Dear Editorial Board Members,

We hope this email finds you and your families healthy and well.

As you may have already heard, Clarivate Analytics (who calculates the impact factors – IFs – for Journal Citation Reports) has suppressed Body Image from receiving a 2019 impact factor due to a higher than typical number of self-citations.

We are stunned, very confused, and think that this decision is unfair. Implicit in the decision to suppress the journal's impact factor is the suggestion that editors have attempted to 'game' the system (e.g., by soliciting self-citations, preferentially accepting submissions with high self-citations, etc.). We share Clarivate's view that such practices are unethical, but completely reject any suggestion that we have engaged in gaming the journal's impact factor.

For example, when we have suggested the inclusion of omitted references to authors, these suggestions have always been specific references that are relevant to a given point that often needs a citing reference. Our suggestions have not been exclusive to the timespan that the IF is calculated on (in this case, only articles with 2017, 2018 dates). Our suggestions are not contingent on accepting an article for publication, nor have they only included Body Image articles. When the article is nearing the end of the review process, we may remind authors to check to ensure that no recent research (from any journal) has been published since the review process began and integrate relevant work when applicable and appropriate. We consider these practices to be wholly within the guidelines of good science and editing.

The purpose of this letter is to let you know what this suppression means for the journal, discuss why it may have happened, and our plan moving forward. Of note, we (along with Elsevier) are appealing Clarivate's decision. (There were twice as many journals suppressed this year due to a new and more conservative metric that they used, so other journals are appealing Clarivate's decision to suppress IF this year. For an example, see the Twitter discussion of the journal Zootaxa.)

What does this mean for the journal? Body Image will still be listed in JCR (they haven't dropped us), but we won't have an impact factor for 2019. They will re-evaluate our 2020 performance, and either reissue an IF or continue the suppression.

Why did this happen? First, this did not occur due to an unethical practice. We uphold scientific integrity and ethics from submission to publication. Below we offer several possible reasons why this happened. (These reasons likely interact.)

1. We are a niche discipline, and Body Image is the "main hub" (it is the *only* specialty journal for research relating to the construct of body image).

   With body image research becoming increasingly prevalent, and with only one major outlet for this specialty research, it is understandable that many papers in the field of body image would cite other work relating to body image - which inevitably pass through the bottleneck of all body image research - Body Image. (In another relatedly niche field, eating disorder researchers have at least 6 journals in operation, minimizing the extent to which relevant references come from one journal.) The self-citation metric sounds like it would be much more relevant to generic journals in broad research areas, but it doesn't really work for specialty journals like Body Image.

2. We have had a dramatic increase in submissions of high-quality work, which has led to more articles being published.

   Last year saw a record number of submissions and acceptances. Each year, we see an increase in submissions by 100 or more (we are now averaging about 60 submissions a month). Body Image does not have page limits, so we can increase our number of publications as needed to house the superior articles that are accepted. In 2018, we had 75 articles that were accepted. In 2019, we had 92 articles accepted.

   But how does a higher number of articles relate to self-citations influencing the impact factor? The numerator of our impact factor of a given year (2019) contains the number of times 2019 Body Image articles cited 2017 and 2018 Body Image articles (i.e., self-citations) plus the number of times other 2019 journal articles cited 2017 and 2018 Body Image articles (i.e., other-citations). This number is then divided by the number of Body Image articles published in 2017 and 2018.

   With many more Body Image articles published in 2019, there are more opportunities for self-citations of 2017 and 2018 articles than years prior, when the number of articles published was lower. Unless all other journals that cite Body Image articles have a similar increase, the self-citation component of the numerator is going to increase, raising the percentage of self-citations.

3. We published many more reviews in 2019 than other years (i.e., systematic reviews, meta-analyses, as well as review articles for the special section devoted to the work of Tom Cash in the December 2019 issue).

   Reviews, due to their comprehensive nature of a current topic, will contain many citations to recent (as well as not so recent) work. Again, because Body Image is the main hub of body image research, we will be citing much recent work from our journal.

