

**Call for expressions of interest in contributing to an IJFAB Special Issue:  
“Publishing controversy: editorial responsibility and freedom of expression”**

***Are there limits to the material that academic journals should publish?***

Freedom of speech in the public arena is currently a very live topic. One particularly contested aspect is determining whether there are certain issues that should not be debated, or at least not in certain ways, on university campuses. But except for a few high-profile cases, less attention has been paid to the debates that take place between the covers (even electronic ones) of academic journals.

Earlier this year, the editorial team of *IJFAB* were publicly attacked on social media for allegedly supporting a particular political agenda. The critic’s claim was based on the publication of a single paper in an issue that celebrated the work of a noted feminist bioethicist; and contrary to the claim, it did not focus on a specific political theme. Nevertheless, in refuting that particular accusation (see “MAiD and *IJFAB*: Why Bioethical Discourse is Not Endorsement”, *IJFAB* Blog, February 11, 2021 <http://www.ijfab.org/blog/2021/02/maid-and-ijfab-why-bioethical-discourse-is-not-endorsement/>) the *IJFAB* Editorial Team became convinced that the general point – on what grounds *other* than quality and relevance might editors decide that a paper should not be published – needs facing by the academic community as a whole.

The aim of a journal like *IJFAB* is not to act as a simple repository of work, but to further the development of thinking within a field. As editors, we take this responsibility to feminist bioethics seriously. We acknowledge that ‘development of thinking’ necessarily means pushing at the boundaries of accepted knowledge and addressing controversial topics. At the same time, there comes a point where ‘controversial/challenging/provocative’ shades into ‘offensive’ and even (some will argue) ‘dangerous’ or ‘harmful’.

We believe a full discussion of the responsibilities of editors (and reviewers) for promoting academic freedom or freedom of expression, within appropriate limits, is vital for the future of bioethics. As a contribution to this discussion, we aim to dedicate part of a forthcoming issue of *IJFAB* to a conversation between four or five feminist bioethicists who hold different views on editorial responsibility and the freedom of expression in academic and public life. Some of the questions the conversation will aim to cover are:

- How do we define editorial responsibility to the field of feminist bioethics, and academic discourse in general?
- Are there grounds other than quality and relevance for deciding a paper should not be published in a journal? Is this a useful distinction at all?
- What is going on when we identify a paper as controversial, or as offensive, or as dangerous? Are these useful categories?
- How do we distinguish between “an argument I disagree with” and “an argument I find offensive”?
- In the context of a journal of feminist bioethics, what approach should we take towards platforming/de-platforming?

We'll strive to hold a discussion that is open, honest, considerate of the positions that others may take, and ultimately not only helpful to *IJFAB's* editors and authors, but to the broader academic community as well. The **conversation** will be held in written form, facilitated by one of the Editorial Team, and will then be edited for publication in the journal. In addition, we invite **responses** to the conversation in the form of short (3-5,000 word) papers to be published in a later issue of the journal, and even shorter entries to the *IJFAB* blog.

To achieve its purpose, the discussion needs to cover a range of opinions. We therefore encourage anyone with a view on this to **express your interest** in being one of the voices by writing a couple of sentences explaining why you'd like to take part, to the IJFAB Editorial Office (EditorialOffice@IJFAB.org) before **31 August 2021**.

**Important note:** We know, and regret, that some potential contributors may feel at too much risk (real or perceived) to participate. In any such cases the IJFAB Editorial Team are willing to discuss having that particular contribution anonymized. This is very far from our preference, not least because it runs counter to feminism's tradition of solidarity and transparency; but we are also realistic about the current climate, and have decided to offer an option that we hope we won't need, in the interests of representing the widest possible range of views.