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**Publishing Standards and Ethics**

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### Article

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## **Publishing Standards and Ethics**

I am sure I will not be the only reader to be angry at the publication of Colin Feltham's most recent article in *Psychotherapy and Politics International* (PPI) entitled 'Psychotherapy in the UK: Multicultural, Eurocentric, and Americentric influences on a complex field in a troubled time'. After my initial anger subsided, my thoughts turned to submitting a letter critiquing Feltham's paper, but after reading Tudor's (2025) thorough response, and the following exchange between the two academics, I felt I had nothing further to add to that discussion. However, upon further reflection I became angry with the journal and its editors for publishing the article in the first place. In this letter I will outline my positionality in relation to the journal and the articles. I then outline three reasons why I believe the editors should not have published Feltham's article. First is the failure of the journal to undertake a peer review of the article *before* publication; the second is the failure to consider Feltham's previous publications; and third, the harmful effects of this article on the PPI readership. Finally, I highlight problems with the way the article is presented and positioned in the journal as an example of white supremacy in action (Sultana, 2018) before asking PPI to reconsider its values when publishing future articles.

I am a white academic in my early forties who lives and works in the UK. I have been an avid reader of PPI for many years and have also been a peer reviewer over the last two years. The opportunity to review papers arose after I published an article in PPI alongside a colleague and two students that explores ways of teaching anti-oppressive practice through sharing aspects of self in teaching; the paper shares an example of a workshop where I share my experiences of homophobia with students and my colleague shares her experiences of racism (see Blundell, Burke, Wilson & Jones, 2022). As a Deputy Editor for another academic journal some of the issues around the values and ethics of publishing articles have been on my mind for some time but writing this letter has led to some deeper reflections. Here, I attempt to articulate why I believe that publishing Feltham's article was a mistake for the journal, and why I believe the journal needs to consider a review of the values and standards that underpin its publishing policy.

A note on academic power: Citations are often one of the ways that power is held within academia and can lead to advancement, promotion and elevated status within the field. Academics clearly do not want 'negative' citations which involve academics critiquing their work; however, any citation (even negative ones) add to an academic's citation count and often further their power within the field. Whilst writing this letter I felt a strong urge not to add to Feltham's academic power through further citations of his work; therefore, whilst I do refer to multiple publications of his within the main body of this letter, I refuse to formally cite these in the reference list at the end of this letter.

The role of journal editors is to uphold the integrity of the journal itself and they do this by ensuring high standards of scholarship. Being assigned as editors of the journal gives

editors this responsibility, which is also a responsibility to its readership. Furthermore, being assigned as an editor also gives editors the authority to maintain this integrity by deciding which articles can be sent out for anonymous peer review, and, ultimately, deciding which articles are published in the journal. It seems to me that the editors failed in their responsibility to uphold academic standards by publishing Feltham's article given the list of issues raised in Tudor's (2025) robust peer review (Sultana, 2018). Indeed, if the editors had taken their responsibility and authority seriously, they could have rejected Feltham's article outright based on their own editorial judgements, or if they were concerned about their own ability to be 'objective' about the quality of the article based on their own political or ethical positioning they could have sent it out for review before making an editorial decision. What they appear to have done instead is publish the article and then ask for a reviewer to review it *in* the journal. The argument for this process seems to be to avoid accusations of 'censorship' by either Feltham or some other unknown party, but if every editor decided to publish an article or opinion piece based on a fear around censorship accusations then we wouldn't need a process to uphold the academic or ethical integrity of our journals (Sultana, 2018). Furthermore, by publishing the article, against what appears to be their better judgement, the editors appear to have side stepped the responsibility and authority placed on them within this role - to uphold the quality of the journal, including its values (a discussion of which I will return to later).