4. Unlike many other journals, we welcome and regularly publish articles containing body image scale adaptations (e.g., translations, modifications to fit another group such as children and athletes, etc.).

   If a scale was originally published in Body Image, it follows that many subsequent scale adaptation studies will also be published in the journal. To take one example, there has been an upsurge in scale translations of the Body Appreciation Scale-2 (BAS-2, which was originally published in Body Image) published in Body Image during the last 4 years. These adaptation papers mention other scale adaptations of the BAS-2, and thus they tend to contain more self-citations.

   We view publishing scale adaptations as a clear strength of our journal. This way, these scales can be used to conduct body image research in diverse groups around the world.

5. A new metric used by Clarivate.

Of note, Clarivate has indicated that they have a new metric for determining whether to suppress journals. This year, twice as many journals were suppressed compared to the previous year.

In 2015, our self-citation percentage (i.e., number of self-citations divided by total number of self-and other-citations) was 32.75%, in 2016 it was 40.4%, in 2017 it was 33.45%, and in 2018 it was 30.5%. These percentages were never flagged, and neither Tom nor I were ever sent an "editor expression of concern" letter. This year, it was 50.4%.

While these percentages, especially 2019, seem high and alarming, it is important to put them into perspective. We calculated the number of self-citations, on average, that would need to appear in an article to reach a 30%, 40%, and 50% self-citation rate (assuming a fixed number of other-citations). To reach 30%, each article would only need to include 2 self-citations on average, to reach 40%, each article would only need to include 3 self-citations on average, and to reach 50%, each article would only need to include 4 self-citations on average. (Please note that these are estimates based on last year's other-citations, as we are still awaiting the data to determine the exact number of self- and other-citations we had from 2019). In a reference list including 40-60 citations, 4 is only 6-10%.

What is our plan?

First, we will publicly push back against Clarivate – we are very uneasy about a private, for-profit company like Clarivate setting itself up as a self-appointed and unaccountable judge. While Elsevier is looking into setting up a coordinated response of their journals that were suppressed (a total of 9), we will also contact Clarivate directly, as well as Retraction Watch.

Second, while the suppression is likely a reflection of Body Image being the only specialty journal in a growing research area, *we vow to not let the politics around impact factors influence the science we publish in Body Image, or the science used to support it* (i.e., the references). Ultimately, creative control of the references used to support authors' work must belong to authors themselves. *We re-commit to never gratuitously asking authors to refer to Body Image articles in their work.* Likewise, authors should know that they will not be penalized for referring to Body Image citations in their work.

Third, while Clarivate doesn't release the exact metric that they use to determine whether a journal is suppressed (they don't want editors to "game the system"), we commit to looking at the data they do provide us to help us in moving forward. We are committed to restoring our IF and remaining in good standing from that point on.

What can you do?

First, feel free to share this email with other authors, reviewers, and students. We are committed to being transparent and (as always) ensuring scientific integrity.

Second, we hope that this news does not discourage you, your lab, your students, and your collaborators from submitting to Body Image, reviewing Body Image articles, and holding the journal in high regard. In the words of one of us:

In my own experience, Body Image is simply the best fit for my research, and there is no other journal like it. I also know that, when I publish in Body Image, my research will be seen and read by other scholars in our field. In fact, when I have tried to publish elsewhere, to diversify my CV, I am often advised by other journal editors to submit to Body Image, instead! Further, in my experience, when it comes to writing manuscripts, many of my citations will come from Body Image because this is simply the best source of high-quality research in our field. To me, it makes complete sense, and I am baffled as to why we would be punished for this…

I underscore how much we appreciate you, our reviewers, and authors for all the work that you have done and all that you will continue to do to make this journal successful. Please share if you have concerns or ideas.

Warmly,

Tracy Tylka, Jessica Alleva, Rachel Calogero, Matthew Fuller-Tyszkiewicz, Todd Jackson, Sarah Murnen, Stuart Murray, Rachel Rodgers, Viren Swami, Jennifer Webb