation into prevention efforts, (d) its integration into the treatment of eating disorders, (e) its expressions among various social identities and special populations, and (f) its numerous avenues for continued investigation. We were faced with the challenging task of identifying who, among the list of prestigious

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positive body image scholars, to invite as authors. Ultimately, we selected clinical and research experts who have made substantial contributions to promoting positive body image scholarship around the globe (i.e., United States, United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada). It is with delight that we now highlight each author's unique contributions to this series.

Contents of the Series

We collaborated on the lead article, which situates positive body image's origins within the wider body image, strength-based, and Buddhist philosophical literatures (see Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015b). We acknowledge the numerous contributions by prominent leaders to the development of positive body image as a construct of interest. Drawing from qualitative and quantitative investigations, we articulate what positive body image is, followed by what it *is not* to provide a comprehensive yet nuanced understanding of this construct.

Jennifer Webb served as the first author on the second article, focused on positive body image assessment (see Webb, Wood-Barcalow, & Tylka, 2015). Webb has expanded the conceptualization of positive body image, using diverse methods to assess different facets of positive body image (e.g., body appreciation and body image flexibility), bridging positive body image with Eastern influences (e.g., self-compassion and mindfulness), and embedding positive body image within affect regulation frameworks. This article presents formal measures of positive body image that can be used in research and clinical practice and offers additional methods of assessing positive body image within psychotherapy and applied research contexts. It offers recommendations for how to conduct rigorous mixed methods/qualitative assessment of positive body image and a discussion of essential areas that need to be pursued to advance positive body image assessment.

Niva Piran, who is world-renowned for her theoretical and empirical contributions to the prevention of eating disorders, authored the third article. Her article highlights the importance of integrating positive body image processes and measures within eating disorder prevention efforts (see Piran, 2015). Piran emphasizes that this integration will likely improve treatment effects, expand outcome assessment, detect mediators of change, and uncover protective factors. She appraises two current empirically supported eating disorder prevention programs as to whether they could foster five key processes of positive embodiment: positive self-talk that counters adverse experiences, experiences of body agency and functionality, attuned self-care, positive experiences and expressions of bodily desires, and inhabiting the body as a subjective rather than objective site.

The fourth article, written by Catherine Cook-Cottone, discusses how psychotherapists can cultivate positive body image in their clients with eating disorders (see Cook-Cottone, 2015). Cook-Cottone's multiple professional roles position her to understand how to promote positive body image within varied settings. She is a psychotherapist who works with clients diagnosed with eating disorders, a researcher of body image and eating behavior, a professor of counseling and school psychology, the creator of an empirically supported yoga-based eating disorder prevention program, and a certified yoga instructor. In her article, Cook-Cottone discusses how and why engaging in mindful self-care and attunement (i.e., when the internal and external aspects of self interact in an adaptive and authentic fashion) are targets of actionable therapeutic work in cultivating positive body image. She presents interventions that can promote mindful self-care and attunement in clients with eating disorders.

Marika Tiggemann authored the fifth article, which considers positive body image within the social identities of age, culture/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and gender roles, as well as the special populations of athletes, dancers, and those with visible differences (see Tiggemann, 2015). Professionally, Tiggemann has been a pioneer in acknowledging and investigating how body image may vary across social group classifications such as gender, sexual orientation, age, and forms of dance (e.g., belly dance, ballet). In her article, Tiggemann asserts that core attitudinal components like appreciation of and positive feelings toward the body may be universal across social identities, whereas the manifestation and behavioral expressions of positive body image are more likely to differ among social groups.

The final article, authored by Emma Halliwell, presents ways to advance positive body image scholarship (see Halliwell, 2015). Halliwell is a prominent researcher of positive body image who has explored how trait body appreciation may alter women's reactions after viewing thin-ideal media images and whether body appreciation increases after dissonance-based interventions; she currently is developing and evaluating interventions to promote positive body image. In her article, Halliwell directs readers to six areas in need of future inquiry, and she provides specific suggestions for how researchers can add to these areas. These areas include exploring how positive body image: (a) is conceptualized, (b) operates within multidimensional models, (c) develops across time and life stages, (d) influences social interactions, (e) interacts with cognitive processing style, and (f) can be increased via interventions.

We are honored to have such prestigious researchers who are active in assessing, applying, and advancing the field of positive body image contribute to this special series. We also are grateful to have edited this special series under the tutelage of Thomas Cash, the Editor-in-Chief of *Body Image: An International Journal of Research*, who provided excellent suggestions at the conceptualization and editing stages and guidance along the course of the series. Furthermore, we thank the many researchers who have contributed to positive body image inquiry; their studies served as the numerous building blocks of this series.

Potential Impact of the Series

We hope that the six articles contained within this special series are informative and inspire ideas for future clinical and research initiatives in positive body image. This series may be especially beneficial for diverse constituents: the graduate student who investigates body image from a positive psychology research paradigm, the clinician who implements interventions to promote flourishing in the context of body image, the prevention specialist who innovates a positive embodiment program for school-aged children and their family members, the medical professional who uses a holistic perspective to comprehend the potential negative *and* positive body image impacts of their patients' illnesses and conditions, the researcher who advances positive body image scholarship, and the advocate who initiates policy change to enhance and protect positive body image in the general public.

Furthering positive body image scholarship has been a rewarding endeavor for us. Indeed, learning about positive psychological variables often has a "rippling effect." One notable example of this rippling effect was provided by Martin Seligman in his TED talk: he observed that people "move towards" him upon learning that he studies happiness, whereas he noted the opposite reaction 10 years prior when he told others he studied depression (Seligman, 2004). We ourselves have observed that focusing on positive body image fuels our inner positivity and enthusiasm for our research and clinical practice, and others are drawn towards learning about positive body image. We hope that the special series further elicits this rippling effect in readers, with its articles serving as a catalyst to take part in advancing this important area of inquiry.

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