It appears the journal did not evaluate Feltham's recent other writings before publishing his article. This is not usually part of an anonymous peer review process, unless articles are cited in the original submission; however, as this article did not go through the usual peer review process before publication it seems to me that understanding Feltham's work within its broader context could have been another way to evaluate this article before publication. Feltham repeats throughout his PPI article that he has been repeatedly 'cancelled', however, similarly to many of the people who claim they have been affected by 'cancel culture' but continue to retain an immense amount of power, Feltham continues to be a prominent UK academic who has published numerous articles in the last five years. These articles are dismissive of many important concepts and ideas that underpin social justice perspectives, such as critical race theory, and radical feminism. In another article he advocates for 'homoscepticism' which, he argues, is important for challenging the narratives of LGBT people and combatting heteroscepticism. As a gay person who was written for the journal, I find the publication of Feltham's work deeply misjudged and problematic given his other recent academic work, and the article could have been rejected on this basis.

The third reason for not publishing Feltham's article is its harmful effects on PPI's readership. The editors argue that publishing the article was important so that the readership can understand where these views come from and what they look like, they say "Feltham's ideas were so revealing and so worrying, so representative of what is happening in the world, that we could not risk declining publication" (Minikin & Pavón-Cuéllar, 2025, p. 1). However, the important question here for me is not 'what is the risk of not publishing this article?', but 'what is the risk of publishing it?'. For those of us with marginalised identities who must live with oppression and discrimination every day of our

lives, we do not need to see these attitudes in written form or see social justice perspectives debated between privileged academic colleagues, to know that oppression exists, because we experience and live this every day. And, if readers of this journal cannot comprehend how we can live in a world that votes for Trump without seeing two academics explore these issues in this journal, then maybe they should consider what privileges they have that enable them to avoid people who hold these views on a day-to-day basis. For the rest of us we are already living in, experiencing, and witness to, a racist heteronormative ableist transphobic and classist society - why do we need to also see it platformed in our journals?

PPI is supported by the Black, African and Asian Therapy Network (BAATN); indeed, it is referred to as 'The BAATN Journal'. I doubt there are many of its members who feel positively about the inclusion of this article in the current volume, or, indeed, their membership fees being used to fund a journal that will publish articles such as these. Publication of an article can also have a legitimising effect and open the door to a wave of potentially similar articles from other authors. I also wonder how teachers and educators will respond to students who may now reference Feltham's work as part of their coursework as a peer reviewed article representing a 'legitimate' view of counselling and psychotherapy from a well-known academic. Whilst a refusal to publish his article may have been argued by Feltham to be another example of his 'cancellation', it would instead, in my view, be the editors safeguarding their readership and this should have been reason enough not to publish this article.

I have argued why I think this article should not have been published. However, once the editors decided that they were going to publish it, they also needed to decide how it was presented. Whilst the robust critique from Tudor is welcome, the way the articles have been exhibited in the journal is also problematic. Feltham's article is presented as the first to appear and takes up the main commentary in the editorial. This placement front and centre makes this the focus or 'headline' article of this volume. Furthermore, the presentation of Feltham's and Tudor's articles next to one another, and their dialogue around 'wokeness' and 'political correctness' further evidences the enduring privilege of white academics to have their opinions broadcast over the global majority.

Feltham states his treatment by the journal confirms to him that PPI does not welcome views from across the political spectrum. Yet, I would argue the publication of Feltham's article indicates that PPI has moved the dial too far in terms of the types of articles it will publish. I appreciate from some of the comments within the editorial and the three articles that publication of Feltham's article may have been a difficult decision for the current editors of the journal and that it was not without consideration. However, the publication of the article, where and how it is placed in the journal and even the attempts at critique, evidence in many ways how white supremacy works (i.e., the centring of white opinions and dialogue). Indeed, as another white academic I questioned whether I should write this letter and be another white voice entering this discussion. Whilst in agreement with Tudor's critique of the article, I also believe the publication of Feltham's article was a mistake because of the harm it has caused towards its readership, especially those with marginalised identities. I think PPI needs to reconsider the values that underpin the journal and its relationship with its readership before publishing similar articles or else risk losing not only its credibility but also its audience.

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