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Editorial: Thinking about bodies in societies. Theories, phenomena and relevance for education

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Editorial on the Research Topic

[Thinking about bodies in societies. Theories, phenomena and relevance for education](#)

The human body is the first thing that individuals can relate to as an entity since birth. From the very first day, norms and values are defined for the body. Each culture and society have specific values and therefore, the body becomes the expression of the norms that are valued by the society. It has always been directly or indirectly communicated to members of each society how to deal with their body, how to perceive and judge it, and how to modify it. Psychology provides some helpful terms and dimensions that can be used to map society's influence. There are conceptualizations that make certain body-related phenomena accessible. Whatever the influences on the body are, we consider this topic to be a central theme of the human sciences and thus, of psychology. If we understand more about these social influences, we could potentially have a positive impact in our circles of influence as well. Specifically, with this Research Topic we aimed to collect knowledge and expertise to understand these influences on the body and to collect ideas about how to give young people control over their bodies and their body image. Four research papers on this complex topic have now been published in this Research Topic. Of course, this can only provide a very fragmentary answer to the questions that concern us. But that is the nature of empirical research: we collect many small pieces of the puzzle so that a larger picture can emerge through theoretical networking, closer observation, more reality-congruent hypothesis generation, and a more sophisticated empirical approach. But as limited as a finding may be at first, there is always a lot of effort involved. In this sense, we would like to thank all the people involved in the creation of this Research Topic, the authors and the reviewers, who have contributed to the scientific discourse necessary to sharpen the ideas and thoughts presented. Many thanks to the reviewers Francesca Giovanna Maria Gastaldi, Carolina Bringas Molleda, Anabela Conceição Pereira, Cristiana Lucretia Pop, and Lipaz Shamoia Nir.

What insights can the reader expect from reading the papers collected in this Research Topic? The research has been conducted in heterogeneous cultural contexts: Russia, Brazil, Canada. The authors themselves point out that the results cannot be generalized, but must be understood in the cultural context itself. The authors work on their questions with extremely diverse methods. The methodologies include document analysis, regression analysis, hermeneutic approaches, and biographical interviews. It is worth pointing out that this diversity is an asset if it points to a common body of evidence; however, this Research Topic is too narrow for that, but we hope that it will stimulate further investigation in this area.

Our recommendation to read these four works with profit is the following: Start with “*The enigma of weight: Figures, flux, and fitting*” written by [Wong et al.](#) (Canada). In our opinion, this is the best introduction to a very central problem of the topic, namely the obsessive preoccupation with measurable body weight. The qualitative hermeneutic approach used by the authors to analyze the 17 interviews with professionals and lay experts provides a fascinating insight into the experience of body weight. The implications, while abstract, can be seen as the basis for more concrete recommendations that emerge from the other research. Let us then stay in the Canadian context and specifically with an important multiplier group for ideas about body weight and appearance: the fitness instructors. [Dobrich](#) looks at fitness instructors’ perceptions of the body and also their perceptions of themselves based on a comprehensive literature review. Her recommendations for this group are very instructive and helpful. If the readers follow the recommended sequence, they can so far, relate to the importance of the concept of bodies in societies. Later on, it is recommended to read the study conducted in Brazil by [Cunha et al.](#) that addresses the still current and certainly not yet sufficiently processed pandemic experience regarding the body image and, above all, the demographic and socioeconomic context, lifestyle, emotional stress, eating behavior, and infection with COVID-19. Being able to examine this interrelated multitude of factors leads to the collection of a very extensive data set with 2,220 participants. The academic context is interesting; 1,245 students and 975 professors are examined. Universities were particularly neglected in the pandemic, insofar as the focus was particularly on younger school children and older populations at particular risk. With the help of regression analyses, some further insights can be found that help us to better understand the influences on our body image. The interview study by [Mikhaylova and Bochaver](#) deals with 50 girls suffering from anorexia, which could be read as the most special of the studies at the end. The study was conducted in Russia and is based on a psychoanalytical view of the development of eating disorders. The authors elaborate on the relationship

between bullying and having anorexia and, in particular, examine the importance of a hostile family environment for the likelihood of becoming a victim of bullying when suffering from anorexia. The authors’ thoughts and examples of the biographical interview material are interesting for all people who function as adult caregivers in schools, i.e., social workers, psychologists, and teachers because they show again how closely one has to look in order to realize the whole contextual information.

We hope all readers will enjoy reading the published studies, above all, we hope that the understanding of the complex diversity of influence on our bodies as a central social symbol will be broadened and that we will become even more aware that how we think, feel and communicate about bodies is not trivial.

Author contributions

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work and approved it for publication.

Conflict of interest

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